University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

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Linguistics 150

Introductory Readings on the Languages of the Pacific Islands


CHINA
Wenzhou
Fuzhou
Taipei
Okinawa
Naha
RYUKYU ISLANDS (JAPAN)
DAITO-SHOTO (JAPAN)
Quanzhou
Xiamen
Guangzhou
Shantou
Taiwan
Kao-hsiung
Hong Kong S.A.R.
Macau S.A.R.
Luzon Strait
Okino-tori-shima (JAPAN)
BONIN ISLANDS (JAPAN)
VOLCANO ISLANDS (JAPAN)
Marcus Island (JAPAN)
Tropic of Cancer
Midway Islands (U.S.)
UNITED STATES
HAWAIIAN ISLANDS
Kauai
Oahu
Honolulu
Maui
Hawaii
MOLOKAI FRACTURE ZONE
CLARION FRACTURE ZONE
Philippine Sea
Northern Mariana Islands (U.S.)
Saipan
MARIANA TRENCH
Hagåtña
Guam (U.S.)
Wake Island (U.S.)
Johnston Atoll (U.S.)
South China Sea
Luzon
Manila
PHILIPPINES
Panay
Iloilo
Cebu
Samar
Bacolod
Negros
Cebu
Cagayan de Oro
Mindanao
Davao
Palawan
Sulu Sea
PHILIPPINE TRENCH
Challenger Deep (world's greatest ocean depth, -10924 m)
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA
Entwetok
MARSHALL ISLANDS
Majuro
Kwajalein
North Pacific Ocean
Melekeok
PALAU
Pohnpei
Palikir
CAROLINE ISLANDS
Kingman Reef (U.S.)
Palmyra Atoll (U.S.)
CLIPPERTON FRACTURE ZONE
Zamboanga
Bandar Seri Begawan
BRUNEI
MALAYSIA
Celebes Sea
Borneo
Manado
Halmahera
Tarawa
KIRIBATI (GILBERT ISLANDS)
Howland Island (U.S.)
Baker Island (U.S.)
Jarvis Island (U.S.)
Kiritimati (Christmas Island) (KIRIBATI)
Equator
Ternate
Samarinda
Palu
Balikpapan
Sorong
Biak
Yaren District
NAURU
Banaba
LINE ISLANDS
Banjarmasin
Celebes
Buru
Ceram
Kendari
Ambon
Jayapura
Wewak
Bismarck Sea
New Ireland
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Madang
Mount Hagen
Lae
New Britain
Bougainville
KIRIBATI
RAWAKI (PHOENIX ISLANDS)
Makassar
Banda Sea
Jaya Sea
Surabaya
INDONESIA
Java
Bali
Sumbawa
Flores
Lombok
Sumba
Denpasar
Dili
TIMOR-LESTE
Timor
Timor Sea
Kupang
Arafura Sea
Ashmore and Cartier Island (AUSTRALIA)
Darwin
Port Moresby
New Guinea
Solomon Sea
SOLOMON ISLANDS
Honiara
Guadalcanal
Awara
Torres Strait
SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS
TUVALU
Funafuti
Tokelau (N.Z.)
Swains Island
ÎLES MARQUISES
Gulf of Carpentaria
Indian Ocean
Coral Sea Islands (AUSTRALIA)
Coral Sea
Rotuma
Wallis and Futuna (FRANCE)
SAMOA
Pago Pago
Apia
Mata-Utu
American Samoa (U.S.)
Cook Islands (N.Z.)
SOCIETY ISLANDS
Papeete
Tahiti
ARCHIPEL DES TUAMOTU
Cairns
VANUATU
Port-Vila
FIJI
Vanua Levu
Viti Levu
Suva
TONGA
Alofi
Niue (N.Z.)
Townsville
New Caledonia (FRANCE)
Noumea
Coral Sea
Nuku'Alofa
Avarua
French Polynesia (FRANCE)
Mururoa
Mount Isa
Mackay
Rockhampton
Gladstone
Tropic of Capricorn
Minerva Reefs
ÎLES TUBUAI
Adamstown
Pitcairn Islands (U.K.)
Port Hedland
HAMMERSLEY RANGE
GREAT SANDY DESERT
GIBSON DESERT
Alice Springs
AUSTRALIA
SIMPSON DESERT
GREAT VICTORIA DESERT
Lake Eyre (lowest point in Australia, -15 m)
Toowoomba
Brisbane
Gold Coast
Geraldton
Kingston
Norfolk Island (AUSTRALIA)
KERMADEC ISLANDS (N.Z.)
Kalgoorlie
Broken Hill
Perth
Rockingham
Bunbury
Whyalla
Newcastle
Sydney
Wollongong
Lord Howe Island (AUSTRALIA)
Esperance
Adelaide
Canberra
Mount Kosciuszko (highest point in Australia, 2229 m)
Melbourne
Geelong
Great Australian Bight
Tasman Sea
North Island
Auckland
Hamilton
Tauranga
NEW ZEALAND
Palmerston North
Hastings
Wellington
Bass Strait
Launceston
Hobart
Tasmania
Indian Ocean
Christchurch
South Island
Invercargill
Dunedin
Stewart Island
CHATHAM ISLANDS (N.Z.)
South Pacific Ocean
Scale 1:41,000,000
Mercator Projection
0 200 400 600 Kilometers
0 200 400 600 Miles

1.

Introductory Readings on the Languages of the Pacific Islands

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Preface

This introductory textbook on language in the Pacific was originally planned to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) in 2013–2014. The target audience is undergraduate students with no prior coursework in linguistics and little knowledge of the Pacific Islands. Contributions were solicited from Oceanic language specialists who had either taught at or received degrees from the Department. (No such affiliation was required for the referees.)

The editors of the first edition, UHM graduate students Hiroko Sato and Jacob Terrell, compiled the earliest contributions into a textbook for a newly designed course at UHM, originally Linguistics 100, now Linguistics 150, which they and other UHM graduate students taught. Referee comments from other linguists and student evaluations from Hiroko Sato's classes were used to solicit revisions of the chapters in the first edition, as well as chapters that did not make it into the first edition. Writing that is clear and accessible to undergraduates has been a top priority. Coverage is still not as broad or as even as we would like, but we hope that it will improve in future editions.

Hiroko Sato (UHM PhD, 2013) and Joel Bradshaw (UHM PhD, 1982)

Introduction

John Lynch
UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

1.0 PRELIMINARY REMARKS. This book is about the languages of the Pacific area. In terms of the way many modern people view things, none of the indigenous languages of this area is seen as being particularly "important": there are none of the great religious languages, like Hebrew, Latin, or Arabic; none of the languages of the major colonizers, like Portuguese, Spanish, German, Dutch, French, or English; none of the major languages of science and technology, like English, French, or German; and none of the major languages of trade, like Chinese.

But in our region are the languages of people who crossed and recrossed a large ocean at the time when Europeans were paddling on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and being careful lest they fall off the edge of the world. Here are spoken the languages of people who developed irrigated agriculture thousands of years ago. And, perhaps most importantly, these are the languages of many hundreds of social communities, large and small, who take pride in their own languages as the vehicle of their unique customs and traditions.

As far as students of linguistics are concerned, the Pacific is important in another way: per head of population, this is linguistically the most diverse area in the whole world, containing close to 25 percent of the world's languages—well over one thousand different languages—spoken by less than ten million people in all.

2. REGIONS WITHIN THE PACIFIC. The Pacific is traditionally divided into three regions—Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia (see map)—mainly on the basis of geography, but also partly at least on the basis of culture and language.[1]

- Polynesia is bounded by the "triangle" drawn with Hawai'i at the northern apex, New Zealand at the southwestern apex, and Easter Island (Rapanui) at the eastern apex. There are around 20 indigenous languages spoken within Polynesia, but there are also about 20 languages of Polynesian origin spoken in Melanesia and Micronesia—the so-called Polynesian Outliers, which originated somewhere in western Polynesia.
- Micronesia consists of the islands in the Northern Marianas, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and Nauru. There are about 15 languages spoken in Micronesia.
- Melanesia consists of the Indonesian province of Papua (the western half of the island of New Guinea), Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji. Over 1,100 languages are spoken in Melanesia.

[1] However, we need to be careful here about applying a strict interpretation to these three regions. There are cultural and linguistic similarities across regions, and cultural and linguistic differences within the same region. This regional subdivision is a convenience, but the boundaries between them should not be interpreted as absolutely "watertight."

3.0 LANGUAGE AND DIALECT. When we say "well over one thousand different languages" are spoken in the Pacific, what do we mean by the term "languages"? Or when we say that English-speakers living in different parts of the world speak different dialects of English, what do we mean by the term "dialects"?

3.1 MUTUAL INTELLIGIBILITY. We are all aware of the fact that people in different geographical areas speak differently. To take one very simple example:

- A Canadian might say: 'His car was very fast'. In doing so, (i) he will likely pronounce the *r* at the end of *car*, and (ii) he will pronounce the word *fast* to rhyme with *fat*.
- However, when an Australian says 'His car was very fast', (i) he will not pronounce the *r* at the end of *car*, and (ii) he will pronounce the word *fast* to rhyme with the first vowel of *father,* not with *fat.*
- To mean the same thing, a Frenchman would say: 'Son auto était très vite'.

If the Canadian and the Australian are involved in a conversation, they will probably understand each other reasonably well right from the beginning, even though each pronounces words slightly differently (although there are cases where two people speaking different dialects of English *do* have difficulties in communicating). That is, although there are differences, these differences are usually not enough to impede communication: we say here that there is mutual intelligibility, meaning each can understand the other fairly well. We also say that they are both speaking the *same language*—English, in this case—but that each speaks a *different dialect* of that language. And so we use the term *dialect* to refer to a variety of a language that is different from other varieties (in pronunciation, grammar, and/or vocabulary), but not so different as to prevent communication.

On the other hand, if our Australian is involved in a conversation with the Frenchman, then neither will understand what the other is saying (unless, of course, one has learned the other's language). Because there is little or no mutual intelligibility involved here, we say that they are speaking *different languages*: English and French. And so we use the term *language* to refer to a speech variety that is different enough from other speech varieties (again, in pronunciation, grammar, and/or vocabulary) to be mutually unintelligible with them.

3.2 BOUNDARY PROBLEMS. These are the traditional definitions of the terms *language* and *dialect*. You should be aware, however, that there are some complications when we approach a number of kinds of situations. I will discuss two of these: dialect chains and social identity. (See Lynch 1998:23–27 for further discussion of the issues outlined below.)

3.2.1 Dialect chains. It is often the case that we have a series of communities—a string of villages along the coast of an island, for example, or a chain of neighboring atolls—in which people in each community speak differently from their neighbors; but while they can nevertheless understand their close neighbors, they cannot really understand their more distant neighbors. We can diagram this situation as follows:

A B C D E F G H I J K L

All the way along the chain, close neighbors can understand each other, but more distant neighbors cannot. If we look at percentages of vocabulary and structure in common, and say that 80 percent is the cutoff for mutual intelligibility—so that dialects that share less than 80 percent are not easily mutually intelligible, then we might find that community A has percentages shared with the other languages as follows:[2]

	95	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	55	50	45
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L

So from A's point of view, there would seem to be a boundary between E and F: A shares 80 percent or more with B, C, D, and E, but less that than with the others. However, now let us look at this situation from E's point of view:

80	85	90	95		95	90	85	80	75	70	65
A	B	C	D	**E**	F	G	H	I	J	K	L

E shares 80 percent or more with A, B, C, and D to its west, and F, G, H, and I to its east: so from E's point of view, the boundary is *not* between E and F but between I and J! Now look again at the situation from L's point of view:

45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	**L**

L shares 80 percent or more with H, I, J, and K, but less with those farther west; so from L's point of view, the boundary would be between G and H!

This means that, if we simply looked at the two ends of the chain, we would say we are dealing with two distinct languages: A and B, for example, would seem to be a completely different language from K and L. However, there is nowhere along that chain where we can say "this is the boundary between one language and the other," since close neighbors can always understand each other. It is therefore almost impossible to decide whether we are dealing with one language, two languages, or more than two in a case like this.

This is the case, for example, in Fiji. The Fijian islands are populated by a number of different dialects. When one compares the dialects spoken in the extreme west with those spoken in the extreme east of the country, it seems as if one is dealing with quite different languages that are probably mutually unintelligible. However, *nowhere* in the country is there a clear boundary between "Western Fijian" and "Eastern Fijian": the dialects simply shade into one another, each being similar to other dialects spoken nearby, and much less similar to dialects spoken farther away.

3.2.2 Social and political identity. There is a further complication in talking about the question of language and dialect, and in working out how many languages are spoken in a particular area, and this relates to people's social identity. Sometimes, while linguists might perceive the language/dialect situation in one way, the people themselves perceive it in another.

In some cases, what linguists would describe as one language (on the basis of mutual intelligibility) is perceived by the people involved as more than one language. One such

[2] That is, A shares 95% with B, 90% with C, 85% with D 80% with E, and so on

example concerns Melanesian Pidgin, the English-derived pidgin/creole spoken in much of Melanesia. The different varieties spoken in Papua New Guinea (where it is called Tok Pisin), Solomon Islands (Pijin), and Vanuatu (Bislama) are probably all fairly mutually intelligible, and linguists would be justified in saying that we are dealing with one language. On the other hand, each variety has a particular status within each of the three countries—each has what we might call a *political identity*—and for this reason most Melanesians would view Tok Pisin, Pijin, and Bislama as being three different languages.

In other cases, the reverse applies: where linguists would see more than one language, the people themselves see a single language. Lynch (1998:26) describes the situation in Fiji. The varieties of Fijian spoken in the west of the country are quite distinct from those spoken in the east, and in normal circumstances we would say there are two languages, Western Fijian and Eastern Fijian. However, because these people all belong to a relatively homogeneous cultural group, and because we are dealing with the language of a single nation, many Fijians simply refer to "the Fijian language" as being a single language.

3.3 DOES IT MATTER? This "blurring" of language/dialect boundaries is a common phenomenon around the world. In one sense, whether we say that two communities speak different languages or different dialects of the same languages is important, if we are looking at, say, using local languages in education, or for religious purposes. But in another sense it is not so important. We do not need to be absolutely exact in counting numbers of languages. If we take a country like Solomon Islands, for example, to say that there are "about sixty" local languages gives us an idea of the linguistic complexity of the country. To feel forced to say that there are exactly 62, or exactly 64 (or whatever) languages, does not really increase our understanding of the linguistic situation in any real way at all. Thus in this book—especially in discussions of the more complex linguistic scenarios of Melanesia—these approximations are all we can really rely on.

4.0 THE OCEANIC LANGUAGES. The bulk of the languages of the Pacific (especially when we exclude the island of New Guinea) belong to the *Oceanic* subgroup of the *Austronesian* family. What does this statement mean?

The term *family* is used in a way similar to its usage in regular English: it implies descent from a common ancestor. When we speak of a language family, we assume that there was a single ancestral language spoken many thousands of years ago. As the speakers of this language migrated in geographical space, and as the language of each of these migrating communities changed over time in various ways, we end up with a large number of modern-day languages that are different from each other, but that nevertheless show certain similarities, due to their common descent.

There are a number of language families in the world. English, for example, belongs to the *Indo-European* language family, along with European languages like German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Polish, and Russian; northern Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, and Gujarati; and others. The *Austronesian* language family, to which most of the languages of the Pacific belong, includes the aboriginal languages of Taiwan, the languages of island Southeast Asia (Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.), and the Pacific region. The family consists of probably 1,200–1,300 languages.

The term *subgroup* is used to refer to a branch of a family. This implies that the languages in a subgroup are more closely related to each other that any is to any other

member of the family. This in turn implies that a more recent common ancestor language is the ancestor of just these members of the family.

Within the Austronesian family, there is an Oceanic subgroup that contains about 450 languages. This consists of all the languages of Polynesia; all the languages of Micronesia (except for Palauan and Chamorro, which belong with languages further to west); the majority of the languages of island Melanesia; and a minority of the languages of the mainland of New Guinea. (See Lynch, Ross, and Crowley 2002 for further details.)

A combination of linguistics and archaeology suggests that there was probably a single language or dialect chain, which we call Proto-Oceanic, spoken somewhere in the islands north of New Guinea, which was the ancestor of these Oceanic languages. Speakers of Proto-Oceanic came from further west in Southeast Asia, and began moving out into the Pacific three to four thousand years ago.

The *Oceanic subgroup* is thus that group of Austronesian languages that derive from Proto-Oceanic. All of the languages of Polynesia and almost all of those of Micronesia are members of this subgroup. And almost all the Austronesian languages of Melanesia are also members of this subgroup (but see section 5 below). No Oceanic languages are spoken outside the Pacific as it is defined in section 2.0. This book thus focuses on the Austronesian languages of the Pacific region.

5.0 PAPUAN LANGUAGES. However, there were other languages spoken in the New Guinea area for many thousands of years before this. These are known as *Papuan* or *non-Austronesian* languages, and belong to a number of different families. All of the languages of the interior of the island of New Guinea are Papuan, while along the coast there are some Papuan and some Oceanic languages. Papuan languages are also found in some of the islands neighboring New Guinea, west as far as Timor and east as far as the central Solomons. There are about 800 Papuan languages in all. The ancestors of speakers of these languages probably arrived in this area about 50,000 years ago, and there is no clear indication, at this stage of research, as to where these languages came from; no clear links with languages in any other part of the world have been found, though there is the possibility that they may be distantly related to the languages spoken by the Australian Aborigines. They do not appear to have a single common ancestor, although this may be a function of time: they have been there for so long that an enormous number of changes would have taken place, and many earlier similarities might have disappeared.

6.0 CONCLUSION. The Pacific area is rich in languages. As you work through the various chapters in this book, I hope you come to appreciate that great richness.

REFERENCES

Lynch, John. 1998. *Pacific languages: An introduction*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

Lynch, John, Malcolm Ross, and Terry Crowley. 2002. *The Oceanic languages*. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press.