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INTRODUCTION

France Mugler, guest editor

This issue is a compilation of selected papers which were presented at the University of the South Pacific (USP) Language Policies in Education Workshop and edited for this issue. In January 2004, in Apia, there was a meeting of the education ministers of the Pacific Island Forum countries. The Director of USP's Institute of Education, Dr 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki, presented a paper entitled "Language and culture in the Pacific region: issues, practices and alternatives". She concluded her paper by recommending that the ministers "[c]onsider adopting language policies as part of the education planning process; and request PRIDE to hold a follow-up regional meeting on language policy and practice for senior education officials". The workshop eventually took place in February 2005 at the Jovili Meo Mission Centre in Suva, with representatives from the 15 member states of the PRIDE region, resource people, and Institute of Education staff, who organised the workshop.

Dr Taufe'ulungaki's reasons for urging education planners to give more attention to language planning arise from her concern, shared by many, that Pacific children are often disadvantaged by not gaining enough competence in their mother tongue before switching to a second (or third) language as the medium of instruction. She referred to a World Bank study of 1994, which found that mother tongue instruction is crucial to cognitive development and the effective learning of a second language. Moreover, children have a right to being educated in their mother tongue. The use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction throughout primary school and as a subject in secondary school would also help maintain and revitalise indigenous languages and the cultures that are associated with them.

Currently, Pacific states are addressing this complex issue in a variety of ways, depending on their history, present circumstances and goals for the future. There is also great variety in terms of the extent to which ministries of education have included provisions for mother tongue education in their planning.

The countries

The countries represented here are island nations located in the Pacific Basin, ranging from those in the middle of the South Pacific, such as Tonga, Niue, Samoa, Fiji, and Tuvalu, with Cook Islands the easternmost, to Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the west, and Kiribati, Nauru, the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau to the north. It is a region of great diversity in size, population and economy, colonial history and political status, language and culture.

While the Pacific is the largest ocean in the world and is home to thousands of islands, its population is quite small. Of the countries represented here, the largest, PNG, with 5,5 million, is not typical of the region, and no other country reaches a million. The next largest, Fiji, has nearly 900,000 people, the Solomon Islands about half a million, Vanuatu a little over 200,000 and Samoa a little under. Several countries have just over 100,000 people (Tonga, FSM, Kiribati), while the populations of others are only in the tens of thousands (RMI, Cook Islands, Palau, Tuvalu). The smallest, Niue, with around 2,000 people, is also the only country whose population has declined in the past ten years.

Out migration is significant for many of these countries, particularly the smaller ones with a limited economic base. There are large numbers of Pacific Islanders in the major English-speaking Pacific Rim countries, such as Samoans in New Zealand (particularly Auckland), Tongans in the United States (especially in Utah), or Fiji Islanders on the west coast of the USA and Canada. Neighbouring Australia also has a large population of Pacific Islanders, and there are more Niueans, for example, in New Zealand than in Niue. Migrants tend to keep close ties with their home island communities, contribute significantly to the economy through remittances, and return regularly to visit.

All the countries were colonised at one time or another, except for Tonga, which was, however, a British protectorate for most of the twentieth century. Many other colonial powers were present in the wider

Pacific at some stage (Germany, Japan, France, the USA, Spain), but Britain and later its local surrogates Australia and New Zealand in the south of the region and the USA in the north eventually became the most important ones. Most countries reached independence in the last thirty years or so of the twentieth century, with Samoa (then ‘Western Samoa’) the first to become independent in 1968. Vanuatu, which had been jointly administered by Britain and France, finally reached independence in 1980. The Cook Islands and Niue are both self-governing states in free association with New Zealand, with their nationals having dual citizenship, while FSM, RMI, and Palau have compacts of free association with the USA.

Linguistic situation

a) Indigenous languages

The Pacific region is also diverse linguistically; indeed, it is the most diverse in the world. In the area covered by the countries represented here, over 1,000 languages are spoken. Most of these are in Melanesia, with Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands accounting for the largest number, ranging from over 60 in Solomon Islands to more than 750 in PNG. Vanuatu, with its relatively small population, has the highest language density in the world, with around 100 languages for about 200,000 people. In Polynesia, on the other hand, most countries have one indigenous language (Samoa, Niue) or two or three (Tonga, Cook Islands, Fiji). This is true also of parts of Micronesia, where Kiribati, Nauru, and RMI have one indigenous language each, while Palau and FSM have a dozen or so each. Tuvaluan, a Polynesian language, is spoken in all but one of the islands of Tuvalu, located in the Micronesian geographical region. The number of speakers per language in the Pacific varies greatly, with the largest having several hundred thousand speakers (Fijian, Samoan, Tongan and, in PNG, Enga, Kuman, Hagen) and others, again mostly in Melanesia, only a couple of thousand, a hundred, or even less.

The indigenous languages of most of these countries belong to the Austronesian language family, the language family with the widest geographical reach in the world. In the Pacific Basin, Austronesian

stretches from Easter Island in the east to PNG in the west, and from Hawai'i in the north to New Zealand in the south. Beyond the Pacific Ocean, Austronesian languages are found in southeast Asia (the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia), Taiwan in the east and Madagascar in the west. However, most languages in PNG and a handful in Solomon Islands (mostly in the north-west) are non-Austronesian (or 'Papuan') languages. All the Austronesian languages (of our countries) are closely related historically and belong to the Oceanic sub-group, except Palauan, a member of the Western Malayo-Polynesian sub-group.

b) Introduced languages

European contact, then colonisation brought other languages to the Pacific. The most important colonial language which remains in the region is English, which has official status—either by law or in actual fact—in all the countries represented here. In Vanuatu, the other major language introduced in the Pacific in colonial times, French, is also official, alongside English and the national language, Bislama.

Colonisation also led to the development of other languages, particularly Melanesian Pidgin English, which evolved as a lingua franca among islanders with different mother tongues recruited or kidnapped through 'blackbirding' to work on plantations in Queensland, Fiji and Samoa. Melanesian Pidgin, originating as a restricted jargon used for limited communicative functions, both between overseers and labourers and among labourers, remained useful to Melanesians after the plantation era.

Like other pidgins, Melanesian Pidgin borrowed most of its vocabulary from the language used by the dominant group, in this case English, while its grammar broadly reflects that of the indigenous languages of its users. With continued use arising from increased contact between Melanesians with different first languages through migration, intermarriage and urbanisation, the pidgin expanded both its functions, and its vocabulary and grammar. It has now become a first language (i.e. a creole) for perhaps half a million or more Melanesians brought up in

urban areas, and continues to be a second (or third) language for perhaps over two million others.

There are three varieties of Melanesian Pidgin: Tok Pisin in PNG, (Solomons) Pijin in Solomon Islands and Bislama in Vanuatu. Each variety is used extensively as a lingua franca in its home country and also fulfils some official functions, particularly in the media. In Vanuatu, Bislama is recognised both as one of the three official languages and as the national language, a powerful symbol of identity and unity in a country formerly divided along the linguistic fault line between its former colonisers. The three varieties of Melanesian Pidgin are mutually intelligible, and the language also functions as a regional lingua franca among citizens of the three countries. In the south of PNG, another pidgin, Hiri Motu, serves as a lingua franca in that region.

Also introduced as a consequence of colonialism is Fiji Hindi, a language (or koiné) resulting from contact between dialects of Hindi spoken in the north of India, which evolved among Indian labourers brought to Fiji under the indenture system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Fiji Hindi has developed into a distinct variety of Hindi, with its own grammar and incorporating in its vocabulary a number of words from Fijian and new borrowings from English, and is spoken by nearly all Fiji citizens of Indian ancestry ('Fiji Indians' or 'Indo-Fijians'). Like other languages that have arisen out of recent language contact (such as pidgins and creoles), Fiji Hindi is not always recognised as a language in its own right by some of its speakers. It has grown to be significantly different from its more prestigious relative Standard Hindi (sometimes referred to as *Shudh* ¾literally 'pure'—*Hindi*).

c) Multilingualism

The introduction or development of languages new to the region has for the most part added to the linguistic diversity of the region rather than displaced indigenous languages. The result has been bilingualism in some countries and increased multilingualism in others, particularly in Melanesia, where the multiplicity of languages and contact between

neighbouring speech communities made multilingualism the norm long before European contact. This means that many Pacific Islanders are conversant in at least two languages, and many Melanesians in particular are often fluent in three or more. In addition, speakers of minority language groups are often familiar with the majority indigenous language of their country. So, most Samoans know both Samoan and English, most Cook Islanders know English and Rarotongan, even when they are native speakers of another variety of Cook Island Maori, and most Kiribati speakers living on Rabe Island know Fijian as well as English. Many Solomon Islanders will speak the language of their mother, the language of their father, Solomons Pijin, and English.

The threat to indigenous languages from English—and in Melanesia from the lingua francas, probably a more immediate menace—has only recently started to become a widespread concern, as the issue of language endangerment has gained prominence worldwide. This is perhaps especially true of the Cook Islands and Niue, where the ease of access to New Zealand means that many people commute, and the predominance of English in the communities in New Zealand is transferred to the islanders' homelands. The situation is similar in the countries closely associated with the USA.

Language policy

a) Language policy and the constitutions of the Pacific

Language policy in the Pacific varies greatly, particularly with respect to the degree to which it is officially codified. This is reflected in the range of coverage of language issues in the constitutions of the countries under study.

Perhaps the most common mention of language occurs in the provisions for individual rights, where 8 of the 14 constitutions specify that a person detained, arrested, or charged, has the right to be informed of the charges in a language he or she understands, and to the free services of an interpreter. A few constitutions also have statements prohibiting

discrimination on various grounds, including language (Fiji, RMI, Palau, Vanuatu).

The status of a language or languages as official is dealt with explicitly in few constitutions. The constitution of Palau states that both Palauan and English are official languages, and that of Vanuatu recognises Bislama, English and French. The constitution of Fiji declares that the official language of Parliament is English but adds that members of either house can also use “Fijian or Hindustani”.

In the constitutions of other countries, the de facto official status of a language can be interpreted as being implicit in other provisions, such as those that specify which language(s) can be used in debates in Parliament or in written bills, laws, and records of proceedings. In countries with only one indigenous language, the official status of that language goes without saying (e.g. Samoan in Samoa). The same is true in countries with more than one indigenous language where one is acknowledged as the main variety (Tongan, rather than Niufo‘ou, in Tonga, for instance, or Tuvaluan in Tuvalu, rather than the Kiribati spoken on Nui). The constitution of the Cook Islands specifies that the records of proceedings of Parliament must be in the Maori “as spoken in Rarotonga”. As for English, the very fact that constitutions are written in it – or that there is at least a version in it – can also be taken as implying official status, along with its possible use in debates, bills and other written government documents.

Many constitutions contain a provision about the possibility of conflict or inconsistency between the version in English and the version in the indigenous language. In most cases, and unsurprisingly since constitutions were usually initially drafted in English, the English version is to prevail—Cook Islands, Palau, Kiribati, RMI, and Samoa, although Samoa’s constitution states that the Samoan and English versions are “equally authoritative”. In Niue also, both the Niuean and the English versions are deemed “equally authentic”. But the constitution treats the problem differently, stating that in case of “apparent discrepancy”, any determination must be made and “regard shall be had to all the circumstances that tend to establish the true intent and meaning

of that provision". Similarly, in case of conflict between versions of the records of proceedings of the Assembly, the Assembly can determine that one or the other version should prevail. In the case of Fiji, English also is to prevail in case of difference, but there are to date no complete translations in Fijian or Hindustani, in spite of a provision which declares that such translations "are to be available", and another which affirms the equal status of the three languages. The constitutions of FSM, Nauru, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are silent on this issue.

The lack of translation of the Fiji constitution points to the general issue of possible discrepancy between policy and practice. This affects in particular citizens' access to services which may be protected by law but may not always be implemented in fact. The lack of training in interpretation and translation, for example, is one factor which limits the full implementation of some provisions of constitutions throughout the region.

As for the issue of national language, only two countries deal with it explicitly in their constitutions: Palau, where "the Palauan traditional languages" are named national languages, and Vanuatu, with Bislama. The Vanuatu constitution also states that the Republic protects the local languages and "may declare one of them as a national language." Moreover, the Council of Chiefs "may make recommendations for the preservation and promotion of ni-Vanuatu cultures and languages." In some countries the issue has not been tackled, perhaps because of the choice of a national language or because languages may be difficult. This is especially true of Fiji and the countries of Melanesia. In Fiji, with its roughly equal populations of speakers of the two main languages, Fijian and Fiji Hindi, the choice may be considered controversial. PNG, with its many languages, including two lingua francas, may prefer to have no declared national language rather than to choose one or several. In Solomon Islands also, no single indigenous language fulfils the unifying symbolic function required, and Pijin, which would fulfil this function well, suffers from too little prestige or official recognition. Elsewhere in the Pacific, it is obvious in most cases that the indigenous language, or the main indigenous language, fulfils that function and is the de facto, if

not de jure, national language—thus Tongan in Tonga, Samoan in Samoa, etc.

b) Language policy in education

What is true of language policy in general is true also of language policy in education, with a range of coverage of the issue in different government documents. Language policy in education is not generally addressed in constitutions, with the exception of two of the Melanesian countries. The constitution of Vanuatu specifies that English and French are “the principal languages of education”—thus excluding the national language, Bislama—and the constitution of PNG states that “all persons and governmental bodies [are] to endeavour to achieve universal literacy in *Pisin*, *Hiri Motu* or English, and in *tok ple s* or *ita eda tano gado*’. And while several constitutions call for respect for traditional culture, including language, [SI, PNG] and others provide for the right of their citizens to access services besides legal ones in an official language other than English [Fiji, Vanuatu], **none has specific provisions to ensure perhaps the most important language right of its young citizens, the right of access to education in their mother-tongue.** Most official statements on language policy, insofar as they exist, tend to emanate from other sources, ministries of education in particular.

In practice, there is a wide variety of ways in which languages are used in the education systems of the Pacific. Some of this diversity is due to differences in the language situation of the various countries, especially between the countries of Polynesia and most of those in Micronesia, that have a small number of indigenous languages (often only one) per country and where these languages tend to have an important place in education, and the far more linguistically diverse Melanesian countries, where the choice of an indigenous language is more complex. The situation in Melanesia, however, has started to change in the past decade or so, with attempts in PNG to incorporate indigenous languages much more in education, particular as languages of instruction, through a localised approach and, more recently, to some extent, in Vanuatu.

In all the countries under study, English has a presence—sometimes an overwhelming one—both as subject of study and as medium of instruction. It is widely seen as the door to opportunity—if not the main reason to send children to school—in terms of access to white collar jobs, to higher education within the region and in Pacific Rim countries, to jobs in regional organisations and beyond the Pacific. In the Solomon Islands, for example, English is the sole recognised medium of instruction from the beginning of schooling, and in Fiji, although the first three years of school are supposed to be in ‘the vernacular’, English is introduced as a subject from the very beginning and often also starts being used as medium of instruction very early. On the other hand, Tongan, for instance, is used as a medium of instruction throughout the primary and secondary levels. But in all countries, no matter what the official policy might be, code switching between different mediums, official or not, is widespread, although it is often ignored. The diversity in the mother tongues of children is another issue. A child whose first language is, say, Cook Island Maori, may not know Rarotongan. In Fiji, where the term ‘vernacular’ tends to be used merely in contradistinction to English, a child whose first language is Fijian may in fact speak, say, Nadroga, a variety mutually unintelligible with Standard Fijian, while children who study Hindi as a subject in school soon realise that it is significantly different from the Hindi that they speak at home. To some extent, this is true also of English, which has developed localised varieties, particularly in colloquial registers, which are different from the formal English taught in schools.

The low status of pidgins, creoles and koines, due to ignorance and prejudice about their ‘mixed’ nature and historical association with the now infamous labour trade, means that they are still often not considered worthy of study as subjects or, even less, suitable as languages of instruction. Even in Vanuatu, where a pidgin/creole, Bislama, is both lingua franca and the national language, it has no official place in education and circulars routinely remind teachers that it is banned from the classroom. Indigenous languages suffer from another paradox. Although their teaching as subjects of study is widely practiced and supported, in the name of cultural identity and as a guarantor of language maintenance, there is still prejudice or at least doubt about their

suitability as languages of instruction, in spite of their widespread, if often unofficial, use in the classroom. They are often said not to have the vocabulary to express technical or scientific concepts, in particular, or complex notions in general. While vocabulary does need to continue to be developed, as is any language, any lack of technical terminology fails to keep teachers from using indigenous languages. Indeed they tend to do so precisely when concepts are difficult.

These are only a few of the issues that are relevant to the formulation or review of language policy and practice in education. There are many others, ranging from unresolved problems in the standardisation of orthography of some indigenous languages, to nation-wide choices of languages at the different levels of both the formal and informal education systems; from the general goals of the policy (language maintenance? eventual transition to English - or French? functional literacy in several languages?) and the structure which will best ensure that these goals are reached (When to introduce which language? When to switch?), to a consideration of attitudes among the community at large (Why is it important to study one's own language, when one 'already knows' it? Does the teaching of a language as subject really ensure its maintenance? What is the difference between a medium and a subject?). Many practical problems, related to materials development and teacher training, for instance, also need addressing.

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