

Richard A. Benton, *The Flight of the Amokura: Oceanic Languages and Formal Education in the South Pacific*. Educational Research Series No. 63. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1981. Pp. xiv, 246.

*The Flight of the Amokura* is a discussion of the role of Oceanic languages in the educational systems of South Pacific island groups (the area covered by the book corresponds roughly to the region of the South Pacific Commission with the addition of New Zealand and Hawaii). The discussion has two aims: a survey of the question of language choice in the classroom; and an analysis of the bilingual education programs that have

been implemented in certain countries of the South Pacific, and of the appropriateness of such programs to other areas of the region. These two objectives will be reviewed separately.

The survey is covered by parts two to four of the volume (pp. 7-141). Arranged by country and territory, it consists of a historical overview and a discussion of the present situation, of the current policies adopted by the education authorities of each government, and of the community's attitudes toward these. New Zealand is by far the most thoroughly reviewed area (pp. 7-83), an imbalance that reflects both the author's own experience (as head of the Maori Research Unit at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research) and the fact that "it is in New Zealand that the debate over the educational status and value of the indigenous language has been the most adequately documented, and has perhaps the longest continuous history" (p. xi).

Benton's coverage of the New Zealand situation is admirably clear and comprehensive. Focused primarily on the status of Maori, it brings together discussions of language attitudes, of the history of language policy-making in relation to both education and other concerns, and of the political implications of the different approaches to the problem. The New Zealand situation is complex: Maori is in the process of succumbing to a long history of competitive pressure from English in all areas of life but ceremonial activities (see Benton 1980 for an interesting microlinguistic analysis of language loss in a Maori community). This has had the effect of polarizing attitudes towards the language. For most Maoris, the language has become a symbol of resistance against sociopolitical oppression by the *pākehā* majority, while among the latter, imminent language death is often quoted as a pretext for greater racial and cultural integration. As is to be expected, the responses to the recent promotion of bilingual education are varied.

The most striking feature of the survey of the rest of the Pacific is a general dearth of solid data, a fact that can hardly be blamed on Benton. Indeed, very little information is available on the educational policies of most countries and territories of the region, whether it is concerned with language questions or other matters (with notable exceptions such as American Samoa--see Baldauf 1982, for instance); even less is known about language attitudes and the community's wishes and concerns regarding what goes on in the classroom. On the effect of Papua New Guinea's intricate multilingual situation on the educational system, Benton only provides four pages (pp. 137-41); the discussion of the role of Tongan in Tongan schools takes little more than a page (pp. 96-97). The conclusion is clear: on most islands of the area, the question of language in

the classroom is typically swept under the carpet. The fact that Benton is unable to illuminate the reader on educational policies any more than he does is due to the fact that these, in most areas, do not exist beyond the trends established decades ago by church or colonial views of what and how children should learn.

The second aim of the volume concerns bilingual education. Richard Benton has been actively involved in the establishment of bilingual education programs in New Zealand, inspired by similar developments in the United States and the British Isles. In Part Five of *The Flight of the Amokura* (pp. 142-201), he reviews in detail the results of the Bilingual Education Conference sponsored by the South Pacific Commission in 1974, which marked the beginning of widespread awareness of bilingual education principles in the South Pacific. This review is followed by a discussion of the implications of bilingual education philosophies for the different types of educational policies and linguistic situations in the Pacific.

It would be difficult to attack Benton's view that bilingual education has a great deal to offer, for example, to the Maori situation in New Zealand, in which the encroachment of the intrusive metropolitan language is so strong that the entire community is bilingual, diglossic, or losing its own indigenous language. Caution should be exerted, however, in assuming that what works in one country will fare just as well in another. On the one hand, the relationship of English to Samoan in American Samoa, and that of English to Tongan in Tonga, for instance, are of a very different nature. In the former, diglossic bilingualism is prevalent, at least among the younger generations (see Fishman 1967 for a discussion of the interaction of bilingualism and diglossia). In Tonga, on the other hand, we have a diglossic situation without bilingualism (except perhaps in Nuku'alofa, the capital), in the sense that English there is used for highly restricted and specific purposes (notes on the blackboard in school, interaction with tourists, etc.), and is not a communicative register available to the majority. Does the success of bilingual education in American Samoa allow us to predict similar results if implemented in Tonga?

It is my understanding that one of the implicit aims of bilingual education philosophy is to provide a model that allows for the manipulation of language attitudes towards a leveling of the status of the different languages involved in a diglossic situation. This assumes, however, that the different languages are all present as register options within the community (not necessarily for the same individuals), just as English and Samoan are in American Samoa. This is not the case in the Tongan situation, where English is just not a daily reality for the children and their parents,

and the implementation of bilingual programs can be expected to present a whole array of problems unknown to the Samoan policymakers.

Furthermore, it may appear surprising that in many areas of the Pacific, any idea tending in the direction of a greater role of the indigenous languages in formal education encounters, at best, intense suspicion. On Wallis and Futuna, for instance, where a survey was recently conducted by the present reviewer on attitudes toward language use in the classroom, both parents and teachers were found to be strongly opposed to any change in the status quo: Uvean and Futunan, the two local Polynesian languages, are seen as the languages of the home, while French is viewed as the only language that should be involved in the educational system.

These attitudes undoubtedly reflect a long history of conditioning into thinking of vernacular languages as inferior registers. However, they seem to point to a wider pattern of attitudes toward education in Pacific countries. Formal education, introduced with Christianity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in most areas of the region, never lost, in most islanders' minds, its intrinsic association with things foreign. This is pointed out by Duranti and Ochs (in press) with respect to literacy instruction, which is very closely associated, both historically (Parsonson 1967) and synchronically, with formal education. In this context the question of the role of Oceanic languages in formal education becomes a particularly thorny issue that involves not only policymaking and the development of new curricula, but questions of deeply ingrained attitudes in the community.

Renton is to be commended for having provided a useful tool of reference for educators, administrators, and researchers. The questions he raises are provoking even if the discussion lacks breadth. The book will undoubtedly become a landmark in the literature on the subject. The bibliography in the appendix (pp. 219-32) is in itself a valuable survey of the research to date.

## REFERENCES

- Baldauf, Richard B., Jr.  
 1982 "The Language Situation in American Samoa." *Language Planning Newsletter* 8(1):1-6.
- Benton, Richard A.  
 1980 "Changes in Language Use in a Rural Maori Community 1963-1978." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 89:455-78.

Duranti, Alessandro and Elinor Ochs

"Literacy Instruction in a Samoan Village." In Bambi B. Schieffelin (ed.): *The Acquisition of Literacy: Ethnographic Perspectives*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex. In press.

Fishman, Joshua

1967 "Bilingualism with and without Diglossia: Diglossia with and without Bilingualism." *Journal of Social Issues* 23(2):29-38.

Nico Besnier  
University of Southern California