

REVIEW ESSAYS

Samuel H. Elbert and Mary Kawena Pukui, *Hawaiian Grammar*, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979. Pp. xviii, 193, bibliography, index. \$12.00.

The field of Polynesian linguistics seems to have known two types of students so far: on the one hand, theoreticians with little practical knowledge of the languages, who thus come up with basically valuable analyses that are supported by more or less wobbly data;¹ on the other hand, a whole series of amateurs, philologists and missionaries who, with generally a good command of the language of their interest, have usually shied away from theoretical issues. Samuel Elbert and Mary Pukui's new *Hawaiian Grammar*, the result of what seems to have been a long period of maturation, makes a great leap toward the bridging of linguistics with accurate data, and yet falls just short on the theoretical side.

Why should we conjure here "theory" and "modern linguistics"? The grammar, Elbert writes in the preface, "is not couched in the most recent linguistic terminology, partly because the authors belong to a different generation, and partly because it is hoped that this volume will be of value to all students and teachers of the Hawaiian language, whether or not they are trained in contemporary linguistics" (p. xiii). It is indeed a fact that modern linguistics sometimes presents itself as a jargon of hopelessly technical terms; as Ross Clark pointed out, "the theoretical grammarians have often allowed an excess of algebraic formalism (at times exacerbated by constipated typography) to obscure the statement of relatively simple facts."² Yet Elbert's statement reveals two fallacies: that modern linguistics necessarily involves (or consists in) a complex terminology intelligible only to the initiated, and that description and theory are two things not to be blended. "Contemporary linguistics" is far from being limited to transformational grammar, nor is it confined to primarily theory-oriented models of description. Many recent grammars have indeed proved that both concepts and terminology can be drawn from the latest theory of grammar in order to present material to be used for the most practical of purposes by the most untrained of users. Since a language has to be described by a model independent of any other language, as Elbert points out rightly (p. 44), new terminology necessarily has to be introduced. Why should generative or post-generative grammatical terminology not be used, being

¹For instance, see Sandra Chung, *Case-Marking and Grammatical Relations in Polynesian* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).

²Ross Clark's review of Hubert Copenrath's *Grammaire approfondie de la langue tahitienne* and Paul Prévost's *Nā roto tātou i te reo Tahiti: Manuel de tahitien moderne*, *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 86 (1977), 540-44.

fairly standardized, generally economical and never obscure enough as to lose nonlinguists if appropriately clarified? For instance, the terms “primary” and “secondary stress” could well have been introduced for clarity in the discussion of stress groups (p. 16) without scaring anyone away from the book.

This question of grammatical terminology is really part of a much wider problem, that of descriptive models. For the description of a language, a great deal of inspiration can be found both from hard-core MIT linguistics as well as from the most virulent opponents of the latter. From transformationalists, the grammar could have benefitted by a clearer and slicker account of relativization (pp. 169-71), which appears as a clearly-definable process in Hawaiian, with an equideletion rule present; perhaps some evidence could have been added where adjectives seem to be treated as, relative clauses having undergone a relative-deletion transformation (p. 49). Relational grammarians would have perhaps reanalyzed passives and imperatives (p. 83) for Hawaiian to fit more smoothly in already-established diachronic patterns for Polynesian, in particular Maori,³ and to avoid the awkward concept of “passive/imperative” (one can be posited as an intrinsic property of the other for defined contexts). The reader is also left in the dark as to whether *a’ole* (p. 59) can be considered as a negative verb as in some other Polynesian languages,⁴ which would indeed be useful knowledge, even from a practical point of view; a positive answer to this, incidentally, is evidenced by the position of *ho’i* in negative sentences (p. 103).

“Softer” linguistics would have come in handy in many instances: a discussion of the phonological patterning of loan-words (p. 28) could have been interesting and useful;⁵ variation theory could have been exploited in many cases where the data are not sufficient for the reader to infer precise generalizations as to style, semantic implications, etc. In short, all the above remarks point to one often-forgotten fact: that modern linguistic theories deal with facts of language, and that their immediate application is language description; their aims are simplicity, accuracy, and universality, which are the underlying aims of any descriptive grammar. Such theories should certainly be taken full advantage of.

Taking advantage of them certainly does not mean following their mistakes. It is indeed a common criticism of the transformational ap-

³Ross Clark, “Passive and Surface-subject in Maori,” LSA Winter meeting, San Diego, 1973.

⁴Sandra Chung, “Negatives as Verbs in Polynesian,” Honor’s Thesis Harvard University 1970.

⁵Albert Schutz, “Phonological Patterning of English Loan-words in Tongan,” in S. A. Wurm and D. C. Laycock, eds., *Pacific Linguistic Studies in Honour of A. Capell* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 1970), pp. 409-28.

proach that it disregards what traditionally was called “exceptions” to the rules for the sake of the simplicity of the grammar. In other instances this principle of grammatical “economy” will make linguists posit rather unorthodox conjectures for a particular language. We cannot but smilingly agree with the authors’ comment on the hypothesis proposed for Samoan to posit underlying verbal forms ending in consonants to account for suffix diversity. With subtle irony, they mention that “in general this solution is more ‘economical’ (high praise to many linguists)” (p. 88). Indeed, the authors point out that certain roots can be found with different suffixes, a fact that thus immediately invalidates any such proposal. For instance, *ho’owa’a + hia* and *ho’owa’a + lia* are both grammatical (p. 85). Rightly, Elbert and Pukui conjecture that perhaps *-hia* and *-’ia* are driving out the rarer *-lia*, *-mia*, and *-nia* (p. 85).

Insights into this problem can be gleaned from another Polynesian language, Tongan. According to a fairly widely accepted theory, Tongan with Niuean is the forerunner of a drift from passivity to ergativity;⁶ Hawaiian, along with other eastern Polynesian languages, is at the other extreme. Passive suffixes in Tongan have been totally reanalyzed, having lost their passivizing function, while the passive constructions became unmarked, thus yielding an ergative system. What the suffixes have been reanalyzed into is not very clear yet, but, synchronically speaking, they do have a semantic rather than syntactic function. A hierarchy of suffix productivity is obvious: suffix *’i* is most productive, followed by *’ia*, while other suffixes are adhering to the root-morpheme they are attached to for the generation of a richer lexicon, to thus create new verbs with a meaning derived from the root, but differing from it by a “shade of meaning” which seems not always to be predictable. For instance, the root *vete* “to loosen” can be suffixed into *vete + ki* “to divorce,” or into *vete + ’i* “to undo” with, arguably, predictable perfective meaning.⁷ Furthermore, one can encounter *vete + kina*, *vete + kia* and *vete + ngia*; how their respective discourse functions differ still has to be investigated. *Vela* “hot” suffixes to form *vele + hia* “damaged by heat” (with diachronically regular vowel mutation), while its partially reduplicated form *vevela* takes *’ia*, a more productive suffix, instead of the expected *-hia*. Verbal compounds and borrowings also take *’ia* rather than another suffix: *kutu + fisi + ’ia* “to be infested with Fijian lice (i.e. fleas);” *toketā + ’ia* “full of doctors.” A similar

⁶Kenneth Hale’s review of Patrick Hohepa’s *Generative Grammar of Maori*, *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 77 (1968), 83-99; and Patrick Hohepa “The Accusative-to-Ergative Drift in Polynesian Languages,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 78 (1969), 295-329.

⁷See Claude Tchekhoff, “Verbal Aspect in an Ergative Construction; an Example in Tongan,” *Oceanic Linguistics* 12 (1973), 607-20; and, on a similar process in Samoan, George Milner, “It is Aspect (not voice) which is marked in Samoan,” *Oceanic Linguistics* 12 (1973), 621-39.

phenomenon is found to be at work with nominalizing suffixes *-'anga*. The predictable *hū + fanga* “refuge,” from *hū* “to enter,” is in competition with *hu + 'anga* “entrance,” and can itself be double-suffixed into *hū + fanga + 'anga* “sanctuary.” The suffix *'anga* is doubtless gaining control of the process.

What does this Tongan data tell us about Hawaiian? It points out that the reanalysis of both passive-type and nominalizing suffixes from a morphosyntactic to a semantic-discourse function, already quite advanced in Tongan, is also starting at the tail-end of the drift sequence in Hawaiian. We therefore have here change in process, and it would be interesting to know whether dialectal or idiosyncratic variation exists in Hawaiian. Also, it proves that, at the stage where Tongan is, a “generative-type” approach would be lost, and indeed has been so far, when confronted with such data. Yet this conclusion of Elbert and Puku‘i’s does not exclude the proposal to posit underlying verbal forms with consonants in final position to generalize the suffixes into *-ia* and *-(a)nga/-(a)na*. What has to be crucially stressed in both analyses is that they are talking about two different sets of data. The position held in *Hawaiian Grammar* and further developed above is one of synchronic description, while the “generative” position, with no doubt, analyzes a protoform of the languages where reanalysis has not yet taken place, and thus is purely diachronic. We may add finally that this same process seems to be present in various other Polynesian languages, including Rarotongan and hence probably Maori.⁸

The second conclusion from these data is that the problem cannot be tackled with any seriousness within the morphology of the language, since its implications are not only phonological and syntactic, but also affect the semantics of the language. Although Hawaiian is morphologically a well-developed language compared to other languages in the family (see for instance the richness of variation in *hō-type* prefixes), it is also evident that a morphologically-based analysis has to be transcended, even if the approach is “data-oriented and structural” (p. xiii). It is also a pity that “less concentration was put on the structure of complex sentences” (p. xiii) where “complex sentences” just begin with simple subordination.

But let us be fair: despite the disappointments expressed above, Elbert and Puku‘i’s work is a little jewel. Scholarship, knowledge of the language, light-heartedness, readability, completeness and the richness of the data all make the grammar a joy to read as well as to consult. One cannot but take delight in the excellent review of early works on Hawaiian (ch. 1), in the sketch of dialectal variations (pp. 23-7), in the treatment of possessive

⁸From data in Stephen Savage, *A Dictionary of the Maori Language of Rarotonga* (Wellington: Department of Island Territories, 1962).

classes (pp. 136-45) and of verb classes, both based on Wilson's work,⁹ which promises to be expanded in a forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation, and in usage notes, like the list of interjections (ch. 12). This grammar makes us students and speakers of other Polynesian languages envious of Hawaiian; there is no doubt that *Hawaiian Grammar* is the best grammar of any Polynesian language, and certainly an excellent expansion of the grammar notes in the successive editions of the authors' dictionary (1957, 1965, 1971), on which the grammar is based.

The book is divided into twelve chapters, each with well-defined scope, and carefully-planned cross-references. One cannot help thinking of the frustrations involved in using Churchward's *Tongan Grammar*¹⁰ with its overabundance of useless crossreferences. Another major drawback of Churchward's grammar is the lack of an index; Elbert and Pukui have appended a glossary, a list of references (of bibliographic value) and an index. A note of reservation on these: let the reader waste no time looking for the unpublished papers by Apoliona, DuPont, K. Lee, M. Lee and Makanani, mentioned to be "in the office of the Department of Indo-Pacific Languages, University of Hawaii;" the secretary there has never heard of them. Furthermore, considering that Elbert was a major contributor to the subdividing of the Polynesian family,¹¹ his rather flaky definitions of terms such as Proto-Central-Polynesian, Proto-Eastern-Polynesian and Proto-Polynesian in the glossary (p. 182) are rather surprising.

We have here perhaps the finest work, although not the most "linguistic" of two of the most accomplished Polynesianists. I do not only recommend it, but it is an absolute must for all students of the Polynesian area. Pukui and Elbert's *Grammar* is the modern progenitor of a grammatical tradition that started with missionary-linguists, but with every possible prescriptive principle removed, and orthography-phonology confusions absent,¹² and, with the position on theoretical issues modified as suggested above, it should be a model for the much-needed description of many other Polynesian languages.

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⁹William Wilson, "The O- and A-Possessive Markers in Hawaiian," M.A. Thesis University of Hawaii 1976.

¹⁰C. M. Churchward, *Tongan Grammar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

¹¹Samuel Elbert, "Internal Relationships of Polynesian Languages and Dialects," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 9 (1953), 147-73.

¹²Except perhaps for the definition: "Sentences are sequences bordered by periods, question marks, or exclamation points" (p. 39).