

THE TAHITIAN LANGUAGE:
A HISTORICAL AND VERNACULAR CONTROVERSY

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After a century of quasi-official repression of the Tahitian language, it finally emerged, through legislation passed in 1977, as a co-official language with French. Its history and present status perhaps provide insights and examples of routes other Polynesian languages may take.

The establishment of a standardized written form for Tahitian began in 1805 by Tahiti-based members of the London Missionary Society after several years of collecting words from European sources (navigators' lists, etc.) and from Tahitians themselves. Several meetings were held in March of that year to construct a Tahitian alphabet into ". . . some uniform mode in order to teach the natives . . ." ¹ It is apparent that much dispute arose in the course of such meetings, primarily over the fact that individual members had been utilizing their own methods of spelling, and that a change to the newly proposed method would be both difficult and confusing. In the end, however, ". . . the minority for peace sake gave up the dispute and agreed with the majority." ²

Both Henry Nott and John Davies, the senior members of the Tahitian mission, assumed the primary responsibility for gathering words and developing a standardized orthography for the printing of books in Tahitian. In 1807, a manuscript was completed and a request was sent to the Society directors in London for its printing. It was not until 1810 that 700 copies of an edition entitled *Te Aebi no Taheiti* (the Tahitian Alphabet) of forty-seven pages was printed in London. The mistakes contained in the text and the long delay in the printing convinced the missionaries that it would be more advantageous to erect a printing press in the islands to facilitate more accurate editions of future texts. In February of 1817, William Ellis arrived in Tahiti with the much awaited press. By May, a printing office was completed at Afareaitu, Mo'orea; and in June, the first printing press in the South Pacific began printing 2,592 copies of the

¹John Davies, *History of the Tahitian Mission, 1799-1830*, ed. C. W. Newbury (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 77. See also William Ellis, *History of the London Missionary Society* (London: J. Snow, 1844), I, 172-76.

²Davies, p. 78.

spelling book. Eventually, catechisms and hymnals were printed, followed by such important works as *Te Evanelia na Luka* (the Gospel of Luke, 1818) and the first codified laws for the islands, the Pomare Code of 1819.

Perhaps one of the most ambitious of the missionaries in the study of the Tahitian language was John M. Orsmond (1788-1856). It appears that Orsmond considered personal competence in the language to be indispensable to the greater task of Christian proselytism. He envied Nott's acknowledged skill in Tahitian; and during the initial years of his ministry, Orsmond spent ". . . the greatest part of the day going from house to house collecting words from the natives."³ Eventually, Orsmond became fluent in Tahitian and at one time unabashedly wrote, "I value my native tongue [Tahitian] as I value my life. What is a missionary without it?"⁴ In 1837, Orsmond suggested to the LMS that a Tahitian-English lexicon be prepared. Orsmond believed that the content of the aboriginal language had changed in the twenty years he had resided in Tahiti, largely because of the increased influence of English-speaking foreigners. Orsmond also believed that a standardized reference was needed before the aboriginal character of Tahitian was lost.⁵ Eventually, Davies, with help from both Nott and Orsmond, finished a *Tahitian and English Dictionary* (314 pages) which was published by the LMS in 1851. The culmination of the literary effort of the missionaries was the translation of a good portion of the New Testament in 1837.⁶ (The four Gospels and Acts of the Gospels, printed in London in 132 pages.)

The establishment of the French protectorate over Tahiti in 1842 brought new changes in the evangelical effort. Anglo-French rivalry extended to the district schools where political restraint was exercised concerning matters of public education.

From the beginning of the protectorate, the administration struggled with the dilemma that district schools were deeply influenced by the LMS but the teaching of French could not be ex-

³Orsmond had been instructed by the Society directors to make a concerted effort to learn Tahitian under Davies who proved to be a more cooperative teacher than Nott. Orsmond's journal entry 12 October 1817, London Missionary Society archives, South Seas Journals (hereafter cited as SSJ), housed at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies and now available on microfilm from Esselite Video, Inc., New York. See also Henry to Directors, 1 July 1817, LMS South Seas Letters (hereinafter cited as SSL).

⁴Orsmond's journal 29 October 1824 to 13 January 1825, SSJ.

⁵Orsmond's journal 17 November 1837-1839, SSJ.

⁶Numerous mistakes were discovered in the Nott manuscript. Consequently, several revisions had to be made by Orsmond, much to his own displeasure. Orsmond to Bennet, 19 August 1841, SSL.

panded while Roman Catholic missionaries were few and not well received on the whole by the population.⁷

Governor Armand-Joseph Bruat (1843-46), constantly confronted with Tahitian and missionary resistance, permitted the LMS to continue printing mission literature even though French law authorized him to do otherwise.⁸ This rather generous act on the part of Bruat permitted the continued publication of missionary literature and also facilitated the continued revision and correction of Biblical texts, thereby improving and perfecting the main sources of traditional and unadulterated Tahitian.

The French administration, however, was determined to exorcise the Anglo-Protestant influence in the islands and to replace it with a distinctly French and preferably Catholic orientation. Instruction in the French language was seen as one effective means of doing so. The Catholic missionary effort to establish church schools (*écoles libres*) was begun in 1857 by the Sisters of Cluny; this attempt lasted only three years, however. In 1860, four members of the Brothers of Plöemel arrived in Tahiti. Brother Alpert Ropert and his colleagues, with the approval of Governor Gaultier de la Richerie, opened a school. Brother Alpert became quite disillusioned, however, at the failure of many students to master even the rudimentary aspects of French.

... 84 students, 10 of which only know how to read a little . . . the others know nothing, not even a word of French The Tahitians have such a distaste for the French that even those who can understand it a little will not speak it. A *canaque* never speaks French. In the twenty years that I have been here it is as if I had arrived today.⁹

In 1860, an ordinance was passed which made instruction in French “. . . obligatory in the schools of the states of the Protectorate to the same degree as that of Tahitian.”¹⁰ A *brevet* (certificate) was established in or-

⁷Colin W. Newbury, “The Administration of French Oceania, 1842-1906,” Diss. Australian National University 1956, p. 134.

⁸Bruat to LMS, 9 January 1843, SSL.

⁹Henri-Charles Rulon, *Les Frères de l’instruction Chrétienne en Polynésie Française, 1860-1960* (Pape’ete: *Ecoles de Frères*, 1960), p. 18. Henri-Charles Rulon, “Les Premiers Temps de l’Instruction Publique en Pape’ete: Le gouverneur de la Richerie et l’Etablissements de l’Ecole de Frères de l’Instruction Chrétienne,” *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 16 (1960), 20-22.

¹⁰A. C. E. Caillot, *Histoire de la Polynésie Orientale* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1910), p. 478.

der to enforce this new law which stated that prospective teachers had to demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of French in order to qualify for positions in public education.

In 1866, in a large part due to a petition drafted by the Protestant members of the Legislative Assembly, Charles Viénot, a member of the Protestant *Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris*, arrived in the islands. Within a few months he established a school called *Ecole Française-Indigène*, in Pape'ete, Papeno'o, and Mataiea.¹¹ Viénot realized that the schools could not successfully substitute French entirely for the Tahitian language.¹² Although the French administration did not have an official policy directly concerning the Tahitian language, Viénot realized that a certain elite of Tahitian society had to gain competency in French in order to meet the challenging demands of an encroaching modern society that paid little heed to a provincial Polynesian vernacular.¹³ At the same time, he also perceived that the Tahitians must adhere to their cultural identity through the meaningful retention of their maternal tongue. Subsequently, Viénot instituted a policy whereby classroom instruction was conducted in French and religious instruction was taught in Tahitian. In this latter endeavor, Viénot relied almost entirely on the Tahitian Bible.

An added impetus to the French Protestant effort in Tahiti was the arrival in 1867 of Frédéric Vernier, also a member of the *Société des Missions Évangéliques*. Vernier was confronted with the same problem in the French-Tahitian controversy which Viénot had faced.

The missionary is . . . placed between two dilemmas. The European who wishes to teach French to all the natives for their own sake, and the native himself, who sees that all good things belong to those who know French. This latter person responds to you in French because of his embarrassment of his maternal tongue.¹⁴

¹¹The petition read in part: "We very much wish that our children learn French, but we do not want them to change their religion while they are doing so." Jacques Pannier and Gustave Mondian, *L'expansion française outre-mer et les Protestants français* (Paris: *Société des missions évangéliques*, 1931), p. 107.

¹²Charles Vernier, *Tahitiens d'hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: *Société des Missions évangéliques*, 1934), p. 254-55.

¹³Official policy emphasized that "the study of French shall be made a necessary part of the instructional program." In addition, "the usage of any other language other than French is forbidden to pupils, even during recreation periods." Louis J. Langomazino, *Codification des actes du gouvernement en vigueur . . .* (Pape'ete: Impr. du gouvernement, 1867), pp. 140 and 144.

¹⁴Vernier, p. 255.

Vernier quickly mastered Tahitian and eventually published an elementary *cahier*, the *Ecolier-Tahitien*, for use by his students. Undoubtedly Vernier was aided in his task by acquiring large amounts of old LMS publications.¹⁵

One of Vernier's sons, Charles, carried on his father's work. After spending eleven years at Ra'iatea, Charles Vernier returned to Pape'ete in 1923. It appears that at this time Charles Vernier intended to devote himself seriously to the improvement of Tahitian instruction, largely because he felt that the young Tahitians were in danger of losing a meaningful understanding of their aboriginal tongue.

The instruction of French, with all the avenues which it opened to the evolved youth in quest of gainful employment in administration or commerce, appears to have detoured the government in the instruction of the classical elements of Tahitian in the public schools, as if they had resolved themselves to accept the alteration, if not the disappearance . . . of the language.¹⁶

With the help of another colleague, Alexandre Drollet, Vernier presented to Governor Louis-Joseph Bogue a proposal to write an elementary grammar for use in the government schools. With support from Bogue, the grammar, *Grammaire de la Langue Tahitienne* [Paris: Missions Evangéliques, 1934, 59 pages.], was completed and published in 1934. In 1946, after serving a year as the territory's first Deputy to the National Assembly, Vernier took a chair reserved for the Polynesian language in the *Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes*.

In 1967, John Teariki, then the territorial Deputy and director of the pro-autonomy party, *Te Pupu Here Ai'a Te Nuna'a ia Ora* (the Patriotic Party for an Autonomous Polity), initiated a proposal to Governor Jean Sicurani to have the Government Council abrogate the decree of 11 December 1932 which required that all non-official language publications be submitted to the Governor for approval.¹⁷ Teariki contended that this archaic decree made Tahitian a *de facto* foreign language since French was the *only* official language of the territory. Teariki's proposal had been

¹⁵Vernier to Thompson, 18 January 1893, SSL.

¹⁶Charles Vernier, "Les variations de vocabulaire tahitien avant et après le contacts européens," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 4 (December, 1948), 20.

¹⁷*Journal Officiel des Etablissements Française de l'Océanie*, 16 February 1933. This decree, the subject of later controversy, may have been prompted by the circulation of underground Vietnamese (Viet Minh) newspapers in Tahiti. See *Journal Officiel des Etablissements Française de l'Océanie*, 1 November 1932.

precipitated by his party's decision to publish the party organ, *Te Here Ai'a* (The Beloved Land), in Tahitian. According to autonomist party members, Sicurani had invoked the 1932 decree as a means of political harassment.¹⁸

On 11 April 1967, Sicurani replied to Teariki's request stating that the Government Council did not think it possible to act on his proposal. Teariki then submitted a proposal to the Territorial Assembly's interim body, the Permanent Commission, suggesting that ". . . the Government of the Republic refer itself to the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789, the Constitution of the French Republic of October 4, 1958, . . . to abrogate . . . a vestige of the past . . . and render Tahitian . . . on an equal footing with the National Language."¹⁹ The Permanent Commission unanimously adopted Teariki's proposal and on 29 May the Territorial Assembly did likewise. In late August, Sicurani informed Teariki that although the Government Council did not oppose the publication of the Tahitian language version of the party organ, translations would still have to be submitted in accordance with the 1932 decree.²⁰ Even though he did not succeed entirely in his attempt, Teariki was somewhat satisfied with his minor victory.

Teariki's action stimulated more serious consideration of the present status of Tahitian in the socio-cultural context of the territory and its future role in education, commerce, and communication. One response to this rather obvious problem was a proposal for the establishment of an *Académie Tahitienne* or *Fare Vana'a* (House of Traditional Discourse), which like its French counterpart would be composed of a group of individuals competent in Tahitian.²¹ The formal proposal was submitted by Jean "Yannick" Amaru, Territorial Assemblyman and member of *Te Pupu Here Ai'a*, to the Territorial Assembly in August 1972.

In presenting the proposal, Amaru reminded the Assembly that it had adopted a proposal by Assemblyman Gaston Flosse which had made the teaching of Tahitian mandatory in the primary grades of the public schools and had provided that examinations on the Tahitian language be

¹⁸ *Assemblée Territoriale de la Polynésie française, 1ère session administrative extraordinaire de 1972, 4ème séance*, 3 August 1972, p. 1644, *Te Here Ai'a*, 25 April 1967, pp. 1-3.

¹⁹ *Assemblée Territoriale . . .*, p. 1643. *Te Here Ai'a*, 25 April 1967, p. 3.

²⁰ *Te Here Ai'a*, 5 September 1967, pp. 1-2.

²¹ *Assemblée Territoriale . . .*, p. 1644. *Te Here Ai'a*, 16-23 July 1968, p. 4. for a comprehensive discussion of the *Académie Tahitienne*, see Hubert Coppenrath, "L'académie tahitienne," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 31 (September, 1975), 284-300.

made optional.²² Amaru also indicated that Deputies Francis Sanford and Rock Pidjot of French Polynesia and New Caledonia respectively had introduced a proposition to the National Assembly on 14 December 1971 concerning the teaching of vernacular languages in the Overseas Territories.

The Territorial Assembly proceedings centered upon the nature, purposes, and composition of the *Académie*. An explicit statement of the primary objectives of the proposed cultural institution was considered urgent. Article 6 of the *Académie* statutes defined the organization's purposes as:

... to fix the language by uniforming vocabulary and grammar.

... to favor the publication of works printed in the Tahitian language and the translation into Tahitian of the masterpieces of the world's literatures.

... to encourage the publication of works in Tahitian treating questions of interest to Polynesia.

... to make the Tahitian language a tool of research for all those interested in ethnology, archaeology, history and . . . all aspects of science concerning the Pacific.

... to promote the instruction of the Tahitian language in the school.²³

The institution would be composed of twenty members who have the "best knowledge of the Tahitian language, with no distinction as to nationality, but having sufficient knowledge of French . . ." ²⁴ The *Académie* would be administered by a director and a chancellor, both of whom would be chosen by majority vote of the *Académie* members. The members themselves would be nominated by the Governor and the Government Council and would be subject to the approval of the Territorial Assembly. The funding of the *Académie* would be through the Commission of Financial, Economic, and Social Affairs.

²² *Assemblée Territoriale . . . , Session Ordinaire Budgetaire de 1971-72, 7ème séance, December, 1971, p. 3032.*

²³ *Assemblée Territoriale . . . , 4ème séance, p. 1670. Coppentrath, pp. 294-95.*

²⁴ *Assemblée Territoriale . . . , 4ème séance, p. 1660.*

The *Académie Tahitienne* is the culmination of years of endeavor and concern to rejuvenate the Tahitian language, an issue which at times has led to conflict between metropolitan and local officials.²⁵ In retrospect, it appears that renewed interest in the Tahitian language is directly related to the historical controversy over the status of indigenous languages and so-called international languages. In a South Pacific Commission technical paper, G. J. Platten states the argument for the use of an “international language.”

. . . it is the consensus of opinion that all native languages have too limited a currency, are unequal to the demands of a wider modern contact and the higher education of progressive native peoples. It is generally believed that only an international language can meet these demands.²⁶

This argument has been echoed by those in French Polynesia who are not especially enthusiastic about introducing Tahitian as a *means* of instruction.

On the other hand, certain problems arise in the learning process when the medium of instruction is a secondary language.

The language question is clearly of key importance. It has been widely discussed . . . but hardly investigated adequately. Proponents of education in the vernacular claim that only in this way can learning be made real . . . the child who enters school to find its proceedings in an unknown tongue quickly forgets after leaving school what little of it he has mastered; or if he has learned it extensively, despises his own tongue and lets his cultural tradition lapse.²⁷

²⁵In one dramatic confrontation, Tahitian nationalist, Pouvanaa a Oopa addressed the October 1972 opening of the Territorial Assembly in Tahitian. He was immediately challenged by Governor Pierre Angeli who protested the use of a language he did not understand and intimated that Pouvanaa was not legally qualified to hold his seat in the Assembly if he could not speak French. *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 6 October 1972. The controversial address and colloquy are reproduced in full in the Assembly proceedings. *Asemblée Territoriale . . . , Session Budgétaire Ordinaire de 1972, séance d'ouverture*, 5 October 1972, pp. 1885-91.

²⁶G. J. Platten, “The Use of the Vernacular in Teaching in the South Pacific,” Technical Paper 44 (June 1953), South Pacific Commission, p. 14.

²⁷Marie Keesing, “Education in Polynesia,” *Specialized Studies in Polynesian Anthropology* (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin No. 193, 1947), p. 52.

It must be emphasized, however, that the primary concern of those advocating a more meaningful study of Tahitian in the schools is the link the language has to Tahitian cultural identity. Robert I. Levy, a psychological anthropologist, observed that the "Tahitian language is a part of Tahitian culture and involves much of the pride of being Tahitian."²⁸ Yves Lemaître, researcher for the *Office de Recherche Scientifique et Technique d'Outre-Mer* (ORSTOM), also affirms that much of traditional Tahitian culture is invariably contained in the traditional language, particularly nomenclature concerning Polynesian flora and sea life.²⁹

The current central issue of the vernacular controversy concerns the introduction of Tahitian into the public educational system as a subject of meaningful study and the extent to which such instruction will satisfy the needs and desires of the population, much of which is both ethnically and culturally diverse. One of the most cogent arguments in support of the use and study of Tahitian is that the use of Tahitian in the elementary schools would better facilitate a child's transition to the school environment from the household *milieu*, where Tahitian is the primary language.³⁰ It is, therefore, not surprising that parents, even those of Tahitian background, converse with their children in French in order that their children may have a better chance of academic success.³¹

Levy, an advocate of bilingualism, favors the formal teaching of Tahitian in the schools, basing his opinion primarily on socio-cultural factors.

The greatly different demographic situation at present in French Polynesia makes it seem unlikely that Tahitian will soon disappear as a primary language . . . or in its use as a *lingua franca*, along with French, for the inhabitants of the other island groups. However, certain classes of the Tahitian population, particularly the urban . . . people of the island, are losing a good deal of their competency and fluency in Tahitian.³²

²⁸Robert I. Levy, "Teaching of the Tahitian Language in the Schools of French Polynesia," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 8 (December, 1972), 80.

²⁹Yves Lemaître, "Essaie sur la langue tahitienne," *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 21 April 1973. See also Yves Lemaître, "Social Life and the Promotion of Polynesian Languages," presented at the *Colloque des Langues Polynésiennes*, 4-9 December 1978, Pape'ete.

³⁰"Le scandale d'enseignement en polynésie. Les Polynésiens condamnés au certificat," *Le Journal de Tahiti*, 29 June 1972. The problem of underachievement of Polynesian students in the school systems has been a long-standing issue which can be attributed in part to the strict use of French as the language of instruction.

³¹Levy, p. 79. Henri Lavondès, "Problèmes socio-linguistiques et alphabétisation en polynésie," *Cahier ORSTOM* (1972), p. 79.

³²Levy, p. 79.

Levy surmises that this circumstance “. . . has the beginnings of an unfortunate situation in which a developing indigenous elite is losing the competency in the traditional national idiom required to communicate with the mass of people, and the potentialities for misunderstanding and distrust which this involves.”³³

Lemaître claims that about 80,000 of the territory's population (1973) of approximately 100,000 speak Tahitian and that approximately thirty-five percent of those who speak Tahitian are bilingual.³⁴ Current estimates confirm the high degree of bilingualism among the French Polynesians, though the degree of fluency in percentage terms are generally speculative. Bilingualism, however, appears to be more characteristic of the *demi-tahitiens*³⁵ who are for the most part concentrated in the urban and suburban zones of the islands. While it is true that Pape'ete and environs have the largest and most concentrated population of primary speakers of French, the rural and outer island districts are overwhelmingly inhabited by primary speakers of Tahitian or other Polynesian languages.³⁶

The above figures lend some credence to Professor Levy's estimation of socio-linguistic alienation among the Tahitian-speaking populace. They also confirm the basis of his recommendation for an educational emphasis on bilingualism. Since metropolitan government subsidies to the public schools are contingent upon whether such schools teach French as both a *means* and a *subject* of instruction, the Tahitian language programs are dependent to a large extent upon metropolitan acceptance of these innovative proposals. Based on past response, such acceptance is at best passive. Present rules and regulations concerning metropolitan civil service

³³Levy, p. 79.

³⁴Lemaître, “Essaie . . .”

³⁵The *demi-tahitien* (or 'afa *popa'a*) are the Euro-Polynesians who have in part adopted European mannerisms and French as the language of the household, though most are bilingually competent. See Ben R. Finney, *Polynesian Peasants and Proletarians* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 22-23. Robert I. Levy, *Tahitians: Mind and Experience in the Society Islands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 86-87. Significantly, the *demi-tahitien* has been in the forefront of Tahitian linguistic nationalism.

³⁶⁶*Resultats Statistiques de Recensement Général de la Population de la Polynésie française* (Paris: Institut National de la Statistique et Etudes Economique, 9 November 1962), pp. 142-45. “Rencensement de Familles Catholiques,” *Evêque de Papeete, Bureau d'Etudes Statistiques, Service du Plan* (1971), p. 77. It must be mentioned that the Mormon Church has continually stressed the use of the Tahitian vernacular as the language of instruction by its mission elders, many of whom are American. As such, the Mormon Church has advanced the use and study of Tahitian (as well as English) in a manner originally contemplated by the LMS.

employment require and demand competency in French, which by its own terms would tend to exclude many Tahitians on linguistic grounds.

One of the latest developments to curb such obvious inequities was passage of legislation by the local Government Council making Tahitian the co-official language of the territory.³⁷ Such a remarkable development was due to a large extent by the efforts of Francis Sanford, a Government Council member and Deputy. Sanford's primary concern was to make the acts and proceedings of local agencies more comprehensible to the electorate, while at the same time emphasizing the cultural significance of Tahitian in a more meaningful way.³⁸ While Sanford's proposal was supported by the opposition party, *Tahoera'a Huira'atira*, some misgivings were expressed concerning the status of the non-Tahitian-speaking constituencies in the Marquesas and Austral islands.³⁹

Shortly following such a significant development, a five-day *Colloques des Langues Polynésiennes* was sponsored by the Territorial Assembly and the *Académie Tahitienne*. Several important policy papers were presented by educators, linguists and communication specialists concerning future plans and prospects for Tahitian in public education. One commentator remarked that the introduction of the Tahitian language on local television was acquired "after long years of patience," though much was desired in terms of broader use of the native language in the communication industry.⁴⁰ *Académie* official Paul J. C. Prévost commented favorably on the Government Council's action and noted that much needed to be done in developing a more comprehensive Tahitian lexicon of modern and technical terms.⁴¹ The papers and proceedings of the colloquium evidence widespread optimism in retrieving the historical and cultural importance of Tahitian and other Polynesian languages. It appears, however, that much needs to be done in training competent teachers to implement these new-founded innovations. Many school teachers, through no fault of their

³⁷ *Journal de Tahiti*, 30 November 1978. This gesture was made legally permissible under article 72 (*Loi Numéro 77-772*), *Journal Officiel de la Polynésie Française*, 18 July 1977 See Note 17.

³⁸ *Journal de Tahiti*, 30 November 1978.

³⁹ *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 6 December 1978. *Journal de Tahiti*, 6 December 1978.

⁴⁰ John Martin, "The Use of Mass Media for the Preservation and Promotion of Polynesian Languages," presented at the *Colloque des Langues Polynésiennes*, 4-9 December 1978, Pape'ete.

⁴¹ *Journal de Tahiti*, 1 December 1978. See also Paul J. C. Prévost, "L'expansion de la zone d'influence de la langue tahitienne," *Journal de La Société des Océanistes*, 26 (September, 1970), 256-60.

own, do not possess the necessary knowledge and linguistic skills in teaching Tahitian, which is compounded by the fact that no suitable or comprehensive Tahitian dictionary and grammar are currently available!⁴² There has been, however, great interest on the part of many students in the study of their aboriginal language, particularly in a cultural context.

The primary objective of those concerned with the language controversy has been with the recognition of vernacular languages on the same level with metropolitan counterparts. Admittedly, problems concerning adaptability of both vernacular and metropolitan languages present particular problems, recent developments in French Polynesia indicate that a reversal of the increasing decline in the proper use of aboriginal languages is being contemplated.

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⁴² *Journal de Tahiti*, 2 December 1978. There exists, however, the *Lexique du Tahitien Contemporaine* by Yves Lemaître (Pape'ete: ORSTOM, 1976), and the *Manuel de Tahitien Moderne* by Paul Prevost (Pape'ete: Metagraph, 1976).