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My aim in writing *Pacific Languages: An Introduction* was, as the reviewers have pointed out, to introduce the languages of the Pacific to nonspecialists—in particular, to nonlinguists who nevertheless have an interest (scholarly or otherwise) in the Pacific region. The book in fact began as an in-house text at the University of the South Pacific (USP) for an undergraduate course in the structure of Pacific languages; and it thus focused fairly heavily on (a) phonology and grammar and (b) the languages of Polynesia, Micronesia, and eastern Melanesia, where the countries belonging to USP are located. This published version added Australia, incorporated more on Papuan languages, reduced the emphasis on linguistic structure, and introduced topics in the areas of language and society and language and culture.

Having taught linguistics in the Pacific for the last thirty years, I have found that many students have inherited a neocolonial attitude toward their own languages. Particularly if their language is not written, or not often written, there is the view that it is not a “real” language, that it doesn’t have a grammar, and so on. There is also the view that, if the orthography or structure of a Pacific language deviates from the patterns of English (or French in some areas), then the language is somehow “defective.” These attitudes are reinforced by the views of some expatriates living in the Pacific: Tourist brochures advertising Vanuatu, for example, often say that there are three languages spoken in the country (English, French, and Bislama) as well as many “local dialects”—a bit of a put-down for the approximately one hundred distinct *languages* spoken there. Such attitudes are also reinforced by educators in some countries, who for years thought that Pacific languages were too “primitive” to be used as classroom languages (see, e.g., Lynch 1996)—though this situation seems to be changing.

Academics in other disciplines also have their misconceptions about Pacific

languages (just as, I am sure, linguists misunderstand concepts in disciplines like archaeology or anthropology). We Pacific linguists often get asked questions such as “What is the oldest language in the Pacific?” or “Isn’t Tongan a purer form of Polynesian than (say) Hawaiian?”—questions that show a basic misunderstanding of the processes of language change and evolution (and which are rather worrying reminders of the artificially high prestige accorded to Latin in the western European scholastic tradition or the “don’t split infinitives” lobby in English grammar).

Apart from presenting basic information on the languages of the Pacific, then, one of my aims was to try to correct some of these misconceptions about these languages. In what follows, I will try to address some of the criticisms raised by the three reviewers, in the context of these aims.

What’s in a Name?

Two reviewers raise issues of nomenclature that are worth discussion here, since they impinge on the way in which nonlinguists interpret the writings of linguists on the languages of this region.

First is the question of what constitutes “the Pacific.” Byron Bender notes that the exclusion of Austronesian languages spoken in insular and mainland Southeast Asia (and Madagascar) “may strike one as strange . . . but . . . understandable from a ‘down under’ point of view.” For most of us “down under,” there is a clear difference between the Pacific and Southeast Asia, with the island of New Guinea at the westward boundary of the Pacific. For the purposes of this book, I was trying to provide a perspective on this region. To include the remaining (western) Austronesian languages in any detail would have necessarily involved some discussion of mainland Southeast Asian non-Austronesian languages, as well as venturing across the Indian Ocean to Austronesian-speaking Madagascar. (I do not, by the way, think that Dick McGinn is correct when he says that I inconsistently exclude New Guinea from “the Pacific”: on the pages he cites, I was simply giving Papua New Guinea as an example of one Pacific country.)

Next, we come to the terms “Melanesia(n),” “Polynesia(n),” and “Micronesia(n)” and the inconsistencies in their usage as pointed out by Dick McGinn. As geographical—and perhaps even broadly cultural—terms, there is probably reasonable consensus as to what these refer to, though Melanesia could be a little more heterogeneous than the others (do Timor and neighboring islands belong?). The question McGinn raises regarding Fiji is one that has exercised other minds: Is it part of Melanesia or of Polynesia? Is it a “border zone”? And, perhaps, does it really matter?

As linguistic terms, however, these are less satisfactory, particularly the

term “Melanesian.” If all one means by “Melanesian languages” is “the languages of Melanesia,” there is no problem. But the difficulty with such terms is that they take unto themselves a certain semantic independence, with a meaning often extending beyond what was originally intended. So while the rather bland “languages of Melanesia” means (to most of us) nothing more than a collection of languages in a certain geographical area, the somewhat more positive term “Melanesian languages” can imply something much more—specifically, it can, in the minds of some people at least, imply some kind of genetic unity.

Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. First, this region includes both Papuan languages (about which more below) and Austronesian languages. Second, the Papuan languages belong to a number of apparently unrelated families. And third, while the vast majority of the Austronesian languages in Melanesia belong to the Oceanic subgroup of that family, some do not. All first-order branches of Oceanic are represented in Melanesia: Although “Polynesian” and “Micronesian” are valid genetic labels (though not exactly coterminous with their geographical senses), “Melanesian” is not.

“Papuan” is also a term that causes problems. Its geographical sense is itself ambiguous: It can refer to the southern half of Papua New Guinea (the former Territory of Papua) and also, quite separately, to the western half of the island of New Guinea—the Indonesian province referred to variously as West Irian, Irian Jaya, West Papua, or just Papua. Its linguistic sense is more precise, though only rather loosely connected with its geographical sense, which is why many writers eschew its use. Linguistically, Papuan languages are those spoken in Melanesia that are not members of the Austronesian family; most of these are on the island of New Guinea, with the remainder being spoken on nearby islands. Once again, the term’s drawbacks are that it is positive sounding—as if these languages formed a genetic unity, which they do not. The alternative, “non-Austronesian,” is often used, though as a negative term it has less appeal (and, of course, could be rather too inclusive).

Dick McGinn suggests that “the nonspecialist reader . . . might be helped by a distinction between Austronesian-Melanesia and Papuan-Melanesia.” This is rather more difficult than it seems. While most of the interior and the far west of New Guinea is Papuan-speaking and the extreme east of Melanesia (Vanuatu and New Caledonia) is Austronesian-speaking, it is more difficult to “draw lines” elsewhere in Melanesia. In many areas in Papua New Guinea especially, Papuan languages are spoken cheek-by-jowl with Austronesian languages—in some cases, even in the same village. And while one can very broadly characterize Papuan languages as interior and Austronesian languages as coastal/insular, a significant proportion of both types of languages do not fit this characterization.

Melanesian Pidgin/Creole: One Language?

Susan Philips wonders why I talk about the three varieties of Melanesian Pidgin—Tok Pisin, Pijin, and Bislama—as being one language rather than separate languages, “in spite of their having emerged through geographically and historically separated processes.”¹ Once again, we have a problem of nomenclature, or of classification (rather similar to the Fijian or Hindi/Urdu situations described on p. 26).

If we take the view that the geopolitical situation plays a part in defining a language or dialect, then the fact that these three varieties are spoken in three different countries (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu) lends weight to the view that they should be treated as different languages. Philips is also at least partly correct in speaking of their historical differences: From about the beginning of the twentieth century until perhaps the 1970s (when Pacific Islanders began moving around the region in largish numbers and radio stations started broadcasting to other countries), each of these varieties was isolated from the others. The influence of substrate languages may have been different (perhaps especially in Papua New Guinea), and the influence of colonial languages (e.g., French in Vanuatu but not in the other two) and of colonial attitudes was also not uniform.

On the other hand, underlying these differences is a period of common historical development through much of the nineteenth century. Crowley attacks this question and notes that speakers of the three varieties of the language “recognize a linguistic unity that excludes other pidgin varieties found in the Pacific and in Australia” (1990:7). He goes on to say that “these three varieties can also be considered to be fairly readily mutually intelligible, this of course being one of the major tests of separate language status.” The major differences seem to be lexical,² with only fairly minor structural differences. Indeed, as English exerts more and more lexical influence on these varieties, it is possible that the lexical differences between them are getting less rather than greater.

Perhaps this is the place to put in a plea for a name change. Linguists generally refer to the language as “Melanesian Pidgin,” despite the fact that for many thousands of speakers it is their first language (and thus not a pidgin in the technical sense at all). The term “pidgin” also has unfortunate pejorative overtones.

Sins of Omission

To try to cover the 1,400 or so languages of this region in about 350 pages works out at one-quarter of a page per language! Obviously, hard choices had

to be made about what should have been included and what omitted or referred to only marginally, especially since the cost factor was also important. Two reviewers are not totally happy with my decisions here.

Susan Philips points out two areas in which I omitted material that, in her view, ought to have been included. These are sentence-level (and perhaps I could add also discourse-level) structures, and language use (or the ethnography of language). I fully accept these criticisms, and note that I would also have liked to have been able to say more on language and education (especially the teaching of Pacific languages), bilingualism/multilingualism, literacy, and a number of other topics.

Dick McGinn chides me for not providing some treatment of the Proto-Oceanic phoneme system and the phonological innovations that define the Oceanic subgroup. Perhaps I could remedy this here by showing the derivation of the Proto-Oceanic (POc) phonemes from Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP), the language ancestral to all Austronesian languages except those of Taiwan (Lynch, Ross, and Crowley 2002):

PMP		p, b	—	t	d, r	s, Z	j	k, g	
POc	oral grade	p	p ^w	t	r	s	c	k	
	nasal grade	b	b ^w	d	dr		j	g	

PMP	m	—	n	ñ	ŋ	w	y	l	q	h	R
POc	m	m ^w	n	ñ	ŋ	w	y	l	q	ø	R

PMP	i, -uy(-)	e, -aw	-ay	a	u
POc	i	o	e	a	u

A Final Word

To attempt to include a discussion of phonological and grammatical structure, as well as issues relating to linguistic (pre)history, language and culture, and language in society as they refer to some 1,400 languages spread pretty much around one-third of the globe, was perhaps too ambitious. Susan Philips in particular has highlighted some of the gaps in some of these areas. Perhaps the way forward might be for someone to write a similar book focusing largely

on the social and cultural aspects of Pacific languages, to provide a kind of balance to the more structural and historical bias of this one.

NOTES

1. Indeed, a case can be made for including Broken, spoken in the Torres Strait, under this umbrella as well—see Keesing 1988:8; Lee 1998, and Shnukal 1988:3.
2. And, unfortunately and preventably, also orthographic.

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