

Dialogue

*Linguistic Ideologies: Teaching Oceanic Languages
in French Polynesia and New Caledonia*

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*Linguistic Ideologies: Teaching Oceanic
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Although French is the only official language in French Polynesia and New Caledonia, the school systems in these two territories have increasingly been obliged to open their doors to vernacular languages in response to the rise of indigenous identity claims, first articulated in the 1970s. While the similarity with the metropolitan teaching model remains strong, France's decentralization policy and, in particular, the transfer of jurisdiction over primary and secondary education to local administrations have nevertheless contributed to this linguistic and cultural recognition. But the distinct linguistic, demographic, and political contexts of these two territories make the conditions for resisting the "all in French" ideology very different. Moreover, the institutional recognition of local languages is not enough, in itself, to revitalize their practice and transmission. Following a presentation of the contemporary sociolinguistic contexts in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, this dialogue piece traces the main phases of education and language policy implemented from the missionary period to today and identifies their ideological underpinnings. It details the current major differences between the two territories in their promotion of local languages in schools. It also uses quantitative indicators to consider the role of families in language transmission. The essay concludes with a reflection on the ultimate objectives of teaching indigenous languages.

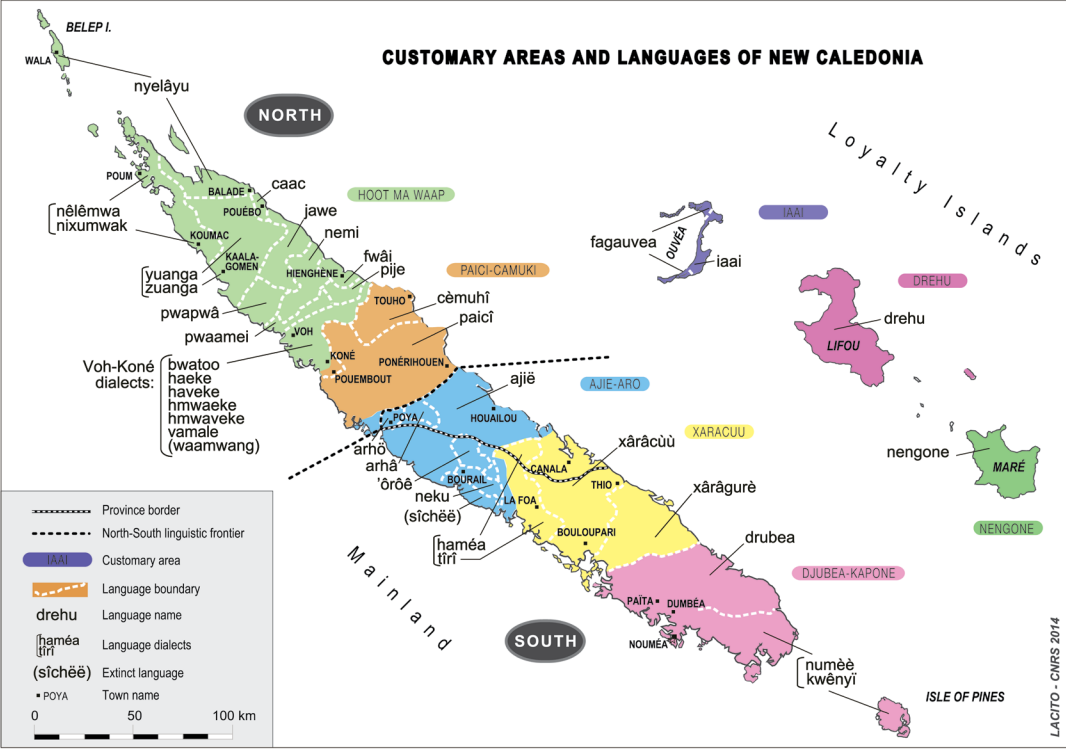
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ON THE CONTEMPORARY
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SCENE

The New Caledonian archipelago is estimated to have had more than thirty indigenous languages at the time of first contact with the West in

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1774. The majority of those languages have been transmitted through to the present day. They are now commonly referred to by the generic term “Kanak languages” (see map 1).

The linguistic fragmentation of New Caledonia can be explained by two factors. First, it is linked to the lengthy period since first settlement, contemporary languages (except Faga‘uvea, the language of the island of Ouvéa) being derived from the dialectal diversification of a common proto-Oceanic language spoken by the early Austronesian sailors who arrived on the islands about three thousand years ago (Moyse-Faurie, Rivierre, and Vernaudon 2012). Second, linguistic fragmentation was structurally induced by intergroup exchanges in precolonial Kanak society. In the absence of centralized political power, no ethno-linguistic group was able to impose its own language on others. The multiplicity of languages



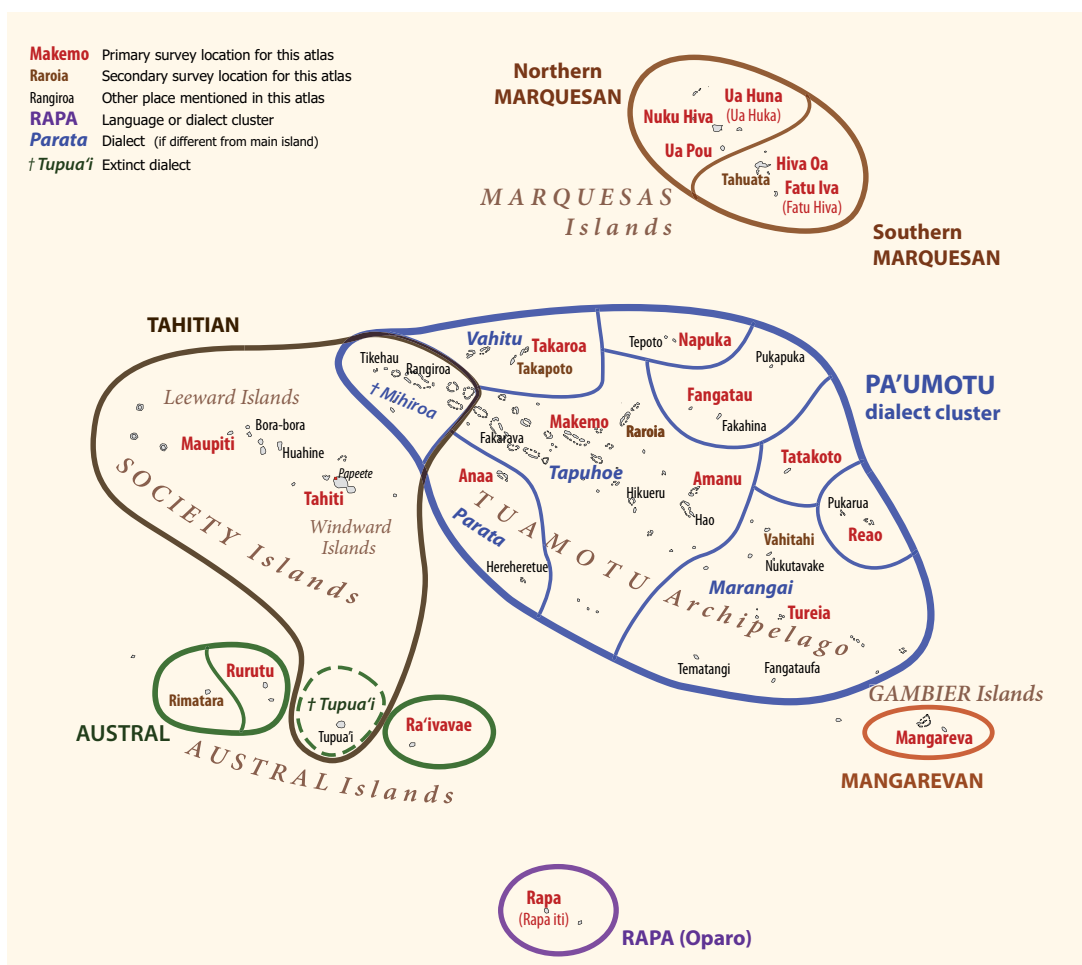
maintained a sociolinguistic balance between exogamous and patrilocal groups. In the absence of an indigenous lingua franca, multilingual individuals, speaking at least the languages of their paternal and maternal clans, allowed for communication between the different ethno-linguistic groups. Maurice Leenhardt noted in this respect that “the possession of several languages [was] one of the essential elements of the personal culture of the ancient Canaque” (1946, xvi).

The indigenous languages of French Polynesia, called “Polynesian languages” or *Reo Mā’ohi*, also belong to the Oceanic subgroup of the Austronesian language family. Derived from “Proto-Central Eastern Polynesian,” contemporary languages have similarly been formed through ancient diversification, although this is much less pronounced than in New Caledonia. Six Polynesian languages are spoken today: Tahitian, Marquesan, Pa‘umotu, Mangarevan, Austral, and Rapa (see map 2). The linguistic atlas of French Polynesia by Jean-Michel Charpentier and Alexandre François states that “several of these ‘languages’ should actually be understood as ‘dialect groups,’ each in turn divided into several dialects or internal varieties” (2015).

In contrast to precolonial New Caledonia, individual multilingualism was probably not as widespread in the geographical area known today as French Polynesia. The inhabitants of each island lived in homogeneous linguistic environments and could speak only one language or possibly several variants of the same language.

New languages from more recent migrations have added to this endogenous diversity in both territories, especially with the introduction of French, which became the only official language, the lingua franca, and the main medium of scholastic instruction following colonization. In addition, in New Caledonia, relocations and regroupings of Kanak populations around the mission of Saint Louis, near Nouméa, during the second half of the nineteenth century, resulted in the emergence of a French-lexified creole language, Tayo. However, Tayo has not experienced the remarkable expansion of other creoles in the region, such as Bislama in Vanuatu, Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, and Pijin in Solomon Islands.

In 2009, 66,884 individuals aged 14 and older in New Caledonia reported speaking a Kanak language (that is, 36% of people in this age group irrespective of ethnic background), and 93 percent of the Kanak population reported doing so (ISEE 2009). Twelve of the twenty-eight contemporary Kanak languages have fewer than a thousand speakers. Drehu and Nengone, respectively the languages of Lifou and Maré Islands



MAP 2 Languages and dialects of French Polynesia, reproduced with permission from *Atlas linguistique de la Polynésie française* (Charpentier and François 2015).

in the Loyalty archipelago, are the two most widely spoken Kanak languages (15,600 and 8,700 speakers), including in the “Greater Nouméa” area, where there are now more speakers of these languages than in their place of origin.

In French Polynesia, 149,007 individuals aged 15 and older reported in 2012 to understand, speak, read and write a Polynesian language (73% of this age group),¹ with the Tahitian language being, by far, much more frequently spoken in families than the other Polynesian languages (ISPF 2012).

French is now the most commonly spoken language in both territories. Ninety-five percent of the Polynesian population aged 15 and over report that they understand, speak, read, and write this language (192,428 people) (ISPF 2012). Ninety-seven percent of New Caledonians over 14 years of age report an equivalent proficiency (ISEE 2009). In New Caledonia, none of the twenty-eight Kanak languages is a lingua franca, while Tahitian is a lingua franca throughout French Polynesia, together with French.

A BRIEF HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF THE USE OF VERNACULAR LANGUAGES IN SCHOOLS

Missionary Work and the Spread of Literacy through Vernacular Languages

Various upheavals have threatened the transmission of indigenous languages since first contact with the West. The first one was caused by the drastic fall in the Pacific population in the nineteenth century that resulted from outbreaks of foreign diseases carried by European navigators (Rallu 1990). In addition to the human tragedy of depopulation and its psychological impact on the survivors, this rapid population decline seriously affected the intergenerational transmission of local languages and knowledge, especially in these Oceanic cultures founded on oral traditions.

However, the sociolinguistic value of some indigenous languages was reinforced through their selection as languages of evangelization in the nineteenth century. The London Missionary Society, founded in 1795, chose Tahiti for its first base in the Pacific in 1797. At that time, the Protestant method of evangelization was based on the principles formulated by Lutheran missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg. Those principles closely associate evangelization with translation and literacy in vernacular languages: “Church and school go hand in hand. Every Christian should be able to read the Word of God: therefore all Christian children should receive education; That Word must be presented to them in their own language” (Nicole 1988, 10).

Indeed, the first Tahitian catechism was published in 1801 and the first complete Tahitian edition of the Bible in 1838. In addition to their work on standardization of spelling and translation, missionaries led an intense literacy effort in the Tahitian language. In 1823, Captain Louis Duperrey wrote of missionary schools in his report to the minister of the navy and the colonies: “All of the natives of Tahiti are literate” (quoted in Nicole 1988, 1).

Protestant missionary work subsequently spread west through the Pacific and reached New Caledonia. Following an unsuccessful attempt in the south of the “Grande Terre” (the main island) and on the Isle of Pines, the London Missionary Society permanently settled on the Loyalty Islands beginning in the 1840s.

A report from Lieutenant Arthur de Salins addressed to New Caledonia Governor Adolphe Le Boucher in 1885 states in relation to Maré Island that “the whole population less than 27 years of age can read and write in the language of Maré” (quoted in R Leenhardt 1980, 123n21).

The languages selected to spread the new religion were consequently given the status of languages of educational instruction, a function that was later contested by the French colonizer.

Colonial Schools and Their Ambition to Impose French

Through legal acts that can be traced from the beginning of colonization, the French administration tried to ban the use of Oceanic languages in missionary schools and to impose French as the exclusive language of instruction. However, a significant gap existed between the legal texts and the reality of their practical implementation on the ground.

In New Caledonia, an order issued by Governor Charles Guillain on 15 October 1863, ten years after the French declared colonial dominion over New Caledonia’s Grande Terre, stipulates that teaching in private schools shall focus on “moral and religious instruction, reading, writing, elements of French language, numeracy and the legal system of weights and measures” and that “the study of New Caledonian idioms is prohibited in all schools” (Guillain 1863). In that order, Governor Guillain indicated that the purpose of those provisions was “to facilitate our relations with the natives and the achievement of our civilizing mission in their regard, which requires, above all, that they understand us.” The Order of 3 August 1905, detailing the organization of primary schools, reaffirmed in article 12 that “only French will be used in schools.”

Similarly, in Polynesia, from the time that the Pomare Kingdom—which comprised the Windward Islands (mainly Tahiti and Moorea)—became a French protectorate in 1842, the colonial administration endeavored to gradually replace Tahitian with French as the language of instruction. In 1857, the administration created public schools in which speaking languages other than French was banned, including in the schoolyard. These schools were established in competition with the existing religious education in Tahitian. In 1859, the governor banned

the use of the Tahitian language in all Papeete schools, private or public, including during recess.

By the Ordinance of 30 October 1862, French language teaching was made compulsory in district schools outside Papeete, on the same basis as Tahitian. In this connection, Stéphane Argentin and Alain Moyrand highlighted that “this Ordinance indeed established the teaching of both languages, but its purpose was clearly indicated by the words used in a recital:² ‘of all the means employed to hasten the development of civilization among the native populations, there is no more effective one than the spread of the French language’” (2014, 314n7).

The hold of the French language over Polynesian students strengthened after annexation and the creation of the *Établissements français de l’Océanie* (French Establishments of Oceania, EFO), in 1880. Order of 27 October 1897, making primary education compulsory in all EFO, specified in a recital that “so far, the indifference of the native population has been a real obstacle to the spread of French in our possessions, and there is a need to address this regrettable state of affairs as soon as possible” (Argentin and Moyrand 2014, 314n8).

Let us consider the ideological foundations of this assimilationist policy. Since the French Revolution, and particularly following the advent of the Third Republic, France has been conceived as a monolingual state wherein the French language is alone imposed on the public sphere as a pillar of national unity (Bertile 2011, 86). There were two joint key ideas underpinning the “Francization” process of promoting cultural assimilation, both in the Hexagon (France itself) and then in the colonies: the dissemination of French as the common language of the nation on the one hand, and the eradication of all (other) native languages on the other. The title of the report of Henri Grégoire to the National Convention of 4 June 1794 is explicit on this point: “Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d’anéantir les patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la langue française” (Report on the Necessity and Means of Annihilating Vernaculars and Universalizing the Use of the French Language) (quoted in de Certeau, Julia, and Revel 1975, 331).

For Grégoire, the latter goal was intended to shape the citizens of the nascent republic so that they would be capable of progressively rising “to any position” and of participating in demographic debate. It was also intended to facilitate the effective administration of the nation, and to promote the spread of reason and enlightenment. Conversely, the expressed aims behind the destruction of the “patois” were to accelerate the spread

of the French language, to neutralize the counterrevolution, and to fight against the obscurantism purportedly perpetuated by provincial idioms (see de Certeau, Julia, and Revel 1975, 335–339).

The original democratic ambition of Francization, in which imposition of French came hand in hand with the advent of citizens with equal rights and duties, was lost in the colonial space because it was not intended to neutralize relations of domination. Rather, it primarily served the interests of the colonizers, which, to be obeyed, had to be understood by the colonized. Furthermore, by founding legitimacy in the public space on mastery of a language that indigenous people did not initially speak and had very limited means of acquiring, the colonizers ensured their long-lasting domination.

Postwar Education and the Advent of the “All in French” Ideology

It was not until after the Second World War that the “all in French” ideology was effectively imposed in practice. Access of indigenous people to full citizenship coincided with a progressive generalization of access to public primary and secondary education. Previously, despite the official political discourse and legal texts, the resources directed to increase the French proficiency of the indigenous population had remained modest (see Salaün 2005a). From the 1950s onward, the French government strove to close the gap between local and metropolitan standards in terms of educational facilities, teacher training, and school curricula. The French language was no longer associated with the “civilizing mission” but instead with the principle of “equal opportunity.” In an account concerning French Polynesia, which could equally have been written of the situation in New Caledonia, Henri Lavondès described the French language monopoly in schools and in the public administration in the late 1960s. Reading between the lines, it is clear that Tahitian was still very much alive in Polynesian families at that time:

Schooling at all levels (primary and secondary) and in all forms (public and private) is the principal instrument of the politics of Francization. Right from the elementary level, all education is delivered in French. Tahitian is not taught at any level in public schools. The use of vernacular languages is prohibited, not only for teachers but also for students, who are not allowed to speak them in the classroom or during recess. This is intended to provide students a practical knowledge of French and to avoid its perception as a dead language, with no possible use in everyday life. Outside school, it is still French that occupies a dominant position. Polynesian dialects are tacitly ignored in all cases where the

need to communicate does not strictly compel the use of the vernacular. French is the official language of the public administration of the Territory: administrative, technical, judicial, police services. (Lavondès 1972, 55)

Francization was generally accompanied by humiliating and sometimes violent practices against students who were native speakers of languages other than French. It was not until the late 1970s in French Polynesia and the 1980s in New Caledonia that the French State reoriented its linguistic policy.

Decolonization and Indigenous Languages

The land question was at the heart of the nationalist claims that emerged in New Caledonia from the late 1960s (Demmer 2006), whereas in French Polynesia it was the establishment of the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (Pacific Testing Center), dedicated to testing nuclear weapons, that prompted the emergence of the cultural renaissance and the affirmation of indigenous identity, especially within the local Protestant Church (Saura 2008, 66). In both contexts, education and the poor outcomes of indigenous students at school were also among the concerns that contributed to the emergence of these new indigenous movements.

Marie Salaün and I described the context in which the first concerns about the education system in New Caledonia were formulated. Contrary to expectations, the generalization of public education had not prompted the emergence of a Kanak elite or the social promotion of indigenous people:

While it was theoretically possible for Kanak individuals to sit the examinations that were previously reserved for whites only, the proportion of graduates in the Kanak population remained small. An extensive process of elimination fueled by school dropouts and relegation to less valued career paths resulted in the following state of affairs: in the late 1970s, Kanak children represented 55% of the primary school population, but only 20% of the secondary school population, and only 10% obtained their Baccalauréat, the high-school certificate allowing access to higher education (Kohler and Wacquant 1985). Consequently, one hundred and twenty years after the French took possession of New Caledonia, nine Melanesians out of ten had no diploma. (Salaün and Vernaudon 2009, 69)

In French Polynesia, besides the emergent Mā'ohi discourse of resistance and differentiation, concerns about school failure arose in the same period. As summarized by Mirose Paia (2014, 412), "by the 1970s, mem-

bers of the Territorial Assembly started to interrogate the education system on its inability to meet the needs of Polynesian students and to take into account their cultural experience.”³

In both territories, opposition to the dominant policy of assimilation and demands for school adaptation to local linguistic and cultural realities were articulated to address the issue of indigenous student education failure. According to Salaün (2013, 60–61), the conjunction of the following three factors explains the emergence of this contestation and the associated demands:

- 1 The implementation from the 1950s onward of a homogenized mass education system, based on a national model and advocating equal opportunity in conjunction with the “all in French” principle;
- 2 The fact that the hopes invested in this school system remained at least partially unfulfilled and that the observation of the system’s failure for indigenous students was made in a postcolonial (but not necessarily decolonized) context in which “the relegation of indigenous people had become illegitimate” (Salaün 2013, 60), whereas it had previously seemed “natural” in the colonial context; and
- 3 The perception, more or less strong depending on the community and its particular social actors, of the school system as a foreign element with the potential to corrupt indigenous societies.

This sentiment is clearly illustrated by the following comments made by Marie-Adèle Néchéro-Jorédié in 1987 during “Les Événements,” the four years of near civil war in New Caledonia from 1984 to 1988. At the time, Néchéro-Jorédié was at the head of an École Populaire Kanak (Kanak popular school, EPK) in Canala.

What have the children of Canala become, sixteen years after they entered the school system in 1960? Canala has only one high school graduate. . . . We have seen the total failure of both the reintegration of Kanak youth into their communities and their ability to understand the modern world. . . .

We have seen an emotional uprooting. When children returned home [from boarding school], they could not speak their own language. I mention this because I experienced this kind of school, and spoke French for years and years. I am now concerned about the school system because there are things I suffered, things that I missed out on. . . .

When we spoke of breaking with the current education system, it was to say that we had to find *ourselves* again, in *our* place, in *our* language, with *our* life. (Néchéro-Jorédié 1988, 246–254)

The first formal request for Kanak specificities to be taken into account in the New Caledonian school system was articulated in 1971. Elected local officials asked for the application of the Deixonne Act (Law 51-46 of 11 January 1951, which has governed the teaching of regional languages in France since then) to Kanak languages. Consulted on the admissibility of this request, the vice-rector of Nouméa (the French official in charge of the education system) responded in 1975 that the use of the French language shall be “constant” in primary school and that “the presence of Melanesian vernaculars in Baccalauréat examinations cannot be validly envisaged in the short or medium terms” (Salaün and Vernaudon 2011, 136).

Following this refusal, the question of the respective places of Kanak languages and the French language in schools became invested with a strong political dimension. In the pro-independence camp, one of the first decisions of the newly elected territorial majority led by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1984 was to repeal all legal provisions inherited from the colonial period prohibiting the use of Kanak languages in schools and in publications. A year later, pro-independence groups called for the boycott of the “colonial” schools, and some EPK were established in which instruction was given in the vernacular language of the local area (Néchérö-Jorédié 1988; Gauthier 1996). However, this initiative was short-lived: most EPK had closed a year later for lack of resources or students. The “loyalist” (anti-independence) camp considered the demands for the official recognition of Kanak languages as a threat to the French presence in New Caledonia and even to the integrity of the French Republic.

The consensus on the need to restore civil peace embodied in the signing of the Matignon-Oudinot Accords at the end of “Les Événements” in 1988 incorporated institutional responses to the cultural demands of the Kanak nationalists. The three New Caledonian provinces have been given the opportunity to adapt the mainstream curriculum to their specific “cultural and linguistic realities” in primary school, with a quota of five hours per week. The Deixonne Act was extended to apply in New Caledonia, and four Kanak languages (Drehu, Nengone, Ajië, Paicî) were included in the oral and written examinations for the Baccalauréat in 1992. The Nouméa Accord, signed in 1998, has offered opportunities for even more ambitious educational reform, with the gradual transfer of jurisdiction over primary and secondary education to the New Caledonian government. In the Organic Law of 19 March 1999, Kanak languages are recognized as “languages of instruction and cultural expression.” A three-year course

in Kanak languages and culture was also established in 1999 at the University of New Caledonia. Since 2005, New Caledonian primary school curriculum provides the option for families to elect for their children to be taught in Kanak languages for a total of seven hours in preschool and five hours in primary school.⁴ Moreover, official curriculum states that “to enforce their status as languages of instruction, Kanak languages are . . . taught through various school subjects.” There is no restrictive list of the Kanak languages to be taught. Theoretically, these are chosen in each school according to the available provincial resources and the requests of parents (see below). In 2006, a competitive teacher admission scheme was established to select and train primary school teachers proficient both in one Kanak language and in French.

The calls for the incorporation of indigenous languages into the school system generated far less tension in French Polynesia:

In 1975, the Government Council [of French Polynesia] called for the creation of a commission to examine the possibility of introducing the Tahitian language into schools. After its survey of the education system, the commission concluded that good knowledge of the mother tongue is beneficial for the teaching of French and advocated progressive teaching of the Tahitian language in primary school, optional teaching in secondary school, and mandatory teacher training programs. (Paia 2014, 413)

The Autonomy Statute granted to French Polynesia on 12 July 1977 gave the local government jurisdiction over vernacular language teaching, and, “in the absence of consensus on the issue of independence (to which autonomy [was] a step for some, a bulwark for others), an implicit agreement [prevailed] on the promotion of Polynesian culture, quickly renamed Mā‘ohi culture” (Saura 2008, 129). In 1980, the Government Council even made the decision, enforced by the prefect of the French Republic, to recognize the Tahitian language as an official language of the territory of French Polynesia, together with French.⁵ Nevertheless, the amendment to the French Constitution in 1992 and the introduction into article 2 of the sentence “the language of the Republic is French” has resulted in the invalidation of Tahitian as an official language in the 1996 Organic Law and in all subsequent statutes.

The Deixonne Act was extended to French Polynesia in 1981 and the teaching of the Tahitian language was gradually introduced in preschool and primary school (2 hours and 40 minutes per week) as well as at the lower secondary school level as an optional subject. A training course has

been provided for primary school teachers since 1982. An optional Tahitian examination was introduced in the Baccalauréat in 1981, as well as in the Certificate of Professional Aptitude and the Diploma of Occupational Studies in 1991. A Reo Mā'ohi course was established in 1993 at the University of French Polynesia, and a Tahitian–French department opened in 1997 to select and train secondary level teachers. While this linguistic policy has broadly favored the Tahitian language, internal linguistic diversity has not been completely sacrificed: the Organic Law of 1984 and later versions provide that, on the decision of the Territorial Assembly, the Tahitian language can be replaced in some schools by a different Polynesian language.⁶

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

In light of this brief overview of the main institutional and statutory progress that has been made by indigenous languages in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, it is now possible to consider the significant similarities and differences between the two territories.

It is important to first understand the different legal status of the two entities, as this determines the distribution of jurisdiction between local governments and the centralized government in metropolitan France, especially regarding education and language policies.

Since the enactment of Organic Law 2004-192 of 27 February 2004, French Polynesia has been designated as an “Overseas Country within the Republic.” It has its own deliberative assembly (the *Assemblée de la Polynésie Française*) and its own executive government, with broad administrative (though not political) autonomy. Primary and secondary education is under local jurisdiction.

New Caledonia is a French collectivity with a special transitory status regulated by Title XIII of the French Constitution (article 77) until the self-determination referendum(s) scheduled to take place beginning in 2014. Organic Law 99-209 of 19 March 1999 creates a New Caledonian citizenship, defines New Caledonia's present institutions (especially including the Congress and the Government of New Caledonia), and determines the modalities for the progressive transfer of non-sovereign powers from the French government to the New Caledonian government, including that of education, jurisdiction over which has already been transferred for the primary and secondary levels. Since 1989, New Caledonia has been divided into three semiautonomous provinces with local assemblies and

executives: South, North, and Loyalty Islands. The populations of the latter two provinces predominantly support independence, while the majority of the Southern Province, which has the largest population, wants New Caledonia to remain French.

Both French Polynesia and New Caledonia thus have a relative autonomy in the domain of education and language policy at the primary and secondary levels, despite the fact that this autonomy is strictly regulated by article 2 of the French Constitution (as noted earlier). The school systems in the two territories demonstrate a high degree of similarity with the national model in terms of the organization and contents of their curricula and in the selection and training of teachers. The “Socle national commun des connaissances et des compétences” (National Common Core of Knowledge and Skills) decree of 11 July 2006 applies in both territories, and local curricula are largely inspired by the curriculum of metropolitan France.⁷

With the exception of the short-lived EPK, neither territory has implemented a charter schools project dedicated to the revitalization of local languages, as in the case of Kohanga Reo in New Zealand or Kula Kaia-puni in Hawai‘i. Although there are initiatives driven by local associations outside school hours (eg, the Puna Reo association in Moorea, or the Bb Lecture association in Canala, New Caledonia), the issue of indigenous language teaching is discussed, above all, in the context of mainstream schooling. While initiatives led by indigenous communities elsewhere in the Pacific may have been given some recognition by local governments, the French education system, including in its overseas collectivities, still maintains a top-down organizational structure, with little involvement at the grassroots level.

Political Consensus and Popular Support

As this discussion indicates, the Polynesian context, in which a relative consensus existed on the introduction of Polynesian languages at school, can be sharply contrasted to the New Caledonian context, in which the promotion of Kanak culture and languages was highly controversial until the Matignon Accords of 1988. The demographic composition of the two territories has played a major role in this divergence. In contrast to New Caledonia, where Kanak are in the minority (about 40% of the total population), in French Polynesia, the overwhelming majority of the population has indigenous ancestry (probably constituting more than 70% of the total population). As confirmed by the research undertaken by Salaün

among political and educational authorities, educational teams, and families, the general view in French Polynesia consequently seems to be that teaching Polynesian languages and cultures is a matter of general interest that transcends political affiliation or ideological orientation (Salaün 2011, 141). The Charter on Education (Country Law 2011-22 of 29 August 2011), unanimously adopted by the Assembly of French Polynesia in 2011, states:

The goal of school is to see all students achieve. School achievement requires the mastery of language, which is obtained through the development of language skills in French, Polynesian languages and foreign languages. The school system must take advantage of the linguistic diversity of Polynesian society to promote multilingualism throughout students' school careers.

In New Caledonia, not only did the recognition of Kanak languages in the school system raise opposition until the period of the Matignon and Nouméa Accords, but, even since 1988, ideological resistance to such recognition has remained strong on the ground, despite the fact that such resistance is no longer politically correct. Moreover, with the approaching political deadline of the referendum(s) to be held starting in 2014 on New Caledonia's future relationship to France, one can observe a growing backlash on this issue and the resurfacing of old divisions. Languages are tools of communication, but they are also identity markers. Loyalist parties, mindful of the upcoming self-determination referendum(s) and of their electoral base, are reluctant to overtly support Kanak language teaching programs, or to expand existing programs, for fear of being suspected of capitulating to their pro-independence opponents (who have historically fought for such programs). Veronique Fillol observed: "The current situation, namely the transfer of jurisdiction over secondary school education (2012), and also the Great Debate [about school] (2010), obviously rekindled political opposition (the need to adapt the school system for the pro-independence camp; attachment to the national model for the loyalist camp) and ideological opposition (monolingualism versus plurilingualism), with, of course, more complex configurations according to the different contexts and moments" (2013, 52).

These divisions are exacerbated by the segmentation of New Caledonia into three provinces. Designed to allow pro-independence Kanak parties to gain control of the provincial executives of the North and the Loyalty Islands, the current system distributes power between the main collectivity, New Caledonia, and the provinces. This organization complicates the

management of the school system in general and of the Kanak language teaching programs in particular. It often hinders synergies from occurring across the country.

Compulsory or Voluntary Teaching

According to article 2 of the French Constitution (discussed above), the teaching of local languages “shall not, by virtue of the principle of equal treatment, be compulsory for students” (Argentin and Moyrand 2014, 321). The New Caledonian school curriculum states that “teaching of and through Kanak languages is provided for children whose parents have expressed the wish for such teaching.”⁸

Broadly speaking, in the Loyalty Islands Province, where the population is almost exclusively Kanak, all pupils are taught both in Kanak languages and in French, following varying timetables and modalities according to schools and teachers. In the Northern and Southern Provinces, the principle of voluntary registration is applied, and students who are enrolled in the program generally go out of their main class to participate in the Kanak language teaching, which raises a certain number of organizational constraints.

On the basis of her sociolinguistic surveys, Fillol summarized the prevailing sentiment regarding this language program as follows: “YES to Kanak language teaching (although many are doubtful of its positive effects on school achievement), but only for Kanak children” (2013, 59).

The situation is again very different in French Polynesia, where, as noted by Argentin and Moyrand, “According to constitutional law, Polynesian language teaching should be optional, but under the positive law [of French Polynesia], it is in fact mandatory at the primary level, and this appears to satisfy French Polynesia without disturbing the [French] State” (2014, 324).

Regardless of origin and without prior parental consent, the school curriculum in French Polynesia provides Reo Mā’ohi teaching for all children for 2 hours and 30 minutes per week. This does not, however, indicate actual implementation on the ground, which depends on the motivation and skills of teachers and the commitment of school authorities.

The Place of Indigenous Languages in the Kanak or Mā’ohi Nationalist Project

Although both Kanak and Mā’ohi pro-independence parties have called for the recognition of indigenous languages as languages of instruction,

this demand represents one element of what are different overall political projects.

In New Caledonia, elected pro-independence politicians acknowledge the vehicular role of the French language, and none of the twenty-eight Kanak languages are tipped to replace it as the official, or even co-official, language. The seventeenth edition of *La voie du FLNKS*, the bimonthly newsletter of the pro-independence coalition the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste, published in March 2012, reproduces a proposed draft constitution for the prospective sovereign country of Kanaky. Under the heading of Title 1, “Basic Principles,” article 1 states:

The Kanak people is a national and multiethnic community, free, united and sovereign, founded on the solidarity of its various elements. . . .

The official language is French.

The State recognizes and guarantees the use of Kanak languages. (FLNKS 2012)

This full inclusion of the French language in the Kanak pro-independence political project is not new. As explained by Néchéro-Jorédié in 1987 regarding the EPK:

We never said we did not want the French language, but we refused the way it was imposed on us, and particularly in a manner that prevented children from even mastering it. Well, one might wonder why the French language, given that we are in an English-speaking environment [in the Pacific]. That’s because we cannot undo one hundred and thirty years of French presence, and because, in any case, this English that surrounds us, we have learned it badly, we do not even know it. So, since a political decision has yet to be made on a national language, we say in our school: “There is a language here, which is a lingua franca, a language of communication, let’s use it, but let’s also search for the proper tools to master it.” And, on the political front, we say: “When we want to fight with someone, well, we must take our opponent’s own tools to fight them, and to face the French [government], well, we have to master its language in order to counter its arguments.” (Néchéro-Jorédié 1988, 254)

For the Mā’ohi separatists, recognition of the Tahitian language as an official language is a core principle of their political project. The recognition of Tahitian and French as co-official languages has been the long-standing position of pro-independence parties. However, recent events have led some politicians, including Oscar Temaru, the leader of the separatist party Tavini Huiraatira, to express a position favoring Tahitian

over French. In a judgment on 13 June 2013, the Conseil d'État (Council of State) declared two laws passed by the Assembly of French Polynesia invalid on the grounds that several speakers expressed their views in Tahitian during the debates.⁹

As in previous episodes, this quashing aroused deep emotion among Polynesian elected representatives, including the pro-autonomy politicians who were returned to power in May 2013. The latter have introduced a draft resolution (2013-4 R/APF of 5 July 2013) formally asking the president of the French Republic to amend article 74 of the constitution so as “to affirm the use of Polynesian languages in the Assembly of French Polynesia and in the public deliberative bodies of French Polynesia.” This was not, however, a request for recognition of the Tahitian language as an official language. Reacting to this proposal during the debates preceding the vote, Oscar Temaru declared: “This resolution should rather prohibit speaking French here in this country. It should prohibit the French language in this Chamber. If we were to ban the French language in this Chamber, then I would agree” (Tahiti Infos 2013).

Leaving the constitutional obstacle to one side, various factors make the promotion of the Tahitian language as a co-official language more viable in French Polynesia than would be the case for a Kanak language in New Caledonia. The Tahitian language, as a medium of evangelization beyond the Society Islands in the nineteenth century, has become a *lingua franca*. Moreover, the linguistic proximity between Polynesian languages has favored the emergence of a “neo-Tahitian,” a koine or dialect that borrows many words from the other languages of French Polynesia in daily use and, occasionally, from other regional Polynesian languages (New Zealand Māori, Hawaiian, etc) or takes inspiration from their model of lexical creation.

This process facilitates the “deterritorialization” of the Tahitian language, which is seen less and less as being attached to a particular archipelago (the Society Islands) and more and more as a Mā'ohi common good. Tahitian is also used daily in the media and in the public sphere, among other things, by politicians and journalists, who discuss highly technical subjects and inform and comment on local, national, and international news. This contributes largely to its “decontextualization”: it is used not only to express immediate experience in the private sphere but also to express the Other, the distant parts of the world and modernity. Tahitian has also acquired a significant exchange value in society, as evidenced by the requirement in recent years of fluency in Tahitian for recruitment in

the local civil service and for senior positions in companies. This is not the case for any Kanak language in New Caledonia (see Salaün 2013).

INTERGENERATIONAL (NON-)TRANSMISSION

As well demonstrated by Joshua Fishman in his book *Reversing Language Shift* (1991), it is impossible to implement linguistic change without the engagement of families in parallel with programs in educational institutions. Intergenerational transmission within families represents a particularly critical issue in the case of indigenous languages. Far from the blind optimism of those who believe that because languages are now taught for a few hours a week from preschool through to university their future is secure, the available quantitative indicators show that, on the contrary, Polynesian languages are passed down from parents to children less and less frequently.

The assimilationist policy and the prevalence of the monolingual ideology transmitted through the school system are partly responsible for this situation, but it is also the result of the significant and ever-increasing proportion of people living in urban zones in these territories. Two out of three inhabitants of New Caledonia live in the metropolitan area of Greater Nouméa (ISEE 2009). In Polynesia, three-quarters of the population lives on the island of Tahiti, with more than a third in Papeete and in its two neighboring districts, Faaa and Pirae (ISPF 2012). “Language-eating” cities, as they are referred to by Louis-Jean Calvet (2004), favor the mixing of populations but also the exclusive choice of the dominant language (here, the local variations of French) as a language of everyday communication, including within the family. In the Oceanic environment, equivalent phenomena can be observed, for example, with the creolization of pidgins in Port Vila in Vanuatu and in Honiara in Solomon Islands.

On the occasion of the introduction of Kanak-language teaching in its schools, the Southern Province of New Caledonia carried out a questionnaire-based survey (unpublished) in December 2005. The questionnaire was sent to the parents of all of the 6,837 children enrolled in kindergarten, and a total of 3,482 questionnaires were completed. While a Kanak language is spoken in 22 percent of the families who responded, only 8 percent of children speak a Kanak language. In 2000, the results of a survey titled “Which Languages Do Our Students Speak when Entering the Sixth Grade?” clearly indicated the preeminence of the French language in the younger generations: “A high proportion of students (70%) identify

French as a first language. This result is particularly indicative of a strong recent trend in favor of the French language when compared to the mother tongue of parents: only 33.3% of fathers and 34.7% of mothers are native French speakers. There is consequently a significant increase in the use of French as the language of communication between parents and children of the ‘Accords generation,’ probably intended to promote the academic achievement of children” (Veyret and Gobber 2000, 23).

In French Polynesia, as part of an experimental program aimed at strengthening Polynesian language teaching in public primary schools, six hundred Polynesian families living on Tahiti and Moorea were asked to complete a questionnaire about their children’s language usage in preschool (Nocus, Guimard, and Florin 2006). Three-quarters of the families identified themselves as Tahitian–French bilingual. Yet most of the parents stated that they addressed their children mainly in French (54%) or through Tahitian–French code-mixing (28%). The vast majority of children, more than 83 percent, respond in French to their parents. Children who use Tahitian only (less than 5%) or Tahitian and French (less than 14%) are rare. In addition, according to statistics from the 2012 census (ISPF 2012), 53 percent of people aged 75–79, 33 percent of people aged 40–44, and 17 percent of those aged 15–19 reported a Polynesian language as the language most commonly spoken at home, similarly demonstrating a withering of Polynesian language use within the family over the generations.

These data can be compared to two other sets of indicators. The 2012 French Polynesian census also reported that 73 percent of people aged 15 and older stated that they “understand, speak, read, and write” a Polynesian language. In the 2009 New Caledonian census, 93 percent of Kanak people declared that they speak a Kanak language. This raises the question of how these languages can maintain such apparent vitality despite their weak transmission within the family. There are two possible explanations. The first relates to the transmission of languages outside the family context, especially in the cultural, religious, and political domains. The second relates to the likely over-estimation by respondents, particularly in the younger generations, of their fluency in these indigenous languages because they identify their heritage languages as a core part of their cultural identity. Even if they do not really speak their heritage language, it remains *their* language, the language of their *tupuna* (ancestor in Tahitian), of their elders. This may lead them to identify themselves as being naturally fluent in their heritage languages, as if “it is in their blood” (Barnèche 2004).

Another indicator is the social demand for language teaching in schools. As discussed earlier, Kanak and Polynesian parents, though often bilingual themselves, are only weakly engaging in the transmission of their native languages to their children. Yet they declare that it is “important” to teach local languages in school (67% of Kanak families in the Southern Province of New Caledonia and 97% of families of Tahiti and Moorea).

LANGUAGES, SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT, IDENTITY

How can we explain that, paradoxically, parents and grandparents are expecting the institution of school to transmit heritage languages that they no longer pass down to their own children? One can argue that some young parents are turning to school to ensure the linguistic transmission of heritage languages that they themselves are unable to pass on because they feel they are not sufficiently fluent (see Salaün 2005b and 2011). But it is also the belief that French is the “language of success” that leads parents to make the choice not to prioritize transmitting their heritage language(s). If one thoroughly considers the assessment and selection criteria in the mainstream school system and in the dominant society, this reasoning can easily be justified. It cannot be claimed that parents speak only French to their children because they are obliged to do so by the colonial power; the law protects the privacy of all citizens. But, in light of the overall conditions of contemporary life in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, parents are aware of the role of French as an international language, offering access to the wider world. Local languages are now also in competition in schools with English, the appeal of which as a global language is even greater.

Thus, Kanak and Mā’ohi parents, as well as their children, are dealing with a double contradiction. They are emotionally attached to their heritage languages. People state, for example, “it is my native tongue,” “it is a beautiful language,” “it is the language of our roots,” and so on. But they attribute a low instrumental value to them. Conversely, parents ascribe a high instrumental value to the French language, and now to English, and they want their children to master these languages, despite the fact that they have no particular emotional attachment to them and, in some instances, feel a degree of mistrust toward the French language. This is particularly true for older people who suffered the humiliation of having had to silence their mother tongue at school as well as having been ridiculed for their imperfect use of French.

One of the goals of the local language-teaching programs established in New Caledonia and in French Polynesia in the 2000s was to try to break the circuit of this double contradiction generated by the dominant monolingual ideology. Another goal has been to demonstrate that indigenous language teaching can enhance school achievement.

In accordance with the scientific literature on bilingualism, several evaluations of Kanak and Polynesian languages/French bilingual programs have indeed demonstrated positive impacts on academic achievement (Nocus and others 2007; Nocus and others 2012). Unfortunately, these results are not in themselves sufficient to fundamentally alter the perceptions of the stakeholders in the school system (families, teachers, school authorities) in relation to indigenous languages. As Salaün correctly observed: “Teaching [of Oceanic languages and cultures] continues to be seen, more or less consciously depending on the individual, primarily as a means of subverting the curriculum and localizing it (and, in so doing, distancing it from the metropolitan model) and only incidentally as a means of promoting academic achievement, making support for Oceanic languages more a strategy of resistance than a genuine pedagogical strategy” (2011, 175).

Indeed, since the early demands articulated in the 1970s, two types of objectives have coexisted. The first (the “cognitive objective”) considers adaptation to local cultural and linguistic realities primarily as a way to promote the academic success of students in the mainstream school system. The second (the “culturalist objective”) sees the promotion of local languages in the school environment primarily as a form of resistance to Western cultural alienation and only secondarily as a means of encouraging school achievement in the dominant model. In 1987, when she was at the head of a leading EPK, Néchéro-Jorédié declared: “I cannot currently predict the future of the young people who will be leaving the EPK. I do not know what the real integration difficulties are. But we need to be ourselves. We cannot keep trying to see our reflection in the mirror of the Whites. That’s over now” (1988, 266).

The cognitive, rather than the culturalist, objective has been largely promoted by scholars and the educational authorities in the last decade, the main assumption being that the school system will accept the changes engendered by the promotion of indigenous languages—in curricula, in teaching practices, and in the selection and training of teachers—if it turns out that this contributes to better achieving the goals of the mainstream school system. But the culturalist objective, which remains in the minds of politicians, and probably also families, has also continued to be operative.

The presence of local languages in schools consolidates the identity of students and “roots [them] in [their] culture” (Néchéro-Jorédié 1988, 260). It also offers the opportunity to develop, with the help of the humanities and the social sciences, a global humanist consciousness by encouraging the comparison of Oceanic and Western cultures, thus exploring the range of human symbolic capacity.

Although the cognitive and culturalist objectives can, in some instances, be complementary, Salaün has shown how they can also be in tension, particularly in terms of their view of the mainstream education model, which the former ultimately accepts and the latter challenges (2013). Salaün also questioned the compatibility between indigenous knowledge and academic knowledge with respect to both school standards and the meaning of local cultures.

CONCLUSION

Although the institutional recognition of indigenous languages as languages of education in New Caledonia and French Polynesia corrects, to some extent, the stigmatization of the colonial period, it is far from enough to reverse the language-use shift from local languages to French that is occurring in practice. Despite the limitations imposed by the French Constitution, the transfer of jurisdiction over primary and secondary education allows local elected officials in both territories to devise ambitious reforms for the promotion of indigenous languages in schools. Resources are available for the recruitment of teachers and the production of new teaching materials through the significant French State funding that has placed New Caledonia and French Polynesia among the most “wealthy” countries of the Pacific. However, the divergent representations and perceptions of the value and role of different languages favor the transmission of some languages over others. Skills in the French language and mathematics essentially remain the two main assessment criteria for school achievement in the mainstream model. As Adrian Blackledge put it: “A liberal orientation to equality of opportunity for all masks an ideological drive towards homogeneity” (2000, 28).

Moreover, parents and grandparents—who were themselves educated entirely in French in a colonial or postcolonial system in which the superiority of French language and culture went unquestioned—do not easily challenge these representations or restore the instrumental value of their languages through active interactions with their children.¹⁰ Consequently,

the link of heritage languages to identity and the emotional attachment often claimed by the indigenous population to those languages does not guarantee their transmission to the younger generation. It is now necessary to think deeply about the *usefulness* of different languages in the eyes of their users. On this point, the survey data already available clearly indicate what adults and adolescents think. On the other hand, there is an urgent need for research into the attitudes of primary school students, particularly given that they are the main target of the language programs currently in place. To what extent do primary school students identify with the community of Oceanic-language speakers? What hierarchy do they perceive in the use of different languages? What type of reinvestment outside the school do they operate in relation to their heritage languages? If these children do not become active users of their heritage languages, their linguistic transmission will reach a critical point with the next generation.

* * *

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Notes

1 Recent censuses report the total populations of New Caledonia and French Polynesia at, respectively, 245,580 (ISEE 2009) and 268,270 (ISPF 2012).

2 In law, and specifically within the European Union legal context, a recital is “the statement in a legal document that gives factual information relevant to the content or purpose of the document” (OED 2015), and by convention commences with the term “Whereas” (the French equivalent is “Un considérant”).

3 See the whole master’s thesis on this topic by Moea Le Caill (1982).

4 Deliberation 118 of 26 September 2005 on public school curricula in New Caledonia and Deliberation 191 of 13 January 2012 on the organization of primary education in New Caledonia.

5 Decision 2036/VP of 28 November 1980.

6 For more details, see Peltzer 1999; Paia 2014. See also Argentin and Moyrand 2014.

7 The “Socle commun,” designed to be “the cement of the Nation,” has seven “pillars,” the first of which is the “mastery of the French language.”

8 Deliberation 191 of 13 January 2012 on the organization of primary education of New Caledonia, article 15.

9 As a supreme administrative court, the Conseil d'État (Council of State) advises the French government and local authorities in the preparation of bills, ordinances, and certain decrees.

10 In a special issue of *Current Issues in Language Planning* on vernacular education in Oceania, edited by Marie Salaün and Christine Jourdan (2013), contributors explore the role of colonial and postcolonial experiences in the genesis and configuration of the economics of linguistic exchange and the educational ideologies in the Pacific Islands.

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Abstract

Though traditionally reluctant to teach languages other than French, the national idiom, schools in French Polynesia and New Caledonia have gradually made way for vernacular languages in response to the rise of indigenous identity claims, first articulated in the 1970s. The decentralization policy of France and especially the transfer of jurisdiction over primary and secondary education to local administrations have contributed to this linguistic and cultural acknowledgment, at least at an institutional level. However, territorial education practice remains strongly homologous with the metropolitan teaching model and, because of demographic, sociolinguistic, and political factors, the two French overseas collectivities display contrasting situations with different conditions of resistance to the “all in French” ideology. Following a presentation of their contemporary sociolinguistic contexts, this dialogue piece traces the main phases of education and language policy implemented in these two countries from the missionary period to today and identifies their ideological underpinnings. It details the current major differences between the two territories in their promotion of local languages in schools. As institutional recognition of local languages is not enough, in itself, to revitalize their practice and transmission, it also uses quantitative indicators to consider the role of families in language transmission. The essay concludes with a reflection on the ultimate objectives of teaching indigenous languages.

KEYWORDS: French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Oceanic languages, educational policy, bilingualism