LANGUAGE STUDIES IN THE SCHOOLS
A Pacific Prospect

Theodore S. Rodgers and Robert L. Snakenberg

To readers of this article, “language study” is likely to have several different senses. In one sense, language study refers to the development or improvement of language skills in one’s native language. In schools this is customarily the domain of “Languages Arts.” In another sense, language study refers to the acquisition of a new language. The language may be a second language in the home or community, it may be a regional language, or it may be a language which the student is highly unlikely to encounter outside of the school setting. It may be a living language, e.g., Japanese; a dead language, e.g., Latin; or a local but dominant language, e.g., Hawaiian. It may be a widely diffused language, e.g., Spanish, or it may be a highly localized language, e.g., Samoan. School-sponsored language study of any of these usually comes under the rubric of “Foreign Languages,” although some contemporary school people prefer “Second Languages,” or “World Languages.”

Language study also has another broad sense in addition to those suggested above. Language can be studied not only as a tool skill in which the focus is on use of the language, it can be studied as a humanistic topic in which the focus is on understanding of language as an art form, as a reflection of a particular culture, as a shaper of thought, and as a fabric of human relationships. Language study, thus defined, constitutes one of the humanistic or social studies along with the arts, history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and the like.

Language study, thus conceived, comprises a host of component and contingent studies. Some are core studies of language itself (grammar, philology); some are interdisciplinary studies (sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics), and some are language peripheral studies, i.e., those which borrow language data as supporting evidence for essentially nonlinguistic inquiries (demography, computer science).

While these studies may sound forbiddingly academic, each has aspects which have been included in general education studies at the school level. For example, comparative linguistic data provide a major source of information on migration patterns in the Pacific, and such data samples appear in social studies materials on Pacific migration designed for 12- and 13-year-old students. (See, “Migration: An Approach to Pacific Cultural Study” elsewhere in this issue.)

In the remainder of this article, the writers would like to consider three examples of types of Pacific-focused language study selected from the range of possibilities previously suggested. The three examples are discussed under the following subheads: Language Study and Social Studies: Pacific Migrations; Local Language Study: The Pacific Languages Revival, and Foreign Language Study: The Immersion Model.

Language Study and Social Studies: Pacific Migrations
One of the studies central to an understanding of the Pacific Basin is the study of the origin and dispersion of the Pacific peoples. Principal settlers of both continental and “remote” Oceania appear to have migrated from Southeast Asia. While there are significant differences in both type and tongue among the Pacific peoples, there are various forms of evidence which support a common origin of the Indonesians, the Filipinos, the Fijians, the Samoans, the Tongans, the Maoris, the Tahitians, and the Hawaiians. This evidence comprises archaeological, biological, and language data; data which allows us to consider what comparative language study might contribute to any inquiry regarding a common origin of the peoples of the Pacific.
Cross-language comparison of basic vocabulary items—such as those for the lower numerals, body parts, kinship terms, and common natural objects—indicates whether the vocabulary items might have derived from a common linguistic ancestor. To a linguist, the process of discovering and describing the elements and rules of a common ancestral language is known as reconstruction. The method by which this is done is known as the comparative method in that it involves comparing different, but apparently related, language systems. While this method can, in some cases, require highly sophisticated analysis, it is, in simple application, accessible and interesting to school children at the upper elementary school level, and above.

Table 1 compares some basic vocabulary items from six Pacific languages.

A brief, visual inspection will suggest certain similarities between these items. A more thorough inspection will reveal the regularity of these similarities; and, as well, will suggest the probable form of the ancient, parent language—which, in this case, the linguists call proto-Austronesian. Again, students can discover for themselves the regular correspondences between the various daughter languages of proto-Austronesian. For example, they will discover that, customarily, Malay, Tagalog, Ilokano “b” corresponds to Fijian “v”, to Samoan “f”, and to Hawaiian “h”. Similarities and differences in grouping of these correspondences will reflect the closeness of relationship of the daughter languages of the Austronesian family.

The collected evidence now available conclusively indicates that various Pacific peoples, such as the Indonesians (Malay-speaking), the Filipinos, the Fijians, the Maori, the Samoans, and the Hawaiians (to mention but a few) share a long and rich common history. An understanding of both the interrelationship of the various Pacific peoples and their history of migration and settlements builds heavily on language study of the kind just described.

One school goal, then, in presenting such linguistic data is to graphically highlight similarities among languages of the Pacific, particularly those languages of the Pacific which have major representation in US school populations. Principally, these languages are Hawaiian, Samoan, and the languages of the Philippines.

School exercises might highlight the correspondences between these languages by using questions in the form of analogies. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samoan</th>
<th>Hawaiian</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ng</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; haunga (stink) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; uspenge (net) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; lao (spear) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; tai (sea) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; tulo (three) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 'ulu (louse) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; mata'a (afraid) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; nau (year) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; tuli (deaf) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; afa (fine) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; afa (sennit) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; fa'a (pandanus) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; ufi (yam) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; fui (turn over) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; faa (four) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; valu (eight) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; ivu (nine) is to &quot; nai as</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
There are also words showing combinations of correspondences—use of more than one correspondence in the same word set. For example, given the above correspondences and given the Samoan word, *fa'atu* (rock), what would be the Hawaiian word for rock? ______ [haku]. The Hawaiian *hiku* (seven) corresponds to Samoan ______? [fitu]; Hawaiian *kanii* (cry) to Samoan ______? [tangil].

Using word lists and a chart showing sound comparisons, examples for one Pacific language can be given to students, and they can “compute” the corresponding word form in other Pacific languages.

**Local Language Study: The Pacific Languages Revival**

The last two decades have seen an increased interest in native Polynesian and Pacific languages developing in the major, urbanized Pacific areas, such as Hawai'i, the Society Islands, New Zealand, and the Marianas.

The Maori of New Zealand have led the way in striving to give a place of honor to the study of the native language and culture in the public school system. Their efforts go back 15 or more years to the 1960s when well-educated Maori became determined to rebalance the trend of English language acculturation which was taking place in the middle and young generations of Maori, especially those who had left the tribal areas to settle in the cities and larger towns.

Maori-speaking educators worked to prepare curriculum materials and supplementary reading materials which could be used in a new Maori language and culture-based curriculum which they wished to insinuate into the European-style New Zealand school system.

As well, the Office of Maori Affairs employs a large number of Maori-speaking tutors who work with small groups of people of all ages in the tribal *marae* to teach them Maori language skills.

In the Society Islands, Tahitian-speaking educational leaders have had a difficult time “localizing” the educational system imposed by Metropolitan France on all French territories. It is deemed crucial for anyone hoping to succeed in academic life, government, and some aspects of business in France or its many territories to work successfully through the stringent requirements of the French national educational system and successfully pass the baccalaureate examination which marks the end of secondary schooling. Rescheduling time in the normal, centrally mandated course of French studies to provide instruction in Tahitian language and culture has posed a number of formidable problems for those who sought to institutionalize the study of the native language in a land where many of the youngest generation of urbanized part-Tahitian, part-European children may understand but no longer speak Tahitian as a native language.

The teaching of the Hawaiian language has returned to the curriculum of Hawai'i's schools some eighty years after the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893. Increasing interest in Hawaiian language and culture during the 1960s and 70s resulted in 1978 public approval of an amendment to the State Constitution calling for the State to promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history, and language in the State's public schools. By 1982 instruction in the Hawaiian language and other aspects of Hawaiian culture had begun in 77 public elementary schools in all seven state school districts.

As the program expands in the elementary grades, it is bound to have far-reaching effects on Hawaiian language and culture instruction in the secondary schools by the second half of the 1980s. Problems of curriculum and materials development, teacher training, and program evaluation must be addressed and resolved.

**Foreign Language Study: Immersion**

As a final “case study,” a consideration will be given the most familiar sense of language study, but interpret it in an unfamiliar way. Immersion is the name given to an educational program idea which offers systematic school instruction in a language other than that natively spoken by the student. The assumption of immersion programs follows from the idea that a language is mastered best under requirements for active use. To quote from Otto Jesperson:

> The first condition for good instruction in foreign languages would seem to be to give the pupil as much as possible to do with and in the foreign language; he must be steeped in it, not only get a sprinkling of it now and then; he must be ducked down in it and get to feel as if he were in his own element, so that he may at last disport himself in it as an able swimmer.

Jesperson's views are supported by recent large-scale research which showed "no significant correlation between students' scores on a battery of second language proficiency measures and the number of years of second language study."

Immersion programs are being successfully offered in Canada and at several locations in the US—most notably Culver City, California (Spanish), and Silver Spring, Maryland (French). Recently a proposal to establish a Japanese immersion school in Hawai'i was proposed to the State's Department of Education:
Japanese Immersion Program

**Purpose** The purpose of the Japanese Immersion Program is to teach the Japanese language to elementary school children who would otherwise not know or use Japanese. At the end of the program, the children should be able to converse freely in Japanese, with no loss in their ability to use English.

**Method** The children will have their early elementary school experience predominantly (K-6) in Japanese. The teachers will be bilingual in Japanese and English since there will be some instruction in English. This will begin in the first grade, with an English reading class. It is planned that the number of subjects taught in English will be increased each year until the sixth grade, at which time Japanese and English will be used in equal amounts.

**Cost** Based on the experience of a similar program in Spanish in Los Angeles, the only extra expense should be a minor amount for textbooks and supplemental materials in Japanese. It will be necessary to find qualified elementary teachers proficient in Japanese and English willing to teach in the program.

**Advantages** The children will acquire a second language, in a manner which is natural and effective. They will also develop a broad understanding and appreciation of a culture other than their own.

**Disadvantages** Given the impressive results of the Spanish Immersion Program there should be no disadvantages. The children’s ability in English should not be affected. In the Spanish program, the children, in tests of math and reading, did as well as (or even better than) children in a regular program.

Research results of the immersion programs suggest that students in such programs approach native fluency in the immersion language by the third year, master subject content as well as nonimmersion control students, and show no evidence of retardation in English language skills (including reading). One researcher reports that Spanish immersion students were judged “significantly better at English storytelling” than control students. And all this “without special funding, hardware or teacher’s aides.”

It should be noted that there are several immersion models ranging from full immersion beginning at the early grades, to partial immersion in which immersion commences after several years of traditional second language instruction, to supplemented immersion in which second language instruction is supplemented by the use of the target language in one or two content subjects. There are other candidate languages for an immersion school (or class) in Hawaii. One candidate would be the Hawaiian language. If there is serious interest in maintaining Hawaiian as a living language then some fairly dramatic proposals need to be explored; one of these proposals might be for a Hawaiian immersion program.

Though the prospect of one or more “immersion” schools has much to recommend it, the idea is not one without potential problems as well. For example, it might be that an immersion school would become an elitist institution to which teachers and students of special talent and commitment are attracted, and the schools have, perhaps necessarily, been leery of programs which bring with them a potential elitist label—witness the rather minimal and inconstant support given to programs for the gifted and talented.

Given the present low priority of second language learning, we find it rather bemusing to contemplate an educational system in which school opportunities for developing mastery of a Pacific language might be considered worthy of envy.

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Footnotes


Theodore S. Rodgers is Professor of Psycholinguistics in the College of Education and Associate Director of the Hawaii English Project: Secondary Developmental Team. Since coming to the University of Hawaii in 1968, he has served on the graduate faculties of English as a Second Language, Information Sciences, Linguistics, and Psychology. He spent two years in Malaysia as Advisor to the Malaysian government on language planning, and, most recently, a year in China as Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics. Dr. Rodgers received his doctorate in linguistics from Stanford University.

Robert Lomakai‘akalani Snakenberg is Educational Specialist in Hawaiian Studies with the State of Hawaii’s Department of Education. Named Hawaii Teacher of the Year in 1977, Mr. Snakenberg is President of ‘Ahahui ‘Olelo Hawaii, the Hawaiian language teachers’ professional organization. He received both his BEA and MEA from the University of Hawaii and taught the Hawaiian language at Kailua High School from 1971 to 1978.