

MOYLE, RICHARD. M. 2011. *Takuu grammar and dictionary: A Polynesian language of the South Pacific*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics. 428pp. ISBN 978-0858836372. AUD \$104.50 (Australia), AUD \$95.00 (elsewhere).

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Readers of this review should be aware of my prejudices and shortcomings as a reviewer. When Richard Moyle, the author of this work, was planning his dictionary of Takuu, he thoughtfully contacted me for permission to use some features of a dictionary that I compiled for the Sikaiana language, a Polynesian language closely related to Takuu.¹ I wrote it about 25 years ago, but I have retained some fluency in the language. Takuu has many cognates with Sikaiana and even after being away from the Sikaiana language for over 20 years, I can understand much of the Takuu language presented in this dictionary.

I found Moyle's dictionary to be an excellent resource not only about the Takuu language but also about Takuu culture. Moreover for the people themselves, the dictionary is a heritage resource, recording many cultural practices that are likely to change in coming years.

Moyle's dictionary is developed from 3300 headwords that he compiled from over 20 months of ethnographic research between 1994 and 2007, and 3600 headwords that were compiled by Irwin (Jay) Howard. Moyle worked on and combined these compilations with a research assistant, Tekaso Laroteone. The dictionary was compiled at the request of the Takuu people. Although Moyle does not discuss the reasons for this request, my own experience on Sikaiana is that many younger people are learning Pijin/Tok Pisin and English rather than their home language, and there is fear that the home language will be eroded and perhaps lost in the future.

The Takuu dictionary includes a 60 page grammar that provides a basic and useful introduction to the language. There are 291 pages of comprehensive entries. They include a grammatical definition, glosses, derivations, idioms, sentence examples, references to related terms, and explanatory notes about the cultural meanings and contexts for terms: ritual terms, for example, often include notes about ritual activities. At the end, there is an extensive finder list of English terms with Takuu equivalents. The book comes with a CD that includes all the entries and also links to photos and videos that illustrate some of the terms (an innovative feature). The format for the presentation of entries is clear and readable. The entries are thorough and often interesting from both a linguistic and cultural perspective. The book itself is well manufactured with good covers and pages, and the CD fits securely into a nob on the inside of the back cover.

Takuu is one of a group of islands referred to as 'Polynesian outliers', a group of islands located outside the geographic regions associated with primary Polynesian settlements. Although anthropologists must always be careful about essentializing cultural

¹ In previous publications, Moyle used a macron to represent long vowels as in Takū. In compiling the dictionary, he found that the people of Takuu prefer to see long vowels represented with double vowels as in Takuu. Hence, long vowels are represented as double vowels in the dictionary (see p.1).

boundaries, it is clear that these outliers have preserved distinctive Polynesian practices and languages in regions of Melanesia and Micronesia. The outliers in Micronesia include Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro near Pohnpei. In Melanesia, they include Takuu, Nukuria and Nukumanu in Papua New Guinea; Ontong Java (Luanguia), Sikaiana, Rennell-Bellona, Vaeakau-Taumako, Tikopia, and Anuta in the Solomon Islands; Mele-Fila (Ifira) and West Futuna in Vanuatu; and West Uvea in New Caledonia. Linguistically, Takuu is usually classified as part of a northern outlier subgroup that includes the languages of Kapingamarangi, Nukuoro, Nukumanu, Luanguia, Sikaiana, and Tuvalu (technically not an outlier) and has close relationships with Tokelau and Samoa among the western Polynesian languages. The Polynesian outliers might be familiar to anthropologists because of Raymond Firth's work on Tikopia (Firth 1936, 1970). Extensive linguistic research on Polynesian outlier languages has been done on Rennell-Bellona (Elbert and Monberg, 1965; Elbert 1975) and Vaeakau-Taumako (Næss and Hovdhaugen 2011). The languages of the Polynesian outliers are especially vulnerable to language shift and loss because of their small populations and their incorporation into larger social systems that use other languages, often a pidgin and English. A recent publication summarizes ethnographic and linguistic research on the Polynesian outliers (Feinberg and Scaglione 2012) and there is an excellent on-line resource for historically reconstructed Polynesian terms found on Pollex Online.²

Colonization and modernization brought more than the usual challenges to Takuu. In the 19th century there were severe depopulations from epidemics. Most of the island was 'purchased' and converted to a coconut plantation which was worked by foreign laborers. In the 1930s, the Takuu people were able to begin to repossess their land (p. 2). More recently, Takuu is facing an extreme environmental challenge due to rising sea levels, presumably the result of global warming, which might result in the removal of the people from their homeland (p. 2, see also <http://www.thereoncewasanisland.com>). These events have caused considerable disruption to the people's lives. If, as some assert, we might lose half of the world's languages by the end of the 21st century, the Takuu language is likely to be one of those that is lost. Moyle's work is timely for scholars and for the people of Takuu. It also points to an important direction in cultural description and representation.

In my view, ethnographers have not been adept at exploiting the possibilities of a dictionary as a resource in cultural representation. A dictionary provides an opportunity to describe many areas of a culture ranging from daily activities, to technology, ritual ceremonies, and more abstract concepts about interactions, intentions and identity. Dictionaries can include metaphoric definitions that provide intimate views of how people use language to express cultural meanings. The analysis of certain keywords is often central in ethnographic descriptions and interpretations of culture, and an earlier generation of anthropologists adopted some linguistic techniques for cultural analysis; nevertheless, ethnographers have not fully exploited the possibilities of using a dictionary as a medium for systematic cultural description. A dictionary can be a resource for culture information and, given the rapid cultural changes that are taking place, the dictionary becomes a resource for recording, if not preserving, the cultural heritage of people who are rapidly changing and sometimes losing their indigenous language and culture. Digitization not only offers

² <http://pollex.org.nz/>

opportunities to systematize entries, it also offers opportunities to illustrate, visualize and contextualize entries, and opportunities for wider participation in the development of ethnographic materials. I do not think that anthropologists have realized the opportunities for ethnographic representation that digitization offers (from what I have seen of on-line dictionaries and language heritage projects, linguists are much better in their use of digitization).

During my ethnographic research on Sikaiana in the 1980s, I found that many Sikaiana people were concerned that they were losing their language, as younger people learned Solomons Pijin and English at the expense of the Sikaiana language. I started a dictionary as a way to try to record the language. In compiling a dictionary of the Sikaiana language, I realized that I also had the opportunity to record information about many aspects of Sikaiana life that I would never write about in academic publications or record in any other format, and that might be lost in another generation (Donner 1987). In 2012, I developed a website that describes Sikaiana life during my research there from 1980-93.³ The dictionary became a core piece of that website, and I have started developing links between entries in the dictionary and other pages of the website. Whatever the merits of this site for academic anthropology and linguistics, the website's blog suggests that it is appreciated by Sikaiana people as a resource about their cultural heritage and past. I strongly encourage a broader effort by anthropologists to look into the possibilities of developing cultural and linguistic heritage materials. (I could not find models or templates for an ethnographic website and, given my limited webpage skills, was forced to use a WordPress platform that is adequate but clunky. I see my website as rudimentary compared to the possibilities for the future.) Digitization offers opportunities for multi-dimensional representations of culture, and the internet offers important opportunities for collaboration and dissemination of this information.

Moyle's work is an excellent example of how future language heritage projects can be developed. I must confess that most of Moyle's entries are more thorough in both linguistic and cultural detail than mine for Sikaiana. His CD adds an important illustrative dimension to the dictionary.

The dictionary is the third in a series of books that Moyle has written about Takuu. The first two books are also rich in linguistic and ethnographic data, and are also important heritage resources. The first book is a collection of oral traditions from Takuu (Moyle 2003), many accompanied by songs, transcribed in Takuu with English translations. The book is accompanied by two CDs that contain audio recordings of the stories. This book has little academic commentary and is primarily a resource for the people interested in Takuu legends and language. The second book is a detailed discussion of the songs and music of Takuu (Moyle 2007; Moyle is an ethnomusicologist). This book does include academic commentary in addition to transcriptions of songs and music. Taken together the three books are excellent resources for a broad audience, including academics, the people of Takuu, and others. Moyle is to be highly commended for his contributions to Polynesian linguistics and to recording Takuu cultural heritage.

I have one complaint and it is with Pacific Linguistics as a distributor of the diction-

³ www.sikaianaarchives.com

ary. I emailed the address given on their website over a year ago (spring, 2012) inquiring about purchasing the dictionary and they never replied. As part of this review, I emailed again in March 2013, and six months later I still have not received a reply. I did receive the book as a reviewer for Language Documentation & Conservation within a few weeks of agreeing to write this review. At least on the mainland USA, it is very difficult to get the dictionary (www.abebooks.com and www.amazon.com both list a single used (?) copy for US\$199.99). This is an important book and the powers at Pacific Linguistics should try to make it more accessible to a broader audience (but see editor's note at end of this review).

I am very positive towards the dictionary and Moyle's other work on Takuu. The material provides rich resources for professional academics and also important material for the people of Takuu and their descendants in recording their language, lives and heritage. Finally, I think the material is a model for other ethnographers and linguists in providing both scholarship about languages and resources for the preservation of heritage.

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WEBSITES

- <http://pollex.org.nz> Comparative Polynesian dictionary
- www.sikaianaarchives.com Website with ethnographic and linguistic material about Sikaiana, Solomon Islands
- www.thereoncewasaniland.com Site with DVD for sale about land erosion on Takuu
- www.abebooks.com ABE site for used books

www.amazon.com Amazon.com site

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Editor's note: Pacific Linguistics have clarified their distribution policy with reference to the reviewer's comments with the following note from their general editors:

"Over the last 18 months Pacific Linguistics has made the transition from being an independent commercial distributor of books to the publisher of a series, having passed the responsibility for distributing new publications to De Gruyter Mouton. However, the book in question remains in print and can still be purchased from Pacific Linguistics by using the Pacific Linguistics email address [see <http://pacling.anu.edu.au/order/order.html>], and we will be delighted if any readers of this review take advantage of this opportunity."