Language Documentation & Conservation

Volume
20 (2026)

Pages
52 - 67

Handle
https://hdl.handle.net/10125/74843

Online
http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc

Citation
Zobule, Alpheaus G., Debra McDougall. 2026. Grammar as a bridge: Empowering Indigenous learners in a Solomon Islands language school. *Language Documentation & Conservation* 20: 52-67.

Grammar as a bridge: Empowering Indigenous learners in a Solomon Islands language school

Alpheaus G. Zobule
Australian National University, Kulu Language Institute, Islands Bible Ministries

Debra McDougall
University of Melbourne

The Kulu Language Institute is an innovative Indigenous language school developed by, for, and with speakers of Luqa (lga) and Kubokota (ghn) in Solomon Islands. Globally, scholarly discussions of Indigenous language learning tend to focus on revitalisation, documentation, or preservation, but Kulu is focused firmly on *people* rather than language. Using a vivid vernacular metalanguage to teach students about the grammar of their own language, the curriculum provides a bridge for students to navigate linguistic, communication, ideological, intellectual, and capacity gaps they face every day. Over twenty-five years, thousands of Ranoqans have undertaken the study of their own language. Some come to Kulu because they cannot read at all. Others have completed many years of school but believe that studying the structure of their own language will help them grasp the grammar of English, which is both the official language of Solomon Islands and the primary language of schooling. Still others are simply amazed at the way that language itself works. By describing the development of the Kulu curriculum and the unexpected ways it is changing people's lives, this article contributes to a growing global literature on innovative pedagogical movements in Indigenous-led schools. We show how metalinguistic awareness can empower Indigenous learners: they come to appreciate the patterned complexity of their own language and gain confidence in their own intellectual capacity to move across languages.

© Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International

E-ISSN 1934-5275

1. Introduction[1]

In the late 1990s, author Alpheaus G. Zobule began translating the New Testament into his first language. Luqa (lga) is one of two Northwest Solomonic languages spoken on the small mountainous island of Ranoqa,[2] and one of more than 70 spoken in the southwestern Pacific nation of Solomon Islands. Like many other Bible translators working in small Indigenous languages, Zobule realized that local people could not necessarily read the language they spoke fluently, so in 1998, he began developing literacy materials for local communities. Unlike most other translators, he went far beyond basic vernacular language literacy. The Luqa word for 'read' is *tiro*, a term that refers to the act of searching for something that is hidden and distinguishing the thing you are searching for from the other things around it. *Tiro* describes a bird soaring above the sea or a fisherman on a cliff looking for schools of fish; it describes the painstaking process of searching through leaf litter to harvest culturally valuable Canarium nuts (McDougall & Zobule 2021).

Grounded in this expansive Indigenous notion of reading, the curriculum Zobule developed stretched ordinary Luqa terms into a vivid vernacular metalanguage. Over years, Luqa grammar workshops developed into the Kubokota and Luqa (Kulu) Language Institute, which aims "to equip Ranonga people to realize their potential and to contribute meaningfully to human living" (Kulu Language Institute 2017). To date, the Kulu Language Institute (known locally as "Kulu") has taught thousands of Ranoqans to read, write, analyze, and interpret their own language.

Kulu recognizes the intrinsic value of Ranoqan languages, but its core aim is not to preserve or revive them. Kulu is primarily focused on the wellbeing of the *people* rather than the *languages* of Ranoqa. As such, it may be considered a form of language reclamation, which Wesley Leonard defines as "a larger effort by a community to claim its right to speak a language and set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives" (2017: 17). In the Kulu case, these goals include competence in English, the national language of Solomon Islands and the language of socio-economic mobility. Acknowledging the pragmatic importance of English, Kulu nevertheless repositions Ranoqan languages at the center of a broader intellectual program, teaching students to build from the knowledge they have grown up with rather than leave it behind in their schooling journeys (Hicks et al. 2021). The curriculum aims to bridge the linguistic, communicative, ideological, intellectual, and capacity gaps that Ranoqans, like other rural Solomon Islanders, face every day.

By describing the development of the Kulu curriculum and the somewhat unexpected ways it is changing people's lives, this article contributes to a growing global literature on innovative pedagogical movements in Indigenous-led schools (Sumida Huaman 2020), specifically work that encourages learners to think like linguists, reflect upon their own languages (Lima 2020; Amaral 2020), and appreciate the distinct beauty of their lexical and grammatical structures (Rosborough et al. 2017). As we discuss below, this approach deviated from the tradition of missionary linguistics that Zobule was trained in; nor does it fit neatly into the Western academic linguistics (Leonard 2020). In the Kulu Language Institute, there is no division between the "linguist" and "community member"; the work has been undertaken by, for, and with the speaker community (Leonard & Haynes 2010; Tsikewa 2021). The Kulu curriculum encourages speakers to step back from a language they know intuitively to think abstractly about its structure and function. In the process, Kulu students develop a new kind of metalinguistic awareness that both encourages them to value their own languages and empowers them to move across languages.

The Kulu curriculum focuses centrally on grammar. Studying grammar has different effects for learners working in unfamiliar and familiar languages. In situations where learners are studying a heritage language they have not grown up speaking, the explicit study of grammar helps them understand and produce correct forms (Wilson & Kamanā 2013; Holden 2020). In contrast, fluent speakers do not need explicit knowledge of grammar to communicate effectively. In

[1] We would like to acknowledge the principals, teachers, apprentices, and students at the Kulu Language Institute who have made significant sacrifices to teach and learn the grammar of Luqa language. We also acknowledge Qiloe landowners whose generosity made it possible to establish the Kulu campus. McDougall thanks everyone who hosted her and took the time to tell her about their experiences. The research was undertaken with permission from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development of the Solomon Islands Government. We thank colleagues in Anthropology and Development Studies at University of Melbourne for thoughtful feedback on an early draft of the paper and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

[2] There are many spelling variants for Ranoqa. Here we retain the initial <r> to reflect the way that most people today pronounce the island name and use the orthography used in the Kulu Language Institute, with <q> for the voiced velar stop (often written <ngg>), <g> for the voiced velar fricative (often written <gh>), and <ng> for the velar nasal. Kubokota, ghn, also called Ganoga, language is spoken in northern Ranoqa; Luqa is spoken in the south.

such situations, studying grammar can foster appreciation of the complexity and value of the local language – a situation Hannah Sarvasy describes in relation to grammar workshops she held with speakers of Nungon language of Papua New Guinea (2024). As Mary-Anne Gale observed in relation to teaching Aboriginal Australian languages to both fluent and novice speakers, "By formally teaching grammar you also empower students with a metalanguage to talk about their language in an explicit way" (2012: 89). This empowerment is not limited to Indigenous language classrooms (Myhill 2021a; Salvatore 2021). Writer, poet, playwright, essayist June Jordon (1988) memorably described the process of working with her Black American undergraduate students to identify the grammatical rules of Black English. The metalinguistic understanding they developed profoundly shifted how they understood themselves, their communities, and the violent white supremacist systems that shaped their lives.

After we sketch the broader context of language learning in Solomon Islands, Alpheaus Zobule describes how his own encounter with many different languages drew his attention to the structures that underlaid all languages. He recounts his efforts to develop the educational institutions and curricula that are now supporting his fellow Ranoqans and other Solomon Islanders to confidently move across languages and knowledges. Then Debra McDougall, an anthropologist who has engaged with Ranoqa people since 1998, draws on interviews conducted with teachers and students at the Kulu Language Institute to understand why so many students felt transformed by learning about the grammar of their own language. Our roles in understanding the work of Kulu are complementary: Zobule sees the movement from the inside and has insights that any outsider lacks, whereas McDougall raises questions about issues that an insider might take for granted. Zobule has focused on developing effective teaching materials, whereas McDougall has investigated the impact on people who have engaged with Kulu.

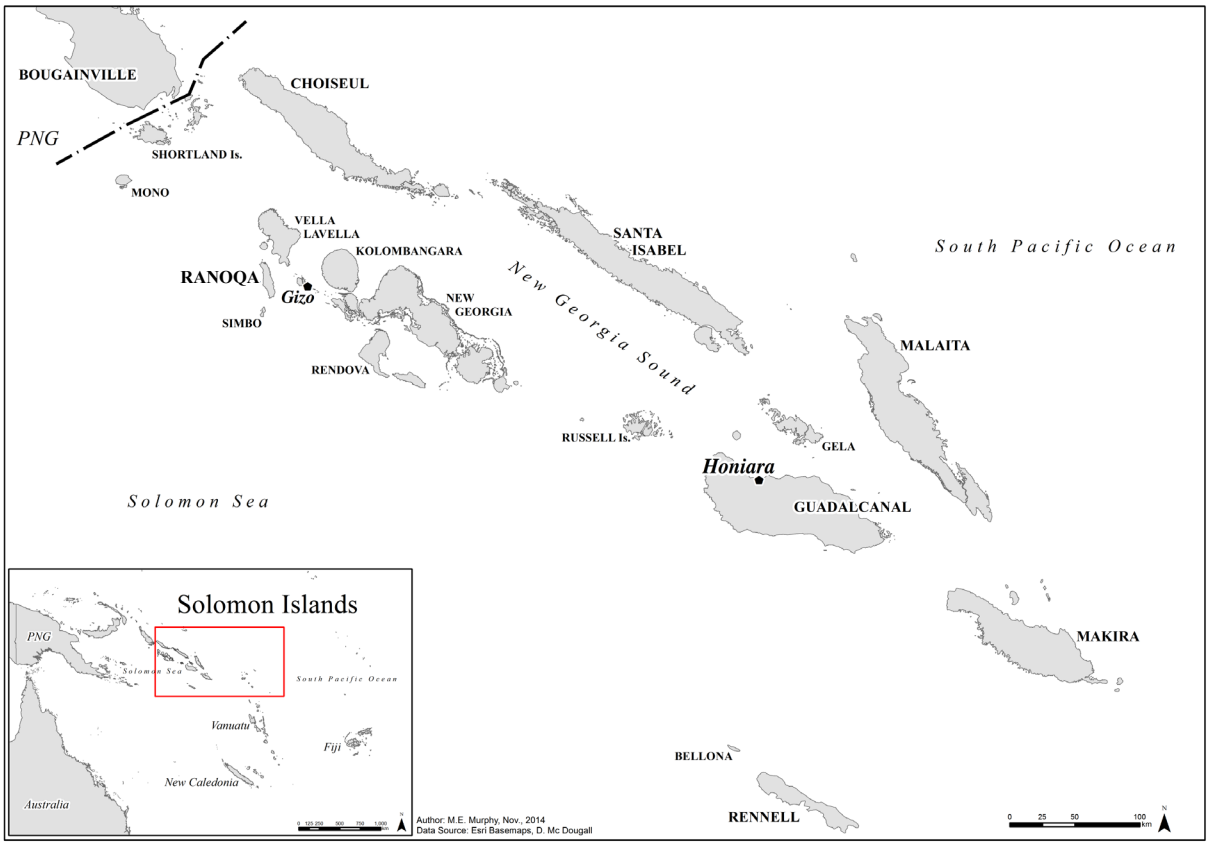


Figure 1. Solomon Islands (inset map includes distant Temotu Province).

2. Language and education in Solomon Islands

Primary and secondary schools in Solomon Islands do a poor job of bridging the gap between local languages and English, the language students are expected to read, write, speak, and understand. Luqa and Kubokota people use the term *soqolo* ('jump') to describe engagement with English: they leap into it blindly, without either a bridge or a life raft. Most of them emerge back where they started, disheveled and disheartened. The successful few who make it to the other shore don't want to make the return trip to local languages.

Solomon Islands youth today are spending more time in school than previous generations, but benefits of this extended schooling are elusive. Driven in part by a global push to achieve "education for all", the Solomon Islands government significantly expanded access to academic schooling in the 1990s and 2000s, but educational outcomes are poor, particularly in measures of literacy (Maebuta 2008; Coxon et al. 2020). Young people in Ranoqa struggle to progress to senior secondary school. Even if they pass competitive exams, many cannot pay school fees and expenses, which amount to USD $1,000 or more per student per year, a sum that far exceeds the usual income of many rural families, particularly those supporting several children.[3] Credential inflation and a poor job market means that even successful students are unable to find a job that would enable them to repay their families for the sacrifices they made to support their schooling. Moreover, many people comment that older adults who only completed primary school in the 1980s or 1990s have better literacy skills than young people today who complete junior or even senior secondary school.

English is the official, but little spoken, language of Solomon Islands. The language of inter-group communication, and the first language of most urban and an increasing number of rural children, is Solomon Islands Pijin, an English-based creole language. During the colonial period, mission schools used selected local languages as the language of instruction (Watson-Gegeo 1987), but English-only policies were introduced as the British government assumed administrative control over schools in the mid-1970s. After national independence in 1978, Solomon Islander teachers took over from expatriates and increasingly used Pijin or local languages to communicate with students (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo 1994: 35; Tanangada 2013). This has led to a situation where "students must learn to read and write a language they seldom hear or speak, while not learning to read or write the language they can speak well" (Early 2020: 20; Jourdan 2013).

On a policy level, there is some support for teaching literacy in local languages in pre-primary and early primary education. The 2023 Education Act opens space for teaching in and about local languages up to Year 3, after which English is to be the primary language of education (National Parliament of Solomon Islands 2024). An earlier language policy actively supported transitional vernacular literacy (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development 2010), but it was not implemented beyond two pilot projects in Arosi and Sa'a language areas and in some early childhood education programs (Glasgow et al. 2011; Burton 2012; Early 2019; Galokale 2023). Importantly, all discussions of vernacular language instruction have focused on basic literacy for young children, and none consider any study of Indigenous languages beyond lower primary school.

In Solomon Islands and across the Pacific, Bible translation organizations have played important roles in the development of vernacular language policies and programs, and in language documentation and analysis generally (Dobrin 2009). SIL International, for example, was critical in the development of Papua New Guinea's transitional bilingual education program (Troolin 2013; Litteral 2015) and SIL affiliate Solomon Islands Translation Advisory Group (SITAG) implemented the multilingual pilot projects in the mid-2010s (SIL International 2013). These expatriate-led organizations do train local people, but, as we discuss below, the training is limited and rarely involves complex analysis of grammar (see also Handman 2007; Dobrin & Good 2009).

3. Grammar bridges gaps: Zobule's reflections on developing the curriculum

I grew up in Saevuke in the southern part of Ranoqa Island. To become educated in a Western sense, I had to jump over gaps. In both my life experience and academic reflection, I have come to think about grammar as what is known in Luqa

[3] Annual school fees for boarding students range from SBD $4,000–$7,000 (USD $475–800), with additional costs for uniforms, books, and activity fees at approximately SBD $2,000 (USD $230), and often very expensive transportation to boarding school (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development 2024). Per capita GDP for 2024 was USD $2,149 (World Bank Group 2025), and the most recent census shows Solomon Islands women have an average of 4 children each (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office 2023).

as a *tetetere karovona* 'the-stepping-on across-thing' or 'bridge'. A *tetetere karovona* is a log placed across a hole or a small river that allows the traveler to cross safely to the other side. The grammar work has been a *tetetere karovona*, a bridge, for Ranoqa people who have recognized both ends of the bridge, identified the bridge itself, and have focused on the act of crossing it. The study of grammar bridges several gaps for Ranoqa people.

3.1 Linguistic gap

Crossing linguistic gaps is a normal phenomenon in Solomon Islands. Every person who leaves home to visit friends and relatives or to trade on another island (or even another part of the same island) must cross linguistic gaps. From a very young age, I crossed these gaps through schooling. I grew up in a village that still does not even have a primary school. My parents sent me away at a tender age of five to pursue education, a life journey that has its own emotional pains and sadness as well as joys and success, a journey I am still on fifty years later. As a very young person, I realized two things about the linguistic gap. First, at my end of the linguistic gap is Luqa – the language I grew up with, knew the best and spoke well, identified with, and could think and reason freely in. Second, at the other end of the linguistic gap are the other languages. I regularly needed to cross the linguistic gap so that I could communicate with others.



Figure 2. Ranoqa Island, showing major church villages and the Kulu Language Institute's campus at Qiloe

At home, we spoke Luqa, but my father would say the Lord's prayer in Roviana, the language used by Methodist missionaries as a lingua franca. When I travelled to another village for school at five years of age, there was a different language I needed to understand in the classroom: English. In later primary school, I moved to Ringi Cove on Kolombangara island, away from my own Luqa language and the closely related languages of Kubokota (spoken in the north of Ranoqa) and Simbo (spoken on the island just south of us). At Ringi, I heard Nduke, the language of Kolombangara, daily from company employees and villagers who came to sell their market produce at the town market and started

to understand it. In school, students spoke many other languages, and I had to know how to communicate in Solomon Pijin, the national lingua franca that is used as a daily language of communication amongst people from different language groups but has no standardized writing system. Pijin is used as a spoken but not a written language in the classroom. Although Roviana wasn't taught, it was the main church language and was spoken in the community, so I also came to speak and understand Roviana. For secondary school, I went further away to Goldie College, a school near the town of Munda in Roviana lagoon founded by the Methodist Mission (but by then part of the United Church of PNG and Solomon Islands), where I gained further fluency in speaking Roviana by learning to communicate with local Roviana students. During my secondary school days, I was taught by many missionary expatriate teachers, and I realized that English was a language I needed to learn well to be educated and to be able to communicate with people beyond the Solomon Islands.

As student at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, I was in a microcosm of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Pacific. I was fascinated by those university students who had a command of a language other than their own, especially English, because I was struggling myself to communicate with non-Solomon Islander students in English. Although I had not yet heard the word "grammar" – let alone "linguistics" – I knew that languages were different, and that people must understand the rules of the different languages to be able to move between languages. While I was a science student at the University of Kansas, USA, in my free time I would go to the university library to look at books on classical Greek, biblical Greek, and Latin. I chose two classical Greek courses as electives, and I translated the Gospel of John from Greek to Luqa with the aim of learning Greek. The translation exercise made me realize that Luqa, like Greek and Latin, must also have grammatical rules; but Luqa looked very different from Greek and Latin, and I could not articulate the grammatical rules of Luqa.

As a student, I learned ancient languages by reading grammar books, as there was no opportunity to communicate with speakers of Ancient Greek or Latin, but back in the multi-lingual society of Solomon Islands everyone was crossing linguistic gaps daily through personal encounters with people of different languages. This approach doesn't work for English, however, because most Solomon Islanders don't have personal encounters or close relationships with native English speakers. The Luqa grammar work I have done has to be understood in the larger context of linguistic diversity where everyone must cross linguistic gaps daily to communicate with others.

3.2 Communication gap

Back in Ranoqa, the Luqa grammar work started as an attempt to address a communication gap. At the end of 1996, I took up leadership in the Luqa Bible translation project, which had been stalled for almost 20 years. The Luqa Bible translation project had been started after a Luqa speaker attended a translation workshop organized by a Bible Society translation consultant in 1980. In the late 1980s, a team from the Solomon Islands Translation Advisory Group (SITAG) came to assume advisory role to the project but then left a few months later, and then another advisor team from SITAG came but also had to leave to take up an advisory role with another translation project in another part of the country. In 1998, we published a trial version of Mark's Gospel to garner feedback from the Luqa speakers about the naturalness, meaningfulness, and communicability of the translation. The feedback from many readers was not what we expected – it became evident to our translation team and community leaders that many Luqa speakers could not read their own language. Since every Luqa speaker knew and spoke their own language from birth and many also had some primary education, I had wrongly assumed that people would just pick up the Luqa translation and read and understand it. While older people had learned to read in Roviana language in mission schools, younger people had encountered only English in school. For them, "reading" meant sounding out the words in English even if they didn't necessarily understand the meaning of those words. Before our trial publication, there was no printed material in Luqa, so reading Luqa was a novel and seemingly insurmountable task. When they read the translation, they read as if they were pronouncing new words and reading a new language. So, the challenge was to help Luqa speakers to read and understand the translation.

Since I was not trained as a literacy teacher, the challenge raised a few questions: Who do we begin with? What do we do? How do we do it? We did not know what to do, but the questions were open-ended and so we were discovering the methodology in the process. In response to the question "Who do we begin with?", the obvious answer was to begin with people from my home village, Saevuke, because my cousin John Tengana had volunteered to lead three other villagers to teach Saevuke young people to read and write. Saevuke was also an obvious choice for another reason: there

was no school in Saevuke. In the 1970s, some of our parents tried to send us away to the villages of Keara, Kudu, Lale, or even as far as Koriovuku for primary education. Leaving our parents and home behind to go to school for a half year at a time was such a difficult thing for children aged six or seven; most of my fellow Saevukeans were so homesick that they only stayed a week or two before finding their way home. So, we could not read nor write, and we remained uneducated. People would characterize us as the *batu patu* 'stoneheads', *piala mota* 'great smokers', and *tabu sikulu* 'the unschooled.' The idea was that if we could teach the unschooled Saevukeans to read and write, then, we reasoned, we would be able to help others too.

While the question as to who to begin with seemed an easy one to answer, the questions "What do we do?" and "How do we do it?" were more complicated. When we began with the idea to address the communication gap with the Saevuke people, we were thinking of non-literate adults who were in their teens, twenties, and thirties. We wanted to teach them not just to read and write but to reason and analyze what they read and write. I decided we would begin by teaching them to identify simple things – I wrote my first seven lessons using transliterated English words such as leta (for letters), alapabeti (for alphabet), konosoneti (for consonant), vaolo (for vowel), naoni (for nouns), vebu (for verb), saoni (sound) and so on. I sent John Tengana away with the written lessons to teach a class of young adults the alphabet, then how to pronounce letters, build words from letters, identify the different letters in a word and the different parts of speech in a sentence, and finally to read and write. He went away very excited. A couple of weeks later, he came back rather disappointed that the students were so confused by these new words he was introducing to them. He himself did not know how to explain them because he did not know where they came from and what they meant.

By using transliterations of foreign words to describe the local language, I had made things difficult for Saevuke students. So, I decided to use familiar Luqa words to talk about language. I kept letter as *leta* in Luqa, but represented other language concepts through simple, familiar concepts: a consonant is a *tinana leta* (mother letter), a vowel is *tuni leta* (child letter), a syllable is a *tamatina leta* (mother-child letter), a noun is a *nisongo* (name), a verb is a *roiti* (work), a pronoun is a *turana nisongo* (relative of a name), and so on. Much of the metalinguistic language I developed builds on the Luqa word *paranga* – which functions as both a verb (to speak, announce, tell) and a noun (language, utterance). For terms such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, I used Luqa's rich vocabulary for dividing objects into smaller pieces. Many of these metalinguistic terms translate directly onto common English grammar terms, but others represent features that are distinctive to Luqa and related languages. Subject markers, for example, are *gila* (sign, like a marker for a reef); a clause with serial verbs, for example, is a *teteri pakata paranga* (a section of speech with a series of the same objects along a string). Ordinary words and concepts from daily living were now used to describe the Luqa language.

Over the years, six main course books (*buka*) were written using Luqa as its own metalanguage to describe the Luqa language. First, **Buka ABADA** introduces the Luqa alphabet, and identifies the consonants and the vowels. Second, **Buka 0** teaches a pre-literate person the alphabet and the Luqa phonemic sounds, and teaches them to pronounce and write the consonants, vowels, syllables, and words. Third, **Buka 1** builds on Buka 0, and introduces words in different semantic domains, and provides short stories and engages the reader to read and discuss and demonstrate comprehension of the text. Fourth, **Buka 2** identifies the different categories and functions of words, analyzing the morphology of Luqa words. Fifth, **Buka 3** focuses on syntax, and identifies and analyses the parts and functions of sentences, phrases, and clauses. Sixth, **Buka 4** focuses on the complete writing, analyses the different parts of a writing, and then asks a student to compose a complete writing.

3.3 Ideological gap

The Bible was being translated into the Luqa language, but the stories and views in it were foreign to the Ranoqa people, hence, the translation brought with it an ideological gap that needed to be bridged. The first text we used was the trial version of Mark's Gospel, but I thought that it was important to help people to first examine themselves – their own cultures, values and beliefs – before engaging with foreign ideologies that came through the Biblical materials and schoolbooks. People grew up in their own environment and they had their own experiences of the land, the sea, and the air; and they had much to talk about. Many of us Ranoqa people who had attained higher education knew all too well that we were ill-prepared to talk about our own cultural ideologies because we had not had the opportunities to reflect on them before we were educated with foreign ideas.

So, learning the Luqa language was not just learning the intricacies of its grammatical structure, but also thinking and talking about the values, cultures, beliefs, and daily experiences of the Ranoqa people. At every grammar workshop, participants produced a short story to demonstrate their ability to think, write, and communicate in the Luqa language. The topics were varied: participants wrote about normal daily events such as fishing, gardening, building houses, and cooking; they shared observations of animals, birds, trees, and the natural environment; they reflected on human behavior, marriage, customary practices, faith, how to live a good life; they discussed the importance of speech and language; and they retold traditional folk tales, including stories about mythical giants. As I was developing the curriculum, I incorporated the stories written by the early participants, using them as texts for students to read as they developed basic literacy and to analyze as they studied the grammatical features of the language. Over the many years we have accumulated thousands of such written texts which reflect a rich collection of the experiences, culture, values and beliefs of the Ranoqa people.[4] In order to bridge the ideological gaps created by the introduction of foreign ideas, everyone has the right to know their own ideologies first, and Luqa grammar was bridging the gap by helping the Ranoqa people to appreciate their own ideologies.

3.4 Intellectual gap

The grammar work we did was also addressing intellectual gaps. As Bible translators, we needed to bridge our knowledge gaps so that we could translate the English Bible into Luqa in the way that is accurate to the original language. My three translators completed only Grades 7 and 12, while I had a Master's degree in the Bible, biblical language and linguistics, and translation. We are all native speakers of Luqa, but because I had been away from home for more than 20 of my 27 years of life, my knowledge of Luqa vocabulary, grammar, and expression was not as good as my translators'. So, the Luqa grammar was written not just for those who would read our translation, but for me also to understand how the Luqa language worked. On the other hand, my knowledge of English complemented my translators' weakness in understanding the English biblical text. So, I wrote a basic English grammar course for my translators so that in addition to interpreting words in their context, understanding the historical and cultural background of the text, and paying attention to figurative language and the flow of ideas in a text, they could also use grammar as a tool to analyze a biblical text before they translated it into Luqa. Later, the Luqa grammar and English grammar courses equipped local preachers, pastors, and ministers with analytical skills to teach and preach the Bible.

When I started writing lessons to teach the Saevukeans, we were going beyond basic literacy. We were not just addressing a communication gap to help the Luqa people read our translation; we were also addressing an intellectual gap by seriously teaching Luqa grammar. Of course, as native Luqa speakers, every Saevuke person already knew Luqa grammar. But few native speakers (even those who had attended school) had an analytical knowledge of their own grammar. We did not only want Luqa speakers to be able to read the translation; we expected them to engage intellectually with the translation they were reading. The reader was expected to pause and think about the words, the use of words, the ideas expressed in the text, and the relevance of the text to the reader's living. To engage intellectually with and understand the translation, readers must have the ability to reason and analyze the text.

The question may still be asked: But if they already know the grammar, why teach them grammar? It is for the very reason they already know their own grammar that grammar becomes a useful tool in understanding the text and in opening new ways of understanding the same text. Luqa grammar helps the Luqa speaker to ask questions about the obvious, to describe what is known, to explain what is plain, to talk about what is understood, to focus on the known small details, and to gain confidence in what he has learned. Learning starts with appreciation of what is known before it goes on to exploration of what may yet be known. Luqa grammar helps a Luqa speaker to be curious about what seems ordinary, and it fuels the desire to discover the extra-ordinary. Luqa grammar helps Luqa speakers appreciate the knowledge they already have; it roots speakers in their own understanding, life and experience. Studying Luqa grammar helps the Luqa speaker to be at home with ideas and to develop his critical abilities of thinking, asking, explaining, reasoning, and analyzing. The underlying assumption is that the Luqa speakers have the intellect that they can develop further to bridge the intellectual gap.

[4] Many of these texts have been scanned, typed, and archived on the Endangered Language Archive (filter for "written texts") (McDougall & Zobule 2019)

3.5 Capacity gap

During the language and translation work discussed above, I became aware of a significant capacity gap beyond Ranoqa: few Solomon Islanders were trained to teach language, translate the Bible, or interpret the translations. One cause of this gap was the fact that most people who achieved higher degrees were keen to move away from their home villages to earn a good salary, which language work does not provide. Another was a lack of training opportunities for the Solomon Islanders who were interested in translation and language work.

During my work on the Luqa New Testament, I realized how much interest there was in English grammar beyond Ranoqa, and each year, I organized several two-week English-grammar workshops a year in Gizo, the provincial capital of Western province. One evening in 1998, I sat with Mr. Ivan Maike and Rev. Philemon Polosovato in a traditional kitchen building of Gizo's Rekona Lodge and shared my vision of registering an organization that would focus on bridging the capacity gap of Solomon Islands nationals. While the Kulu Language Institute grew from the grammar workshops on Ranoqa, Islands Bible Ministries developed from a desire to train Solomon Islanders to take on primary responsibility for language work and Bible translation in the Solomon Islands.

Since the 1980s, Solomon Islands Translation Advisory Group (SITAG), a local entity of Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International, had been doing language work and Bible translation. I had been trained by SIL and sponsored by The Seed Company to obtain my first Master's degree in the Bible, linguistics, and translation in 1996. Working very closely with SITAG as a non-member of the organization, however, I realized that most of our national translators did not go through proper accredited training; unless they already had higher degrees like I did, there was no path for them to pursue formal degrees. SITAG organized short training courses and book workshops, but these did not equip national translators to work independently and confidently: they remained dependent on their translation advisors.

The SITAG advisors came to Solomon Islands assigned to specific translation projects – they were there to come up with a product called the New Testament translation in their assigned languages. Financial support came from donors overseas, and to maintain this support, they had to report their progress toward the completed product. The expatriate advisors came to help but not to stay; those who came with young families planned to remain in the country only until their children had to go to high school. So whatever short training courses they organized for their translators was for the narrow purpose of producing the New Testament. What was lacking was any big vision or any organized training program that would enable national translators to get formal qualifications in the areas of linguistics, Bible, and translation principles. As an organization, SIL valued academic training: their linguists and translators invested five or six years in undergraduate and graduate training programs before they came to the field. But they did not apply this logic to the training of Solomon Islanders. I felt that a more effective approach would be devising at least a two-year training program to equip nationals with relevant knowledge and skill sets before they were engaged as translators. Because SITAG focused primarily on the product, they did not invest time, ideas, resources, and energy in training the national translators.

For these reasons, I sought to bridge the capacity gap by training Solomon Islanders to lead their own language and translation projects and organizations. In Solomon Islands, few people have access to higher education, and those who do are rarely attracted to Bible translation and language work because pay is low. I could not wait for people to get bachelor's and master's degrees before I could engage them – I had to begin with unemployed high school pushouts from the rural villages, and I had to be involved in the process of getting them qualifications. I see it as my responsibility to help them see their potential and to instill self-worth, self-belief, and boldness in them so that they can be equipped with proper knowledge and skills to serve confidently and competently. To achieve these goals, I have organized Bible translation projects, sent nationals overseas for higher training, and set up a family company to help fund and build national capacity.

The most important way I have bridged the capacity gap is by writing courses and organizing training through Kulu Language Institute and Islands Bible Ministries. I have already described the courses in Luqa grammar offered in Ranoqa. Over the first 15-year period in 1997–2012, 760 attended the Kulu Language Institute courses for a yearly average of 50 participants per year. Those were the beginning, difficult, and groundbreaking years when not too many Ranoqa people believed in the language work nor saw the importance of learning their own language, and many even scoffed at and made jokes about the absurdity of formally studying their own language. The language work continued largely because of the commitment and sacrifice that the pioneer teachers put into it as they went from village to village and trekked across the island on treacherous roads to organize Luqa language workshops. The Ranoqa people's nega-

tive attitudes have changed, and they have seen the importance of the language work. Over the last 10-year period in 2013–2023, a total of 2800 participants have attended a Luqa grammar course at Kulu Language Institute on Ranoqa for a yearly average of 280 per year.

Over the years, beyond the Luqa grammar courses, I have also written 5 English grammar courses for primary level students, 11 adult English grammar courses, 10 Bible courses, 8 courses on the grammar of Biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew), 10 English writing skills courses, and 4 grammar and communication skills courses for professionals. All the courses have been organized into a 2-year program for those studying full-time, but they could also be taken in part-time mode as evening or holiday classes. Over the 9-year period in 2015–2023, 3019 students attended the first English grammar course for adults offered at Islands Bible Ministries in the national capital Honiara. Despite the dip in enrolments during the COVID-19 years, this number still averages 430 students a year studying English grammar. Considering all the other English grammar instruction – courses for primary school students, for Bible students, for students at the Kulu Language Institute, and for students at the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) academy in Honiara – the yearly average of students studying English Grammar is around 500.

Nationals who willingly avail themselves for the vision and tasks are not always the best educated ones. Bridging the capacity gap means instilling the vision in the nationals; encouraging them, mentoring them and equipping them with appropriate training, knowledge and skills; and providing them avenues and bridging opportunities to attain higher level qualifications so they can perform independently, competently, and confidently as language teachers and translators.

4. Crossing the bridge: McDougall's conversations with Kulu students

When Zobule began building pedagogical bridges in the late 1990s, people of Ranoqa were all too aware of the challenges of accessing distant sources of knowledge and power. Among the most obvious challenge was fluency in English, the language of schooling and of national and international status. But in those days, almost no one on Ranoqa imagined that a careful study of the structure and function of their own language could be a bridge to other languages. Over the years, increasing numbers of young people have come to Kulu to study Luqa grammar because they hope it will help them cross over to English. Often, however, they come to appreciate the complexity of something they had always taken for granted and or dismissed, and come to re-value their own language and, indeed, themselves. They realize that they can move back and forth between languages and knowledges rather than desperately trying to jump to the other side.

I have witnessed Zobule's language work since the late 1990s, when church leaders from Pienuna village, where I was living during my PhD research, returned from meetings about the New Testament translation marveling that Luqa had grammar – they had thought that only English had grammar (McDougall 2012). In 2016, when young people had begun to come to the Kulu campus in significant numbers, I approached Zobule to propose research on what drew them to Kulu and what they were learning. In a series of visits in 2017, 2018, 2023, and 2024, I observed many hours of classroom instruction and conducted more than 70 interviews. These were with Kulu leaders and staff; students enrolled in Kulu classes at the Qiloe campus; former students, including trained teachers, church leaders, and young people pursuing further education in Honiara; and finally, others in the community who were engaged in the work. The interviews were loosely structured around questions about language background, educational history, experiences at Kulu, and broader ideas about language. In addition to the interviews I conducted, in 2024, Zobule recorded the stories of several students and teachers.

At the core of the Kulu mission is a commitment to help those left behind by formal schooling. Some such students come from villages, like Saevuke, that lack even a primary school. Others had access to school, but fled from school because of failure, humiliation, or physical beatings. Others simply were not enrolled in school by their parents. It is not only primary school dropouts, however, who cannot read: many young people who have completed junior secondary school are still unable to read or write in any language. Youth who have missed out on or failed in school often feel worthless. Many echoed the sentiments of a participant who said: "I felt I was just a waste of time … a useless man in my village." Young men, in particular, linked struggles in school to behaviors like fighting, drinking, or smoking marijuana (McDougall 2021). Others lamented the fact that they were ashamed to speak in public or take roles in their church or community, because it would become obvious that they couldn't read.

But most people drawn to Kulu already have basic literacy. Almost all who went on to become apprentices or teachers are also driven by intellectual curiosity – a fascination with the underlying structures of a familiar language. Founding teacher John Tengana reflected on the early days of analyzing Luqa: "Your head is heavy all the time. Working with language is like mathematics – it makes you dizzy. There are rules, and you transform things back and forth." Tengana said that some people made fun of him for teaching Luqa, but others were curious about what the word "grammar" meant or were surprised to learn that their language had grammar. Among those who approached the project with curiosity was Izikeli Moata. As a Sunday School leader whose formal schooling ended with primary school, he was invited to the early grammar workshop and was "amazed" by language. Tengana invited Izikeli, and later Danstone Beck, to use the Luqa grammar texts in workshops. These three pioneers wrestled with the texts, constantly questioning Zobule's analysis. Without any classrooms, they held sessions under trees or in community halls; without any money for transport by motorized canoe, they walked from village to village across the island's steep terrain, carrying copies of the textbooks and relying upon the generosity of hosts for meals and accommodation. The time they spent teaching Luqa was time away from work that would support the subsistence and financial needs of their young families. In trying to explain why he made such sacrifices, Izikeli said that "the work wasn't like other work" – it was intellectually compelling.

Tengana, Izikeli, and Danstone embraced the process of understanding the abstract principles that structure language as manifest in everyday life. The teachers who have followed in their footsteps describe a similar sense of wonder at the systematic way language works. Nathan Manoah, an apprentice teacher when I first interviewed him in 2017, now (2024) the deputy principal of the Kulu Institute, also talked of being surprised by the way that the language worked and a desire to be involved because it was his language. Allan Buka, another Kulu teacher and the lead translator of the Luqa Old Testament, also told me of how much he loved understanding how different parts of the language work together in a larger whole. Glorida Madikolo likened the orderly structure of both Luqa language and Zobule's curriculum to a carefully laid out feast. These Kulu teachers and leaders see enormous value in digging deeply into Luqa language for its own sake and appreciating its internal structure. This theme emerges strongly in accounts from pastors and church leaders who have studied Luqa grammar – they emphasize the need to break down and build up language in interpreting the Bible and in composing sermons and Bible studies.

By the mid-2010s, there was a growing understanding that studying Luqa grammar would help students in the formal schooling system. Teachers in primary and secondary schools have generally assumed that vernacular literacy is important only for young children. Their training had been focused on acquiring competence in English. These attitudes shifted as teachers and principals saw a change in both the intellectual ability and the attitudes of students who had studied grammar at the Kulu Institute. One secondary school principal explained that informal research he had carried out showed that studying Luqa had significant effects on test scores. More than that, very shy or withdrawn students became willing to speak in class, answering and even asking questions. Studying Luqa had somehow "opened their minds" and given them confidence. Although the Ministry of Education doesn't recognize Kulu or sponsor teachers to study there, many teachers followed their students to study Luqa grammar and independently worked to incorporate some of what they learned into the curriculum provided by the Ministry. In 2017, I sat in on a class in which a tertiary-trained secondary school teacher from the neighboring island of Vella Lavella sat alongside his fourteen- and fifteen-year-old students; roles were reversed as the students helped their teacher understand the Luqa materials.

Nearly every teacher and student I interviewed criticized the formal school curriculum for "jumping" to English and setting up students for failure. Once they engaged in the study of a local language, it was obvious that students should start in their own language before moving to another language. Current Kulu principal Reuben Pae took on the role after decades of experience as a primary school teacher and principal. He described the difficult struggle to gain confidence in English through primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Then, when he took up Zobule's invitation to be involved in Kulu, he became ashamed. He could break down English sentences into the component parts, and he knew grammatical rules in English, but he couldn't analyze or translate English texts back into his own language. In his years of schooling and teacher training, he was expected to simply reproduce correct English forms and never acquired the skill of moving back and forth between languages.

Twenty-five years ago, few people knew what grammar was, but today there is now a real hunger for studying grammar across Solomon Islands. Part of this interest is generated by the work of Islands Bible Ministries in Honiara; another cause may be that, after expansion of junior secondary education, more and more students encounter the idea of grammar in secondary school. Almost all young people who progress past primary school are fluent in Pijin and many have a good understanding of English words. They come to feel that grammar is a barrier to success in English and, more broadly, to success in life. Such students come in knowing names of English parts of speech and often described their

learning at Kulu in terms of the different parts of speech in Luqa and English. They were able to describe concepts like tense and number and contrast the ways these work in English and Luqa.

Some teenagers study at Kulu during their school holidays, often in preparation for the high-stake exams that determine whether they can continue in schooling. In 2017, one young woman explained that while the other young people in her secondary school dreaded the grammar part of the examination, she welcomed it because she had used her Kulu textbooks to help her understand what English words like "noun" and "verb" meant. As the reputation of Kulu has grown, more students temporarily withdraw from secondary or post-secondary schooling to "upgrade" their language skills. In 2023, an 18-year-old student explained, "I had a bit of problem with grammar. When I would write a story, it was like, the story I wrote was broken. It was English, then Pijin. So, I decided to come to this school here, come to open my brain a little bit with, ah, grammar." Other students come after they have failed to progress in formal schooling. A 24-year-old student from Simbo, working as an apprentice teacher in 2023, said that it was poor scores in English that meant he didn't pass onto the final year of secondary school. He said he recognizes words but doesn't really understand them and can't speak well.

Kulu teachers are glad that the study of Luqa grammar helps students in formal English-language schooling, but they also worry that many ambitious young students see the formal study of Luqa as nothing more than a bridge to English. Several teachers I talked to felt that unschooled students often come to understand Luqa grammar better than well-educated youth and adults, who often try to analyze Luqa through the lens of English. Such students often only enroll in Luqa courses only because it is required by the Kulu school: they would prefer to jump directly to English. Kulu teachers feel that such students don't really understand the point or purpose of Kulu, which is digging deeply into Luqa to understand its structure and function.

Yet many students who take an instrumental approach to learning Luqa find that the serious study of an Indigenous language shifts their understandings in an unexpected way. They come to realize the intrinsic value of their own language or, in the case of the non-Ranoqans who are increasingly enrolling in Kulu courses, of Indigenous Solomon Islands languages more generally. Several young people I interviewed in 2023 were from islands other than Ranoqa, and many of them weren't even aware that Kulu started with Luqa grammar not English. One student from Simbo, for example, said he came to learn grammar to help him advance in schooling but discovered a passion for languages – he enjoyed learning Luqa language and joked that he'd like to go to lots of other islands to learn their languages too. And while he dreaded English in school, he loves it now and reads whenever he gets a chance and watches movies with subtitles to try to learn new words. Students talk of having their minds "opened" and realizing that their own languages are as complex, interesting, and important as English.

The transformation that these students describe is not just intellectual; it is also moral and spiritual. Many young people describe their encounter with grammar in almost religious terms: they were lost but have now found a sense of purpose. Of course, there is a direct and enduring connection to the Christian faith, and almost all interviewees – even the younger students primarily focused on passing exams – linked the ability to read and analyze text to an ability to understand the word of God in the Bible. In describing the early days of Luqa grammar teaching, Tengana said that he originally aimed simply to teach people to read Luqa so that they could read the New Testament that was being translated. But he gradually started to think that "It might change our lives, our ways of living, how we live together in community and in the church, and in families, among siblings, with our relatives, and in our clans." The importance of language in community life is a theme in many of the texts in the books, particularly a series of reflections written by Zobule for analysis by students. Many students spontaneously reflected on those texts, expressing a sense that the mixed-up way that many people talked today was related to disorder in their lives and communities.

Formal schooling made them feel unmoored: disconnected from home, scrambling to become competent in an unfamiliar language without much support, always looking outward for a sense of value and meaning. Studying Luqa provided solid ground (McDougall & Zobule 2021) and a way of crossing back and forth across languages. Rather than blindly jumping over to English and all that it represents or feeling that they must forever leave what is familiar to have any sense of a future, students come to see that they can build on, rather than move away from, their own languages.

5. Conclusion: The power of grammar

Reflecting on the Kulu Language Institute from an outsider's perspective, McDougall was surprised that a curriculum focused on grammar was so enthusiastically embraced by people of rural Ranoqa over the years when it had been devalued in schooling systems of the Anglophone Global North. Grammar exemplifies a kind of abstract thinking that is, arguably, overvalued in formal schooling and often contrasted with learning based on lived, practical experience so central to Pacific Islands and other Indigenous ways of knowing. Grammar teaching, curricula, classrooms, schedules, assessments – all part of the Kulu Language Institute – echo a dominant educational system that promises socio-economic mobility but often seems to naturalize marginality. Yet, as Elizabeth Sumida Huaman observed in relation to three small Indigenous schools in Peru, Canada, and the United States, the "binary" of Western forms of knowledge (seen as necessary to thrive in the broader society) versus Indigenous forms of knowledge (linked to cultural heritage and identity) is illusory. Regardless of the form or content of instruction, schools can become "critical spaces of resurgence" (Sumida Huaman 2020: 264) when Indigenous people are in control.

In building the Kulu curriculum, Zobule worked within his own language community through a trial-and-error approach; the work was not guided by scholarly research on teaching literacy and languages. Yet as we have engaged with such scholarship, we suggest that Kulu's focus on grammar puts it in the vanguard of efforts to reconnect formal descriptive linguistics and language teaching. In the mid-twentieth century in many Anglophone countries, English teachers moved away from prescriptive school grammar toward the descriptive grammar of academic linguistics, but movements to embrace more linguistically informed approach to grammar were short-lived (Locke 2010; Adoniou 2014; Kolln & Hancock 2005). An explicit rejection of grammar instruction by teachers' organizations in the US and UK left a generation of teachers with minimal "conscious knowledge of grammar" (Denham 2020: 4). Fluent speakers of Standard English might be able to learn to read and write effectively without explicit attention to grammar, but the neglect of grammar can lead non-native speakers and speakers of devalued dialects assume that there is "only one monolingual standardized grammar" and that anyone without a grasp of this grammar is a deficient language user (Salvatore 2021: 93; see also Myhill 2021b). As Andreas Trotzke observed in a discussion of pedagogical linguistics "in an increasingly multilingual world, a theoretical foundation on the basic structure of 'language' is needed more than ever in both native and second language classroom settings, and at all educational levels" (Trotzke 2023: 155). By directing attention to the underlying structures of a familiar language through a metalanguage grounded in everyday experience, the Kulu curriculum helps to inculcate this sort of sophisticated theoretical foundation among learners who have been marginalized in formal schooling.

McDougall would describe classes at both the Kulu Language Institute and Islands Bible Ministries as unapologetically academic; they focus on critical analysis and abstract thinking about language. This approach runs counter to dominant approaches to mass education in Solomon Islands, which have consistently underestimated the ambitions of ordinary people. From the late colonial and early Independence era, planners have assumed that only a small elite would progress through academically-oriented education and that most rural people would be best served by a more practical curriculum focused on basic skills and vocational education. Not only has vocational education been consistently given lower value than academic education pathways (Maebuta et al. 2010), but – as we have learned – students who invest so much in pursuing the higher-status academic path often fail to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The Kulu Language Institute is grounded in Zobule's conviction that rural people are perfectly capable of high-level intellectual work. By practicing these skills in a language they know, even the least educated Ranoqans discover that they aren't stupid 'stoneheads.' Like the African American students that Jordan worked with, they come to see failures in the broader system, rather than themselves. Studying the form and function of Luqa provides Ranoqans a bridge to other languages, especially English, while also affirming the value of their own language, knowledge, experience, and lifeways.

References

Adoniou, Misty. 2014. Grammar matters and should be taught – differently. *The Conversation*. (http://theconversation.com/grammar-matters-and-should-be-taught-differently-25604) (Accessed 2023-03-16.)

Amaral, Luiz. 2020. A framework for designing pedagogical materials in Indigenous languages: Examples from Brazil and Mexico. *Tellus* 20(43). 145–166. doi:10.20435/tellus.v20i43.702

Burton, Lindsay J. 2012. Building on living traditions: Early childhood education and culture in Solomon Islands. *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 15(1). 157–175. doi:10.52214/cice.v15i1.11471

Coxon, Eve, Jack Maebuta, & Seu'ula Johansson-Fua. 2020. Education for "Development" in context: Solomon Islands and Tonga. In Johansson-Fua, Seu'ula, Rebecca Jesson, Rebecca Spratt, & Eve Coxon (eds.), *Relationality and Learning in Oceania: Contextualizing Education for Development*, 17–41. Brill. doi:10.1163/9789004425316_002

Denham, Kristin. 2020. Positioning students as linguistic and social experts: Teaching grammar and linguistics in the United States. *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature* 1–16. doi:10.17239/L1ESLL-2020.20.03.02

Dobrin, Lise M. 2009. Introduction: SIL International and the disciplinary culture of linguistics. *Language* 85(3). 618–619.

Dobrin, Lise M. & Jeff Good. 2009. Practical language development: Whose mission? *Language* 85(3). 619–629. doi:10.1353/lan.0.0132

Early, Robert. 2019. *Pilot vernacular education programme project review*. Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development.

Early, Robert. 2020. Adjusting Language-in-education practices in multilingual societies: A Solomon Islands case study. In Johansson-Fua, Seu'ula, Rebecca Jesson, Rebecca Spratt, & Eve Coxon (eds.), *Relationality and learning in Oceania: Contextualizing education for development*, 87–101. Brill. (https://brill.com/edcollbook-oa/title/57057)

Gale, Mary-Anne. 2012. Grammar rules, OK? What works when teaching a highly endangered Aboriginal language versus a stronger language? In *Proceedings of the 42nd Australian Linguistic Society Conference 2011*, Canberra, 1–4 December. Australian Linguistic Society. (https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/9397)

Galokale, Kerryn Sogha. 2023. *Examining the vernacular languages and English in education policy and practices: Language attitudes and perspectives towards Sa'a language, Pijin, and English in Sa'a Indigenous community in Solomon Islands*. Auckland: The University of Auckland. (Doctoral dissertation.) (https://hdl.handle.net/2292/68629)

Glasgow, Ali, Bernadine Ha 'amori, Joanna Daiwo, & Viola Malasa. 2011. The Solomon Islands initiatives to support and enhance the use of vernaculars in early childhood education. *Language and Linguistics in Melanesia* 29. 87–94.

Handman, Courtney. 2007. Speaking to the soul: On native language and authenticity in Papua New Guinea Bible translation. In Makihara, Miki & Bambi B. Schieffelin (eds.), *Consequences of contact: Language ideologies and sociocultural transformations in Pacific societies*, 166–188. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hicks, Rachel Emerine, Debra McDougall, & David Oakeshott. 2021. The promise of education: Schooling journeys in the Southwestern Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific* 33(2). 301–336. doi:10.1353/cp.2021.0033

Holden, Josh. 2020. Indigenous universities and language reclamation: Lessons in balancing Linguistics, L2 teaching, and language frameworks from Blue Quills University. In de Lima Silva, Wilson & Katherine J. Riestenberg (eds.), *Collaborative approaches to the challenges of Language Documentation and Conservation: Selected papers from the 2018 Symposium on American Indian Languages (SAIL).* (Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication 20), 20–37. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. (http://hdl.handle.net/10125/24930)

Jordan, June. 1988. Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan. *Harvard Educational Review* 58 (3): 363–74.

Jourdan, Christine. 2013. Pijin at school in Solomon Islands: Language ideologies and the nation. *Current issues in language planning* 14(2). 270–282.

Kolln, Martha & Craig Hancock. 2005. The story of English grammar in United States schools. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique* 4(3). 11–31.

Kulu Language Institute. 2017. The Constitution of Kubokota and Luqa Language Institute.

Leonard, Wesley Y. 2017. Producing language reclamation by decolonising 'language.' *Language Documentation and Description* (Special Issue on Reclaiming Languages: Contesting and Decolonising "language Endangerment" from the Ground Up) 14. 15–36. doi:10.25894/ldd146

Leonard, Wesley Y. 2020. Musings on Native American language reclamation and sociolinguistics. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2020(263). 85–90. doi:10.1515/ijsl-2020-2086

Leonard, Wesley Y & Erin Haynes. 2010. Making "collaboration" collaborative: An examination of perspectives that frame linguistic field research. *Language Documentation* 4. 268–293.

Lima, Suzi. 2020. The Kawaiwete pedagogical grammar: Linguistic theory, collaborative language documentation, and the production of pedagogical materials. In Silva, Wilson de Lima & Katherine J. Riestenberg (eds.), *Collaborative approaches to the challenges of language documentation and conservation: Selected papers from the 2018 Symposium on American Indian Languages (SAIL).* (Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication 20), 54–72. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. (http://hdl.handle.net/10125/24932)

Litteral, Robert. 2015. Changes in mother tongue education policy in Papua New Guinea. *Language and Linguistics in Melanesia* 33(2). 93–99.

Locke, Terry (ed.). 2010. *Beyond the grammar wars: A resource for teachers and students on developing language knowledge in the English/literacy classroom*. Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis.

Maebuta, Jack. 2008. Stiudens wearem unifom nating: Examining the quality of learning in Solomon Islands urban community high schools. In Dorovolomo, Jeremy, Cresantia F. Koya, Huy P. Phan, Joseph Veramu, & Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (eds.), *Pacific education: Issues and perspectives*, 92–108. Lautoka, Fiji: University of the South Pacific.

Maebuta, Jack, Jeremy Dorovolomo, & Huy P. Phan. 2010. Examining the quality of practical learning in secondary school technical and vocational education curriculum in Solomon Islands. *The International Journal of Learning: Annual Review* 17(5). 11–24. doi:10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v17i05/47030

McDougall, Debra. 2012. Stealing foreign words, recovering local treasures: Bible translation and vernacular literacy on Ranongga (Solomon Islands). *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 23(3). 318–339. doi:10.1111/taja.12003

McDougall, Debra. 2021. Gendered ambition and disappointment: Women and men in a vernacular language education movement in Melanesia. In Bainton, Nicholas A., Debra McDougall, Kalissa Alexeyeff, & John Cox (eds.), *Unequal lives: Gender, race and class in the Western Pacific*, 183–211. 1st edn. ANU Press. doi:10.22459/UE.2020.07

McDougall, Debra & Alpheaus G Zobule. 2021. "All Read Well": Schooling on solid ground in a Solomon Islands language movement. *The Contemporary Pacific* 33(2). 410–439. doi:10.1353/cp.2021.0037

Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. 2010. *Policy statement and guidelines for the use of vernacular languages and English in education in Solomon Islands*. Honiara, Solomon Islands: Solomon Islands Government. (https://www.mehrd.gov.sb/documents?view=download&format=raw&fileId=42)

Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. 2024. *Compulsory School Fees Limits*. Honiara, Solomon Islands: Solomon Islands Government. (https://solomons.gov.sb/compulsory-school-fees-limits) (Accessed 2024-04-30.)

Myhill, Debra. 2021a. Grammar re-imagined: Foregrounding understanding of language choice in writing. *English in Education* 55(3). 265–278. doi:10.1080/04250494.2021.1885975

Myhill, Debra. 2021b. Grammar as choice: Teaching students the craft of writing. *Journal of Teaching Writing* 36(1). 11–36.

National Parliament of Solomon Islands. 2024. *Education Act 2023*. Vol. No 8 of 2023.

Rosborough, Trish, Chuutsqa Layla Rorick, & Suzanne Urbanczyk. 2017. Beautiful words: Enriching and indigenizing Kwak'wala revitalization through understandings of linguistic structure. *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 73(4). 425–437. doi:10.3138/cmlr.4059

Salvatore, Joseph. 2021. Tools, not rules: Rhetorical grammar as a meaning-making tool in the creative writing workshop. *Journal of Teaching Writing* 36(1). 91–128.

Sarvasy, Hannah. 2024. Papua New Guinea: Learning the lessons of language. *The Interpretor (Lowy Institute)*. (https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/papua-new-guinea-learning-lessons-language) (Accessed 2024-04-30.)

SIL International. 2013. Literacy & education: MLE pilot project planned for Solomon Islands. (http://www.sil.org/about/news/mle-pilot-project-planned-solomon-islands) (Accessed 2016-10-28.)

Solomon Islands National Statistics Office. 2023. *2019 Population and housing census (Volume 1)*. Census. Honiara, Solomon Islands: Ministry of Finance and Treasury. (https://solomons.gov.sb/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Solomon-Islands-2019-Population-and-Housing-Census_National-Report-Vol-1-2.pdf) (Accessed 2025-11-07.)

Sumida Huaman, Elizabeth. 2020. Small Indigenous schools: Indigenous resurgence and education in the Americas. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 51(3). 262–281. doi:10.1111/aeq.12335

Tanangada, Lanelle Olandrea. 2013. *A study of language use in secondary school classrooms in the Solomon Islands: Conceptions, practices and proficiencies*. Hamilton, NZ: Waikato University. (Master's thesis.)

Troolin, David. 2013. Navigating contested terrain: Vernacular education in a Papua New Guinean village. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 14(2). 283–299. doi:10.1080/14664208.2013.821020

Trotzke, Andreas. 2023. Pedagogical linguistics: Connecting formal linguistics to language teaching. *Language* 99(3). e153–e175. doi:10.1353/lan.2023.a907016

Tsikewa, Adrienne. 2021. Reimagining the current praxis of field linguistics training: Decolonial considerations. *Language* 97(4). e293–e319. doi:10.1353/lan.2021.0080

Watson-Gegeo, Karen Ann. 1987. English in the Solomon Islands. *World Englishes* 6(1). 21–32.

Watson-Gegeo, Karen Ann & David Welchman Gegeo. 1994. Keeping culture out of the classroom in rural Solomon Islands schools: A critical analysis. *The Journal of Educational Foundations* 8(2). 27–55.

Wilson, William H. & Kauanoe Kamanā. 2013. Commentary: A Hawaiian revitalization perspective on Indigenous youth and bilingualism. In Wyman, Leisy T., Teresa L. McCarty, & Sheilah E. Nicholas (eds.), *Indigenous youth and multilingualism: Language identity, ideology, and practice in dynamic cultural worlds*, 187–200. Routledge.

World Bank Group. 2025. *World Bank Open Data – Solomon Islands*. (https://data.worldbank.org/country/solomon-islands) (Accessed 2025-11-07.)

Debra McDougall
debra.mcdougall@unimelb.edu.au
orcid.org/0000-0001-5447-9991