
PAUL GERAGHTY

*University of the South Pacific and University of New England*

Pacific lexicographers have been a disparate lot. The earliest were traders and beachcombers, then for a long time the market was cornered by missionaries, who morphed into linguists and anthropologists. This dictionary of Takū, however, is something of a radical departure, one researched and compiled by an ethnomusicologist, the third in a series of monographs resulting from extensive field work spread over 15 years.

This is a very substantial work. It comprises an introduction, a grammatical sketch of some 50 pages, a dictionary with approximately 6,000 entries, some with profuse and fascinating detail, and an English-Takū finder-list. Apart from the minutiae of the physical and cultural environment, many helpful notes on usage are included—for example, the observation (p. 27) that the a/o possessive distinction was retained by some speakers up until the 1990s. Another particularly valuable bonus is a DVD of the text which also includes hundreds of photos and video clips illustrating flora and fauna, topography, material culture and song and dance performances.

Takū is an atoll, politically part of Papua New Guinea, the people of which speak the second most westerly Polynesian language (only Nukuria is further west). It subgroups immediately with Nukuria, Nukumanu, Ontong Java (Pelau and Luanua) and Sikaiana, and more remotely with Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi to the north. Remarkably, the number of Takū speakers appears to have plunged to as few as 12 in the late 19th century, but is now approximately 500. In terms of material culture, Takū holds the distinction of being one of the few Polynesian cultures which traditionally used a loom and penis sheath (not necessarily at the same time); linguistically it is almost unique (along with Nukuoro) in having metathesised Proto Polynesian *niu ‘coconut’* to *nui* and, like Tuvalu and some other outlier languages, is characterised by geminate consonants, while there are ongoing changes of *l > r* and *f > h*, which are described and illustrated in detail in this work. Because of its relative isolation and lack of natural resources, coupled with the decision not to admit missionaries until recently, Takū is arguably the most traditional of all Polynesian communities. In recent years it has gained some unwanted notoriety by being the first Pacific island to be so threatened by rising sea levels and salination of gardens that there are plans to evacuate the entire population and resettle it on nearby Bougainville—witness the poignant entry for *kamatū* “shrub taxon… formerly plentiful in the soft ground at Sialeva, but all such locations have now been eroded by rising sea levels”.

289
As Moyle recounts in the introduction, this is not the first Takū dictionary. A predecessor was compiled, but never published, by the linguist Irwin (later Jay) Howard and associates, including myself, at the University of Hawai‘i in the late 1970s. Moyle has built on this pioneering work, and includes quite a number of entries which were recorded in it, but had become unknown by the time Moyle conducted his fieldwork some 20 years later, particularly in more arcane fields such as tattoo design and string figures.

The dictionary is attractively produced and easy on the eye and in the hand, with helpful drawings showing canoe, house and loom parts, but alas no map. It could have been better proof-read. I counted some 70 typos, mis-orderings, mis-glossings and other slips, the most egregious being the misspelling of grammar as ‘grammer’ in, of all places, the cataloguing-in-publication entry, and the replacement of the headword vere with vasi. A whole section of the sketch grammar is repeated, almost verbatim—appearing first as “2.3.4 Nominalised verbs” then reappearing a couple of pages later as “2.3.7 Verbal nominalizations” (the forests weep).

The author acknowledges his debt to linguists who guided him, or whose work he followed, in writing the sketch grammar and compiling the dictionary, but there are a number of places where he appears to have ventured out alone into unfamiliar territory: the claim (p. 3) that all dictionaries are “founded on the assumption of uniform usage”, confusion between “grammar” and “syntax” (p. 6), accounts of the functions of tense markers—in particular ku—and prepositions and conjunctions which are at odds with the examples given or linguistically implausible, confusion over demonstrative pronouns (pp. 30-31), failure to note that demonstratives often function as articles, failure to note a number of other “compound verbs” like hanake (p. 41), and the redundant information (p. 172) that locative nouns are not preceded by an article. The section on phonotactics also omits to mention the very obvious fact that recent loans from Tokpisin and English have radically changed syllable structure, introducing non-geminate initial consonant clusters (e.g., skul), final consonants (e.g., mak), and even a new phoneme, the velar nasal (e.g., ring, teng—found in examples but not listed in the dictionary). In all of these cases, however, it is a saving grace that the profusion of examples given throughout the work enables readers to draw their own conclusions.

The dictionary does not list Proto Polynesian sources, but does attempt to provide etymologies of loan-words, most of which are from English via Tokpisin, or simply from Tokpisin, and a few from neighbouring Nukumanu. Some obvious loanwords are not given etymologies—e.g., kapa ‘metal, tin-can, corrugated iron’, mameapu ‘pawpaw’, tiāina ‘banana species’—and a number of proposed etymologies are wide of the mark: I find it hard to believe that höia ‘a long time ago’ comes from English before; and suluka ‘hand-rolled cigarette made from banana leaves’ is not from English cheroor via Samoan, but from Fijian suluka, presumably via a Melanesian pidgin. Most intriguingly, säita ‘time’ is not indicated as a borrowing, but I would wager good money that it is from German Zeit, even though it is not found in Tokpisin.

Most of the natural species are identified, thanks to a number of experts duly credited by Moyle; but I would certainly check the identification of karū, a tree with edible fruit, as Barringtonia asiatica, whose fruit is a well-known fish-poison, and
the identification of a kind of tuna (*laku, takua*) as *Istiophorus*, which is a sailfish.

I have a few minor concerns of a more general nature. The first is regarding the orthography. In Moyle’s previous publications on Takū, he used—sensibly, in my view—a macron to indicate vowel length. Here he uses double vowels, explaining (p. 3) that this was a condition of his being given access to Howard’s dictionary. I, and again the world’s forests, would have preferred that he had not so readily acquiesced to this rather strange condition.

My second quibble concerns example sentences. Many are detailed and useful, but some are totally predictable and provide no further information, e.g., for *mahana* ‘feverish’ the example given is *te tama nei e mahana* ‘this child is feverish’, for *vware* ‘(of a limb) numb’ the example given is *taku vae e vware* ‘my leg is numb’, etc.

Finally, the organisation of non-predictable derivatives is always a problem for Pacific lexicographers, because of the extensive use of prefixes—whether to just put them all under the base, or simply list them all as separate heads, or (the solution I prefer as most user-friendly) refer to them under the base then list and define them as separate heads, or vice versa. Moyle has opted mostly for the first strategy, which means that many words are not to be found in alphabetical order, for example *kāoti* ‘stop, quit’ is found only under *oti*, *pallë* ‘move quickly’ is only found under *llë*, *takallë* under *llï*, *mëmata* under *mata* 4, *moemiti* under *miti*, and so on.

The author seems unduly pessimistic about the survival of the culture that he has so meticulously recorded, commenting (p. 2) that, if it happens, “the abandonment of the island will render meaningless or superfluous much of Takuu culture currently practised, including its language”. However, this is not necessarily the case, as witness many examples of relocated communities in the Pacific that have retained largely intact their language and culture, such as the Banabans of Ocean Island and the Vaitupuans of Tuvalu who have been living on Rabi and Kioa, respectively, in Fiji for nearly 70 years.

Overall, this dictionary is of high quality and excellent value and packed full of many kinds of information, as we have come to expect from Pacific Linguistics, and it is sad to note that, now that de Gruyter Mouton have become co-publishers of PL, the quality will no doubt remain but the cost will shoot through the roof: we will be paying Mouton prices for most Pacific dictionaries from now on.


MALAMA MELEISEA  
Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa

*Echoes at Fisherman’s Rock* is a book, originally written and published in Tokelauan, by a group of Tokelauan elders living in the Wellington, New Zealand, who wanted to have a permanent record of some of the fishing and food gathering traditions in Tokelau. These men, who had lived in New Zealand for a number of years, are part of