

# 2 *The question of dialect and language in Oceania*

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TERRY CROWLEY

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Given that many of the 450 or so Oceanic languages — nearly 10% of the world's total number of languages — exhibit varying degrees of internal regional diversity, it is perhaps a little surprising that data from so few of these languages have contributed significantly to the field of dialectology in general, and to Austronesian dialectology in particular. In fact, the only major dialectological studies of any Oceanic language that I am aware of relate to Fijian (Schütz 1972; Geraghty 1983). Published grammars and dictionaries of Oceanic languages for the most part concentrate on just a single regional variety, though often with some specific comments on the major points of phonological, lexical or grammatical features by which other regional varieties differ from the described variety, for example Crowley (1982:8–10) and Crowley (1992:x–xvi) for Paamese, with little attempt to describe variability, the effects of dialect contact and dialect levelling.

Any discussion of Austronesian dialectology must, of course, be predicated on some kind of understanding of what constitutes the difference between a dialect and a language. The issue of whether varieties of speech associated with different geographical areas should be considered as 'dialects of a single language' or as 'different languages' is, of course, typically decided by invoking the criterial notion of mutual intelligibility. Geographically determined speech forms which are not mutually intelligible are said to constitute separate languages, whereas dialects of the same language are generally said to be mutually intelligible.

Since a speaker of Fijian cannot understand anything of what is said when somebody is speaking Maori, we can easily say that Fijian and Maori constitute separate languages. On the other hand, someone who has learnt Maori in the East Cape area of New Zealand can easily understand somebody who learned the language in Northland, despite the existence of some recognisable differences between the two varieties, so the speech patterns of East Cape and Northland constitute two dialects of a single language.

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However, it is also generally acknowledged that sociopolitical factors are often at least equally important in distinguishing between different languages, as reflected in the widely repeated<sup>2</sup> aphorism that 'a language is a dialect with an army and a navy'. Dutch, for example, is about as distinct from the German of Berlin as is the local speech of many parts of northern Germany, yet only Dutch is said to constitute a separate language, because of its association with what has become a separate nation. Afrikaans, on the other hand, could easily have been treated as a dialect of Dutch rather than a separate language if it had been spoken in the Netherlands rather than in South Africa. In fact, until relatively recently, even Afrikaansers did call their language Dutch, though they now refer to it as a separate language.

This paper compares how linguists talk about Oceanic languages and the regional diversity to be found within them with how speakers of these languages themselves talk about the same sorts of issues. The paper seeks to establish whether languages are created out of diversity by speakers of those languages themselves, or whether, as argued by Mühlhäusler (1996), languages represent colonial abstractions produced by foreign academics and missionaries which are not in accord with indigenous understandings of the linguistic situation of the region.

## 2 Revisiting dialect and language in Oceania<sup>3</sup>

For several decades after the appearance of Wurm and Laycock's article on the question of language and dialect in New Guinea in 1961, there was no serious attempt to discuss the dialect/language issue in terms that might be applicable to Oceanic languages.<sup>4</sup> Wurm and Laycock (1961:137) concluded that 'the ultimate classification of given forms of speech ... as dialects or as distinct languages is a very complex matter'. One of the particular problems relating to the recognition of mutual intelligibility involves dialect-chain situations in which mutual intelligibility, of course, is maintained between geographically adjacent communalects,<sup>5</sup> yet over larger distances mutual intelligibility fails. A well-known example of this involves the situation in Germany and the Netherlands, where speakers of local communalects in Amsterdam and Berlin can certainly not understand each other, yet a traveller moving from one communalect to another between these two cities will never encounter mutual unintelligibility.

Although a clear-cut boundary between dialect and language is therefore often not possible, Oceanic linguists have often succumbed to the natural human tendency to operate in terms of discrete entities and clearly defined boundaries rather than allowing for the indeterminacies necessitated by continua. For example, surveys of Vanuatu languages (Tryon 1976) and Solomon Islands languages (Tryon & Hackman 1983) have adopted the traditional lexicostatistical figure of 81% shared cognacy in core vocabulary as representing the boundary between language and dialect, despite clear evidence presented by Wurm and

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<sup>2</sup> But surprisingly difficult to cite.

<sup>3</sup> For the most part, my discussion will deal with languages from the Oceanic subgroup of Austronesian, though there will be some reference also to Australian languages and the non-Austronesian languages of Melanesia where this provides relevant supplementary information.

<sup>4</sup> The examples discussed by Wurm and Laycock all happen to involve non-Austronesian languages from Papua New Guinea, though the sociocultural contexts are similar enough to what we find for Oceanic languages that their comments can be taken as applying equally to situations of regional diversity within these languages.

<sup>5</sup> I will use the term 'communalect' following Wurm and Laycock (1961:132) to refer to a speech form that is indeterminate with respect to separate-language or same-language status.

Laycock (1961) that a variety of phonological and structural factors can also affect mutual intelligibility.

In any case, there is also a real problem in operating with such figures, because different writers comparing essentially the same pairs of communalects can sometimes come up with surprisingly different cognate percentages. In Crowley (1998b:105–106), I point out that a number of lexicostatistical comparisons of pairs of Oceanic communalects by different linguists have produced published cognate figures that vary by as much as 20%. The reasons for this presumably involve, in part, differences of criteria as to what constitute cognates.

Differing degrees of accuracy in raw lexical data have also played a part, especially when comparing figures presented in general surveys against information contained in more detailed studies of particular languages. Davis (1997:25), for example, upwardly revises Tryon and Hackman's (1983) figures for cognate sharing between *Hoava* and *Kusaghe* in Solomon Islands from 77.6% to 89.8% by eliminating errors in their lexical data, which takes this pair of communalects from the status of separate languages to the status of dialects of the same language. One particular source of error involved situations where a particular meaning in both communalects could be expressed by two synonymous forms, yet the lists upon which the lexicostatistical percentages were calculated included only one synonym for *Hoava* and the other synonym for *Kusaghe*, resulting in lower scores for shared cognacy than should have been the case.

Dixon (1997:7) has recently revisited the language/dialect issue by arguing that sociopolitical factors can be factored out of the equation, after which he claims — *contra* Wurm and Laycock — that '... it is generally not a difficult matter to decide whether one is dealing with one language or with more than one in a given situation'.

Empirical verification of the language or dialect status of two speech forms can, Dixon says, be tested by giving people spoken or written passages and then administering comprehension questions (allowing for differences of pronunciation). Comprehension levels above the 80–90% range, he argues, would then be deemed to constitute dialects of a single language.

Unfortunately, Dixon does not attempt to discuss any of the difficulties that would inevitably arise with the administration of such tests. In diglossic situations, where one variety is likely to be considered inappropriate for use in a testing situation, any attempt to apply a test will inevitably produce biased results (Fasold 1984:153), as may turn out to be the case, for example, regarding 'Standard Fijian' and local communalects. Language-testing specialists already have enough difficulty deciding what constitute legitimate testing procedures, yet Dixon proposes to quantify comprehension, which is inherently difficult to quantify (Nettle 1999:63). In any case, one wonders what the precise basis is for Dixon's particular cut-off point in comprehension scores (and how should we interpret his allowance of a range of 10%?). Wurm and Laycock (1961:132–133), and some other writers, suggest much lower rates of information transfer as representing the boundary between dialect and language, though Dixon does not address the variation between his figures and theirs.

Also, how could one ever expect to administer a comprehension test between two languages in societies where there is either active or passive bilingualism between those languages? In the typically multilingual areas where Oceanic languages are spoken, of course, bilingualism of various kinds is the norm rather than the exception (Wurm and Laycock 1961:136). Wurm and Laycock (1961:136) make the obvious point that even the subject of a discourse may influence mutual intelligibility, and speakers of different communalects will almost certainly find it easier to overcome regional differences when they are listening to speech on a subject where they have overlapping fields of experience than

when they do not. Lippi-Green (1994) points out that mutual intelligibility depends on a whole range of additional non-linguistic factors, such as attitudes, beliefs, and even good will.

Dixon (1980:35–36) offers another test for language versus dialect status: the one-or-two-book test. By this test, he argues that if it is more convenient for a linguist to write a single grammar of two communalects — with notes on regional differences — then it is a question of dialects of a single language. If, on the other hand, it is necessary to write two separate grammars, then it is clearly a question of two separate languages. Of course, this test does not tell us how many notes of regional differences we will need to accumulate before a separate grammar is warranted. Obviously, different writers — or publishers — might be prepared to operate according to different aesthetic judgements when making this kind of decision, which means that the division between language and dialect becomes little more than the personal whim of an academic linguist, or even a publisher who knows nothing about linguistics.

For example, the Sye and Ura languages of Erromango in Vanuatu are clearly separate languages according to the mutual intelligibility criterion, as speakers of Sye cannot understand Ura when the language is played to them on tape.<sup>6</sup> However, structurally there are so many direct parallels between the two that I could have simply copied the files from Crowley (1998a), substituted Ura examples for the Sye ones, and made a few amendments to the text to account for the relatively small number of additional differences in producing Crowley (1999a).

Situations like this where the patterns of one language are largely mapped morpheme-by-morpheme onto those of another language, but with partly (and sometimes even completely) different forms, are certainly not unique — see Thurston (1987) for a description of what we find in parts of New Britain for example, and Grace (1981:157–159) for reference to a similar situation in New Caledonia — and one wonders how the one-or-two-book test would be applied here. A shared grammatical text with separate examples is far from impossible in such cases, even though the mutual intelligibility criterion indicates that we are dealing with separate languages.

Dixon (1997:8) acknowledges the existence of dialect chains, for which he concedes that ‘fairly arbitrary’ decisions may be needed, though he claims that such situations are ‘rather rare’. This is a somewhat surprising claim, given that it is widely known that the entire Romance-speaking area of Europe, as well as many parts of Germanic-speaking Europe, constitute gigantic dialect chains (Crystal 1987:25). Also, the speech form that Dixon (1988) described in Fiji belongs to what most would regard as a Fiji-wide dialect chain, or possibly one of two dialect chains (Geraghty 1983:277), despite Dixon’s attempt to reduce Fiji to a straightforward two-language situation, with each language having ‘a considerable number of dialects’ (Dixon 1988:1). Other dialect chains are encountered among Oceanic languages in some parts of Papua New Guinea (Wurm & Laycock 1961:137), including, for example, Central Province (Pawley 1975:10), as well as the Caroline Islands of Micronesia (Lynch 1998:27).

Dixon (1980:37) may be correct in claiming that in Australia — apart from the Western Desert and Central/South Queensland — there were no dialect chains at all. However, he does not consider at least the possibility that in other parts of the continent, earlier dialect chains may have been obliterated soon after European contact by the complete loss (often

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<sup>6</sup> All Ura speakers, however, are bilingual in Ura and Sye, so the mutual intelligibility test could not be applied with them.

even without substantial records) of many intermediate speech varieties, or that the establishment of mission stations and government reserves resulted in considerable amounts of dialect levelling. The island of Erromango, for example, was described by earlier observers as having been linguistically much more like modern-day neighbouring Tanna, with its gradual transitions between varieties. However, major linguistic attrition has brought about the loss of all transitional varieties on Erromango, resulting in now quite clear-cut language boundaries (Lynch 1983:5).

### **3 Traditional naming practices**

I now propose to investigate the dialect/language issue from a somewhat different perspective. Rather than adopting the traditional academic criterion of mutual intelligibility, I propose to look at the issue from an indigenous perspective, as reflected in how speakers of Oceanic communalects talk about their own ways of speaking, those of other groups, and also regional diversity within their speech communities. In particular, I will concentrate on the traditional naming of communalects by speakers of Oceanic languages, as well as other conventionalised lexical expressions used in talking about linguistic diversity. However, while I propose to describe the main patterns of naming that are encountered among Oceanic communalects, there will be some reference to non-Oceanic communalects as well.<sup>7</sup>

#### **3.1 Talking about diversity**

Speakers of Oceanic languages seem generally to be aware of at least some aspects of regional variation within their areas of mutual intelligibility. Geraghty (1983:18), for example, indicates that even very young speakers of Fijian communalects are typically very much aware of even small linguistic differences between their own speech and that of others, and that people generally have a good idea of how far their own communalect extends.

However, the precise characterisation of linguistic differences often involves a concentration on particular kinds of differences while ignoring others. This observation sits well with my own observations of linguistic diversity on Paama and Erromango, which suggest that there is often an element of exaggerating differences by stereotyping. For instance, Erromangans will typically describe a southern dialect of their language as having *h* in words that have *s* in the northern dialect, but the situation is far more complicated than this, as described in more detail in Crowley (1998c).

People are also able to recognise and talk about varying degrees of difference between mutually unintelligible varieties. The Paamese, for example, will normally say that the people of neighbouring Southeast Ambrym speak a 'different language', which they cannot understand. However, I have on occasion also heard people say that the Southeast Ambrymese speak the 'same language' as they do, though this has always been in the context of comparing Southeast Ambrymese with languages from other parts of Ambrym. Even a linguistically fairly naive observer soon comes to realise that, despite the mutual unintelligibility between Paama and Southeast Ambrym, there is a large number of common

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<sup>7</sup> Additional observations for Australian communalects can be found in Dixon (1980:40–43). Foley (1986:22–29) makes some observations concerning the naming of non-Austronesian communalects in the New Guinea area. For the sake of stylistic convenience, I will describe all of these patterns using the present tense, though it should be kept in mind that some of the traditional patterns described in this section actually refer to communalects that have become extinct, or which are moribund.

individual words that are either the same — or at least very similar in shape — in contrast to the much more divergent vocabularies of the other languages of Ambrym.

The fact that speakers of Oceanic languages clearly talk about linguistic diversity at different levels of generality depending on the context means that different people can end up saying quite different things about exactly the same linguistic situation. John Lynch (pers. comm.), for example, reports that some people on Tanna claim that there is just a single language on the island, while he has heard one person claim that there are as many as twenty-eight languages, and other people have offered various figures between these extremes. Linguists have tended to recognise around three to five languages based primarily on the criterion of mutual intelligibility, and there are no armies or navies on Tanna to provide a more definitive answer (Lynch 1978:719).

### 3.2 Unnamed dialects, named languages

Some communalects in the Pacific have names which function exclusively as language names in the traditional sense described in §2. Many such names are completely unanalysable, such as *Raga*<sup>8</sup> of Pentecost, *Nakanamanga* of Nguna and *Ura* of Erromango, all spoken in Vanuatu. Sometimes, emblematic words within a particular language are chosen as the basis for a language name. For example, on Erromango the various first person singular possessive pronouns ('my') are used also metalinguistically as language names such as *Enyau*, *Aryau*, *Sorug* (Crowley 1997).

Other language names may represent some kind of compound, which may be descriptive in some way of how a people are characteristically seen as speaking. For instance, the name of the *Guugu Yimidhirr* language from north Queensland involves *guugu* 'language' as the initial element, while the second element, *Yimidhirr*, derives from *yimi* 'this' and *-dhirr* 'having'. The name therefore literally means 'language with *yimi* (for 'this')' (Dixon 1980:42). Compound language names sometimes also express some kind of ethnocentric judgement about that group's own way of speaking, for example *Tinata Tuna*, literally 'true language', spoken in the Rabaul area of Papua New Guinea (Lynch 1998:40).

Even very small languages in the Pacific can be expected to exhibit some degree of geographical heterogeneity, and with some languages the diversity can be considerable. *Tinata Tuna*, for example, is spoken over a substantial area of northern New Britain, and it has one of the largest speaking populations in Papua New Guinea today. However, while there is a considerable amount of regional diversity within this language, I am not aware that any of these local dialects are themselves separately named. All are, therefore, equally referred to simply as *Tinata Tuna* 'true language' by their speakers.

Some languages may even have more than one name. For example, *Ura* and *Aryau*, both of which have already been mentioned, are synonymous names for the same language in Vanuatu, one of which is uniquely a language name (*Ura*), while the other is derived from the word in that language for 'my' (*Aryau*). Sometimes one name may be used by speakers of their own language, while other names may be used by speakers of neighbouring languages. For instance, speakers of the *Angkamuthi* language of Cape York in Australia refer to their language by that name, whereas neighbouring groups to the south call their

<sup>8</sup> Since the precise phonemic shape of language names is not germane to the overall discussion, names are here presented either in the local orthography, or as in the title of the major linguistic description, despite the fact that there are sometimes considerable differences in the phonemic interpretation of particular orthographic symbols.

language *Ngkamuthi* (reflecting the regular loss of initial vowels in their languages), and Torres Strait people refer to it as *Kuta* (Crowley 1983:310–311).

### 3.3 Unnamed dialects, unnamed languages

It is not uncommon in other places for there to be no indigenous names for communalects at all (Lynch 1998:40). In much — though by no means all — of northern and central Vanuatu, as well as in most of Polynesia and Micronesia, there are typically no lexical items that have unique reference as communalect names in traditional usage. In such cases, when people need to refer specifically to their language, they will typically refer to it in terms such as ‘the language of such-and-such a place’ if that language is associated exclusively with a well-defined geographical location.

The people of the island of Paama in Vanuatu, for instance, having no separate name for their own language, refer to it in contrast to anybody else’s language by saying *selūsien tenout Voum*, which literally means ‘language of Paama’. Alternatively, they can refer to it unambiguously within their own speech community as *selūsien orer*, which literally means ‘our (plural inclusive) language’. When they are speaking in Bislama to somebody from another language area, they can refer to their language unambiguously as *lanwis blong mifala*, literally ‘our (plural exclusive) language’.

The Paamese have also incorporated the Bislama word *lanwis* ‘language’ — in the shape *lanūs* — into their vernacular. This word enters into a highly specialised grammatical construction as a postverbal nominal complement to the intransitive verb *selūs* ‘speak’ along with other language names. For example:

- (1) *Naselūs Veranis.*  
‘I speak French.’
- (2) *Koselūs Inglis.*  
‘You speak English.’
- (3) *Niselūs Pislama.*  
‘I will speak Bislama.’
- (4) *Kiselūs Lanūs*  
‘You will speak Paamese.’

It should be pointed out, however, that borrowed *lanūs* can, in an appropriate context, refer to any vernacular, though a vernacular other than Paamese is more likely to be accompanied by some additional specification for the location of its speakers, e.g. *lanūs tenout Tanso* ‘language of Southeast Ambrym’. Unmodified *lanūs*, on the other hand, is most likely to be interpreted as referring particularly to Paamese.

When someone is speaking Bislama, the word *lanwis* can be used at different levels of generality or specificity, depending on the communicative needs of the context, in a similar way to the relative use of ‘same’ and ‘different’ noted in §3.1. For example, a speaker of *Ninde* on Malakula in Vanuatu could speak of his/her vernacular to an outsider simply as *lanwis blong Malakula* ‘language of Malakula’ if the implied contrast is with any other language from Vanuatu, even though there are nearly thirty other mutually unintelligible languages spoken on the island. Increasing degrees of specific identification could be achieved by referring to *Ninde* as *lanwis blong saot Malakula* ‘language of south Malakula’,

*lanwis blong Sawes Bei* 'language of Southwest Bay', and finally, to distinguish it from other languages spoken in the multilingual settlement at Southwest Bay, *Ninde*.

Lacking a generic language name certainly does not imply that members of a speech community will necessarily have names for any of the specific regional dialects of that language. Paamese speakers will typically point to a distinction between mutually intelligible northern and southern varieties, though they do not have local names for these. If information about the geographical source of a particular variety is to be expressed, Paamese speakers tend to refer variously to speakers from 'up there' or 'down there', or to refer to the village of origin of a particular speaker.

When describing the differences between northern and southern Paamese, people will often use some fairly impressionistic terminology, referring to people from the north who are said to *vit kotehei* 'speak cut' the language, whereas southerners are said to *lehei* 'pull' the language.<sup>9</sup> In other situations involving regional diversity, different varieties are sometimes impressionistically described instead as 'heavy' or 'light' (Geraghty 1983:18), though these do not always correspond to well-defined linguistic features. On the other hand, while speakers of Erromangan typically stereotype linguistic features that are associated with geographical areas as I have already indicated, they have no conventionalised metalinguistic terminology to refer to regional differences within their language.

### 3.4 Named dialects, unnamed languages

It is also fairly common for what might be considered as geographical dialects of a single language — purely on the grounds of mutual intelligibility — to have no accepted generic language name, but for each of the local dialects to have a name of its own. This kind of situation is encountered in parts of the Solomon Islands, where, for example, separately named *Mbatambana*, *Katazi*, *Sengga*, *Lömaumbi* and *Avasö* are all mutually intelligible varieties spoken on central and eastern Choiseul (Tryon & Hackman 1983:27). Davis (1997:22) indicates that speakers of mutually intelligible but separately named *Hoava* and *Kusaghe* in the Solomon Islands traditionally use these terms alternately as names of the specific dialects, or as names for the language as a whole. However, she indicates that when people need to unambiguously refer to their language as a whole in contrast to other languages, they coordinate both names into a single phrase.

Linguistically diverse Fiji also falls into this category (Geraghty 1983). Although we do not have enough data to be certain, it is also possible that separately named *Enyau* and *Sorug* on Erromango in Vanuatu could also be considered linguistically as having been separate but mutually intelligible varieties for which there was no overall name (Crowley 1997:47–48). Lynch (1978:719) also indicates that the range of recognisable communalects on Tanna are grouped into eight named varieties.

Northern Malaita is another area in which local dialects have names, but there are no generic language names. Siegel (1987:219–220) indicates that people of this area regard language as an important element in group identification, and the dialect names often seize upon local linguistic habits in the derivation of names. For instance, *Baelelea* is a compound involving *bae* 'say' and *lelea*, which reflects the local predilection for reduplicating the word *lea* 'go' as *lelea*.

<sup>9</sup> This terminology reflects the fact that by and large, the southern dialect is phonologically more conservative, while words in the northern dialect have generally undergone various processes of phonological deletion or assimilation.



### 3.5 Language names and ethnonyms

In some societies, the name of an ethnic group and the language of that group may be quite different. Anglo-Celtic New Zealanders, for example, can be referred to by the ethnonym *Pākehā* while their language is English, never *Pākehā-ese*. Such situations, however, are not all that common, and it is far more common for there to be some kind of formal relationship between language name and ethnonym, with either the language name being derived from the ethnonym, or the ethnonym being derived from the language name.

Dixon (1980:40–41) points out that ethnic groups in indigenous Australia (often referred to as ‘tribes’) frequently derive their ethnonyms from their language name by means of a derivational suffix of some kind. Thus, the name of the *Yidinyji* people of northern Queensland derives from the language-name *Yidiny* by means of the suffix *-ji*, which expresses the meaning of ‘having’. The *Yidinyji* are therefore those people who have (i.e. speak) *Yidiny*. Yet other tribes have names that appear to be formally derived from their language name, though by means of otherwise unrecognisable morphemes, such as with the *Jirrbalngan* people, who speak *Jirrbal* (Dixon 1980:42).

There are other cases, however, where it appears that it is the ethnonym which is basic, and the language is referred to in terms of being the speech of a particular ethnic group (similar to how European language names typically derive from the names of nations or regions, e.g. *Russia* > *Russian*, *Italy* > *Italian*, *Galicia* > *Galician*). Thus, the word *Motu* primarily refers to the people who live along the coast around Port Moresby, while their language has no distinct name of its own (Lynch 1998:40). It is necessary to refer to the language by means of the descriptive phrase involving *gado* ‘language’.

It should be pointed out that boundaries of ethnicity and language clearly do not need to coincide. Dixon (1980:35) points out that originally the 600 or so separate ‘tribes’ of Australia spoke only about 200 separate languages. Foley (1986:23) also points out that merely sharing a common language does not guarantee that people will necessarily identify as a political entity, as there are a number of villages in the Karawari area of the Sepik in Papua New Guinea where people speak a series of mutually intelligible varieties, yet there is little sense of either a single linguistic or political community. In fact, people’s non-linguistic links seem to be closer in many cases to neighbouring villages where people speak mutually unintelligible varieties (though obviously with extensive patterns of bilingualism operating throughout the area). Nineteenth-century sources also indicate that the main traditional political groupings on Erromango did not correspond closely to linguistic boundaries, leading to a situation where speakers of the same language could belong to separate political groupings, while speakers of different languages could belong to the same political entity (Spriggs & Wickler 1989).

## 4 Postcontact language names

As far as possible, the discussion in §3 has been presented to describe the kinds of naming patterns that prevailed among speech communities prior to colonial contact. Since that time, of course, much has changed, including in some cases the ways that people refer to their languages. Massive depopulation and major movements of people have resulted in considerable loss of original linguistic diversity in some areas. This has happened most notably in Australia, where either most of the original languages have completely disappeared, or their loss seems imminent. However, it is possible that there has also been some unrecorded loss of linguistic diversity among Oceanic languages due to depopulation in

some parts of Vanuatu such as parts of Malakula, and several languages have certainly been lost on Erromango due to depopulation (Crowley 1997).

In such circumstances, what was once a more diverse area may have experienced changes in the practices associated with language naming. Crowley (1997), for example, documents the replacement of original *Enyau*, *Sorug*, *Utaha* and *Ura* on Erromango with a single viable modern language, which appears to be basically a koine based on original *Enyau* and *Sorug*. However, neither of these names is now used, and no unique language name has been adopted to replace these forms.<sup>10</sup> It seems that the loss of linguistic diversity on the island has eliminated the need for people to make any kind of explicit contrast between the language that they speak today and any other language that was formerly spoken on the island, so there is a reduced need for it to have a distinct name. Thus, the language of Erromango today has changed from being a named language of the type described in §3.1 to an unnamed language, as described in §3.3.

In yet other cases, a previously unnamed language has acquired a name, which has arisen from within the community of its own speakers. The indigenous people of the North and South Islands of New Zealand originally had no separate name for their ethnic group as a whole, or for their language, though they had many local names for the various *iwi* ('tribal') groupings, e.g. *Ngāti Porou*, *Tūwharetoa*, *Ngāpuhi*, *Kai Tahu* etc. (though not their local dialects). With the arrival of substantial numbers of European settlers (who came to be known from very early on by the etymologically obscure word *Pākehā*), the common sense of indigenous, i.e. non-*Pākehā*, ethnicity came to be expressed by semantically extending the original word *māori*, which meant 'plain, ordinary' to become the ethnonym *Māori*, from which is derived the name of the language *te reo Māori* (< *te reo* 'language').

In a similar way, *na vosa vaka-Viti* 'Fijian language' (*na vosa* 'language', *vaka-* 'adjectival derivative', *Viti* 'Fiji') as a language name has been superimposed over the various local named speech varieties. In this case, however, there was also an associated development of a semiartificial written standard based on one of the local varieties that was promoted by nineteenth-century European missionaries.

Original language names have also sometimes been replaced by new names that derive from placenames associated with colonial government or mission resettlement. Lynch (1998:41) reports that the indigenous names for what are now commonly referred to on Tanna in Vanuatu as the *Lenakel* and *Waitsan* languages are seldom used by local people today. Both of these new language names derive from the names of the settlements *Lenakel* and *Whitesands* that developed as important centres in the colonial era within these two areas.

In yet other cases, an introduced word has filled a gap corresponding to the lack of a traditional language name. Once the original language names were lost on Erromango — as described above — the sole surviving viable language has come to be referred to today in contrast to other languages in Vanuatu as *nam Eromaga*, literally 'Erromangan language', even though *Eromaga* is itself an introduced word (about the source of which there is some dispute).

However, other postcontact language names referred to by Lynch (1998:40–41), Lynch (1994:viii) and Dixon (1980:40–43) have been derived by means of English derivational

<sup>10</sup> Published descriptions of the language such as Crowley (1998a) refer to it as *Sye*. However, this is simply one of the alternative names for linguistic varieties recorded in nineteenth-century sources which is remembered by a handful of people on the island as a language name. Most speakers of the language no longer use, or even recognise, *Sye* as a language name, hence my inclusion of the form within parentheses in *An Erromangan (Sye) grammar*.

morphology on the basis of the names of places in English where a language is spoken (e.g. *Paama* > *Paamese*, *Erromango* > *Erromangan*, *Fiji* > *Fijian*),<sup>11</sup> or by compounding existing dialect or placenames into a single word (e.g. *Ifira-Mele*, *Aniwa-Futuna*). Yet other newly created language names derive from the choice of a single local dialect name — sometimes arbitrarily — as a convenient ‘cover term’ for all of the regional dialects involved, such as Davis’ (1997) choice of *Hoava* for both mutually intelligible *Hoava* and *Kusaghe*.

It should be pointed out that in most instances the deliberate creation of such names has simply been to allow outsiders to talk about these languages amongst themselves in English. This has involved either academic linguists who have produced grammars and dictionaries, or missionaries who have formulated and implemented educational and evangelistic programmes in these languages. I am aware of very few cases where this kind of externally imposed linguistic labelling has actually impinged on local usage in any way.

Despite the fact that a grammar and a dictionary has been published for ‘Paamese’, for example (Crowley 1982, 1992), or ‘Erromangan’ (Crowley 1998a), the way in which the local people name these two languages has not changed in any way. In fact, Lynch (1994) represents a comprehensive compilation of alternative language names for Vanuatu languages, and this is valuable precisely because so many of these competing externally imposed labels have *not* entered general usage. We therefore find, for example, a reference to the locally used language name *Nakanamanga*, along with the following competing externally imposed labels:

Efate(se), Havannah Harbour, Nguna, Ngunese, North Efate, Sesake, Tongoa(n), and a number of other aliases. (Lynch 1994:36)

These names derive from a range of sources: placenames in English (*Havannah Harbour*, *North Efate*), anglicised placenames derived from indigenous sources (*Efate*), indigenous placenames (*Nguna*, *Sesake*, *Tongoa*), or derivations from indigenous placenames using English morphology (*Ngunese*, *Tongoan*, *Efatese*).

As I pointed out in Crowley (1999b), local people are largely unaware of the existence of published volumes dealing with their languages. I have, for example, deliberately chosen not to distribute copies of Crowley (1982, 1998a) widely to members of the Paamese and Erromangan communities because the way in which their languages are described grammatically renders those books embarrassingly difficult — and sometimes even impossible — to understand. Small numbers of my dictionary of Paamese (Crowley 1992) have been distributed to people on Paama, but this is primarily a Paamese–English dictionary, rather than primarily an English–Paamese dictionary, or a monolingual Paamese volume. For this reason, while the information contained within it may be of some interest, it is likely to be of little practical use to members of the local community. The copies are therefore seldom seen or used on Paama, and the dictionary is likely to be of much greater interest to comparative linguists or other Oceanic specialists.

Another modern language-naming situation that is worth mentioning involves people of Aboriginal ancestry in Tasmania, who have a keen interest in seeing community members make greater use of words from their ancestral indigenous languages, though the last speakers of these languages died in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tasmania was once linguistically fairly diverse, with possibly as many as a dozen distinct languages spoken there (Crowley & Dixon 1981). However, the records of each of these languages on their own is so poor that the attempt at linguistic revival has been based on the idea that words from the various recorded

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<sup>11</sup> The indigenous Paamese word for the island is *Voum*, while the Erromangans call their island *Unelocompne*, and the Fijian word for Fiji is *Viti*.

vocabularies should be pooled together to constitute one collective lexical resource. The language that is being promoted in this way by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre is referred to by the locally coined phrase *Palawa kani*, which is based on the recorded words *Palawa* 'Aboriginal person' and *kani* 'talk'. These words have been compounded according to the English pattern, in the absence of any substantive grammatical information which would indicate how — or indeed even if — compounds could be formed in the original languages.<sup>12</sup>

With regard to this latter case, it is interesting to note that outsider academics have again attempted to create a new language name, apparently without realising that members of the local community had independently coined their own preferred name. Thus, Mühlhäusler (1996:128) names and identifies their language as *Neo-Tasmanian*, possibly on the analogy of Hall's (1959) unsuccessful term *Neo-Melanesian* for Melanesian Pidgin.

It is worth noting, however, that in similar situations of complete loss of the original language such as we commonly find in southeastern Australia, present-day exclusively English-speaking Aboriginal people are expressing increased interest in their traditional past. With regard to language, this knowledge is often derived exclusively from older, and often phonetically unreliable, written sources. The result is that original language names such as Nganyaywana, Djangati and Gumbaynggir are regarded with suspicion, with people referring instead to the languages instead as Aniwan (pronounced as 'Anna won'), Dungguti and Koombanggee. These names are either spelling pronunciations based on older written sources, or anglicisations of the original language name. In cases such as 'Aniwan', the older poorly recorded language name appears to have given a level of reverence which derives solely from its long tradition of appearing in writing, despite its lack of empirical validity.

## 5 New languages

Since the advent of the colonial era in the Pacific, we have seen the emergence of a wide range of new languages that have arisen in situations of multilingual contact, i.e. new pidgin/creole varieties (Lynch 1998:220–236). I propose to examine only the major themes involved in the naming of such languages, not because they relate to the issue of the difference between dialect and language in Oceanic languages, but because it relates to a broader issue arising out of dialect and language naming that I propose to address in §6.

In some cases, the speakers of these new languages have provided their own names, which they have derived from a variety of sources. The name of French-lexifier *Tayo* in New Caledonia reportedly derives from a word in Tahitian meaning 'friend' (Hollyman 1983:133–136) and younger speakers of the language have recently adopted this as an in-group term which identifies their language (Ehrhart 1993:51). The English-lexifier creole spoken in the area of Cape York and Torres Strait is referred to locally as *Broken*, which clearly derives from 'broken (English)'.<sup>13</sup>

These pidgins and creoles have sometimes also acquired vernacular names which people use when speaking about the languages within their own communities. For instance, *Bislama* is referred to by Erromangans as *Nam Ilvucteven*, which literally means 'between language', reflecting its role as a language of contact between Melanesians and English- or French-

<sup>12</sup> An interesting Austronesian — though not Oceanic — parallel involves some Netherlands-born Moluccans who are endeavouring to teach themselves 'Moluccan' from published sources which derive from a variety of linguistic sources, resulting in an artificial amalgam of several different Moluccan languages (John Bowden, pers. comm.).

<sup>13</sup> This name presumably reflects the community's earlier negative stereotyping of their own language.

speaking Europeans. People from southern Tanna who speak *Kwamera* but no Bislama tend to refer to it by the phrase *nagiarian sei pitoga*, literally 'language of the foreigners'.

In other cases, the group who initiated a particular name has been obscured by time. For instance, while *Bislama* derives its name ultimately from Portuguese *bicho de mar* — referring to the sea slugs that represented a major trading commodity in the formative years of the language around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Crowley 1990:26–33) — there is no way of knowing whether that word became a language name at the behest of its earliest Melanesian speakers or of European traders and labour recruiters at the time. However, the active involvement of local people is suggested by the somewhat archaic alternant *Bislaman*, which presumably originated analogically on the basis of *Inglisman* 'English person' and *Franisman* 'French person'.

In Papua, the colonial police force in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was centrally involved in the formation and spread of a pidginised form of Motu, which is the vernacular language spoken around Port Moresby. People generally refer to both pidginised and vernacular Motu as *Motu*, though if a distinction is to be encoded, pidgin Motu is typically referred to as *Motu*, while vernacular Motu is referred to as *Motu korikori* 'true Motu'.

As a result of the circumstances in which this pidgin language originated, it came to be referred to in English — by both Europeans and educated Papua New Guineans — as *Police Motu*. In the lead-up to the independence of Papua New Guinea in 1975, there was something of a Papuan separatist movement which was in part linguistically inspired, and some *Police Motu*-speaking Papuans were concerned about being dominated by *Tok Pisin*-speaking New Guineans<sup>14</sup> from the early 1970s.

Objecting to *Tok Pisin* as a language of obvious colonial origins, it was claimed — incorrectly as it turned out (Dutton 1985) — that the Papuan lingua franca originated in the precolonial era at the time when the well-known *hiri* trading expeditions involved local people in major exploits of organisation and long-distance ocean voyaging. This prompted a move among intellectuals to rename *Police Motu* as *Hiri Motu*, and this new — though historically inaccurate — name has become well-established, at least among better educated speakers of the language (Dutton 1985:127–128).

Europeans — whether academic linguists, missionaries or government officials — have from time to time also come up with their own names for some of the pidgins and creoles of the region, for a variety of reasons. For instance, in order to refer generically to *Tok Pisin*, *Pijin* and *Bislama* as a single language with three mutually intelligible national varieties spoken in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu respectively, the term *Melanesian Pidgin* has been widely adopted in English (e.g. Holm 1989:526), while others have adopted alternative idiosyncratic creations such as *Neo-Melanesian* (Hall 1959) or *Bislamic languages* (Sankoff 1996:421). For the most part, however, these are terms which have enabled outsiders to discuss various aspects of these languages in English, and they have not had any impact whatsoever on local usage, or even general academic usage.

The only situation of which I am aware where a name introduced by an academic has actually been incorporated into local usage involves the *Kriol* language of the Roper River area of northern parts of Australia. This language was originally variously named by its speakers as *Pijin*, *Pijin Ingglij* or *Blekbala Ingglij*. However, with moves since the 1970s towards the development of vernacular literacy and vernacular education in the Northern Territory,<sup>15</sup> a writing system and accompanying reading materials were developed in this

<sup>14</sup> *Tok Pisin* is the English-lexifier contact language that is widely used as a lingua franca in the northern part of Papua New Guinea.

<sup>15</sup> Such programmes, however, are currently facing the possibility of being axed.

language, and those who used the language as a medium of instruction in schools were deliberately introduced to the term *Kriol*, and it has apparently spread from there (Sandefur 1979:7–8).

## 6 Language-naming as linguistic trespass

The discussion in §3 shows that there is a very wide variety of traditional practices to be encountered among Oceanic languages with regard to the naming of communalects, ranging from the naming of only local geographic varieties, to the naming of ‘languages’ corresponding closely to the traditional linguistic definition of the term, and also the lack of any explicit lexicalised communalect names (though usually with some conventionalised means of referring to languages, but not local dialects).

Indigenous language-naming practices have clearly not been static, with older language names sometimes disappearing since colonial contact, and in other cases new names being introduced by local people into their own languages (§4). Yet other language names have been deliberately created by academics or missionaries, though in most cases this has been simply to allow them to talk (or write) in English about the linguistic situations in which they were operating (§4, §5).

However, Mühlhäusler (1996) claims that prior to colonial contact the notion of ‘language’ in the sense described in §2 was absent from the Pacific, and that:

... the concept of ‘a language’ is brought into existence by this process [of colonialism]  
 ... Indigenous conceptions of language thus have given way to European concepts ...  
 (Mühlhäusler 1996:53–54)

But while Mühlhäusler asserts that traditional Pacific societies had no concept of ‘language’, he does not carry out any detailed study of the Pacific similar to the survey in the present paper by way of verification.

According to Mühlhäusler, languages are so non-existent in what he refers to as the ‘linguistic ecologies’ (Mühlhäusler 1996:238) of the Pacific that even the word ‘language’ has no translation equivalent in the languages of the region. However, there are in fact *many* Oceanic languages which have words which clearly express precisely this meaning. The following represent a random selection, and Siegel (1997:228–229) points out that there are other languages which can be added to this list:

- |     |                  |                  |
|-----|------------------|------------------|
| (5) | Erromangan       | <i>nam</i>       |
|     | Paamese          | <i>selūsien</i>  |
|     | Southeast Ambrym | <i>seppinien</i> |
|     | Fijian           | <i>vosa</i>      |
|     | Māori            | <i>reo</i>       |
|     | Tinata Tuna      | <i>tinata</i>    |

In fact, of all of the Oceanic languages that I have come into contact with, either through my own fieldwork or library research, I cannot think of *any* language that does *not* have a word for ‘language’.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, many of these words express other meanings as well, such as ‘talk’ or ‘utterance’, and some are nominalisations of the verb meaning ‘talk’. However, the fact that these words do not uniquely translate the English word ‘language’ should obviously not be

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<sup>16</sup> In many cases, this is the *only* metalinguistic term that I have encountered in Oceanic languages.

taken as an indication that speakers of these languages are not familiar with this concept. According to my *Cassell's German and English dictionary*, the word *Sprache* translates not only as 'language', but also 'speech', 'diction', 'parlance', 'voice', 'accent', 'style' and 'discussion'. However, this clearly does not mean that speakers of German do not have a word corresponding to 'language' in English.

Despite this kind of evidence, Mühlhäusler finds the notion of countable and nameable languages to be so objectionable that in his response to in Siegel's (1997) criticisms on this point, he attempts at one point to disown the term by replacing 'language' with the phrase 'Siegel's metalanguage' (Mühlhäusler 1998a:219). It is interesting to note, however, that Mühlhäusler (1998b) himself refers elsewhere to individual languages using the term 'language' a total of eighteen times, in contexts such as the following:<sup>17</sup>

... three languages with which I have had recent experience, Norfolk, Milne Bay English, and South Australian Nunga English (Mühlhäusler 1998b:357)

... a language which occupied four years of my undergraduate studies, Afrikaans (Mühlhäusler 1998b:357)

In fact, not only does he himself use this metalanguage here, but he also 'names' (and 'counts') Norfolk, Milne Bay English, South Australian Nunga English and Afrikaans.

Mühlhäusler goes considerably further than just saying that 'languages' did not exist in the Pacific, and that the languages of today are essentially colonial creations. He claims, in fact, that the academic tradition of naming languages itself constitutes a dangerous colonial practice:

... [T]he identification of languages and their subsequent naming is far from being an act of objective description, and it can constitute a very serious trespass on the linguistic ecology of an area. The very view that languages can be counted and named may be part of the disease that has affected the linguistic ecology of the Pacific ... (Mühlhäusler 1996:5)

It can be seen from this quotation that not only is Mühlhäusler denying the existence of 'languages', but that he sees any attempts to identify, name and count them as having deliterious effects on the languages of the Pacific, with linguistic diversity already having been lost, and a considerable amount of additional loss of diversity soon to explode upon the scene as a result.

Not only is Mühlhäusler in serious contradiction to his own stated position on the issue of naming and identifying languages by naming languages himself, but his fundamental assumptions that speakers of Pacific languages do not operate with the notion of 'language', and that people in the greater Pacific do not 'name' and 'identify' their own languages, demonstrate a serious level of unfamiliarity with the facts for at least many parts of the Pacific. In fact, many Pacific languages have names which function purely as language names (as noted in §3.1), a situation which contrasts with most European languages, where names are typically related in some way to what is primarily either an ethnonym or the name of a nation-state.

The vast majority of acts of language-name bestowal that I have described in this paper have originated from within indigenous speech communities, so they can hardly constitute the externally imposed linguistic trespasses about which Mühlhäusler aims to warn us. The externally imposed language names to which I refer in §4 and §5 have for the most part not influenced local usage in any significant way, as these names have almost exclusively been

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<sup>17</sup> I have not counted quotes such as 'the linguistic nature of Norfolk' (Mühlhäusler 1998b:358), though given the semantic relationship to 'language', this should probably have been included in my count. I also ignored the use of the term 'language' when Mühlhäusler was citing or paraphrasing the words of others.

used to enable academics and other outside professionals to talk about the language situation in the region amongst themselves in English in an almost exclusively academic context.

My basic point, then, is that both Dixon and Mühlhäusler are guilty of drastically oversimplifying a complex issue. Dixon oversimplifies by attempting to argue that the terms 'language' and 'dialect' can be defined asocially and apolitically, whereas Mühlhäusler oversimplifies by claiming that the distinction between the terms is nothing more than a colonial invention. I think that it would reflect greater wisdom to stick with the words of Wurm and Laycock of forty years ago: 'the ultimate classification of given forms of speech ... as dialects of a distinct language is a very complex matter'.

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