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In Our Language: Imagining a Pacific research journal in terms of language and stakeholder position and engagement

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In Our Language: Imagining a Pacific research journal in terms of language and stakeholder position and engagement

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Introduction

A scan of academic databases shows research publications covering every topic from impending death in the *Journal of Near-death Studies* to keeping potatoes safe in the *Journal of Potato Storage*. The most popular languages for publications are in English, followed by French, German, Spanish and Chinese. While Chinese is the least popular, there are, nevertheless, over 1,400 Chinese language journals. As at March 2021, a search of the University of Waikato’s library databases shows more than 72,000 published papers that focus to some degree on the Pacific. However, not one of those papers is published in a dedicated journal by, or among, Pacific peoples in their own languages.

The University of Waikato recently launched a new online Pacific academic journal which has been created by Pacific scholars for Pacific scholarship in Pacific languages. It is designed to address the research publication gap and other ethical, equitable and cultural issues associated with medium of expression and stakeholder position and engagement. This digital initiative has been launched as a global pandemic continues to impact connection and relationality. With this in mind, the article first examines the context and issues around language and research in terms of discrimination, ethics and other risks. Next, the article discusses the vulnerability and positionality of Pacific scholars, learners, peoples and communities in relation to the research publications. In the third and final part, we describe the journal initiative generally and our hopes for it—with a blatant invitation to other scholars to participate.

We admittedly speak from Kanaka Maoli/Native Hawaiian and Fijian perspectives as well as from the different disciplines of Law and Health. We do not speak as linguists but from lived experiences of speaking and learning Pacific languages as well as our conversations and work with other communities from Moananuiākea/the Pacific Ocean. We also speak from experience in education research, teaching, learning support and strategic leadership.

Language and *talanoa/vā*

The Aotearoa-based *Pacific Islands Families Study* reports that “language fluency speaks to a Pacific person’s ethnic identity ... is a critical component of this identity ... [with this] forming part of the social and cultural connections which maintains positive mental well-being” (Schluter et al., 2020, p.



7). Various research has identified cultural practices and language as important markers of identity (Ana'e 1998; Manuela & Sibley 2014; Mila-Schaaf, 2010; Tiatia 1998).

One example of this is the experience of many of us raised by Pacific parents in non-Pacific countries exposed to words from 'back home' that have no direct translation in English but which one understands perfectly. One such Hawaiian word is *maha'oe*, a term describing a situation where a child, for instance, asks for something out of turn. One may try to explain that word in English by saying that it means this or that, kind of this or kind of that, but this word is so much more. *Maha'oe* applies in particular situations. It indicates one aspect of the right way for a person to interact with other human beings, something taught to little children to be understood and practised through life, but it also has close links to other, fundamental principles of Hawaiian culture including *aloha* and *ha'aha'a*. We may sum these terms up, respectively, as love and humility, but these are also complex cultural terms that cannot be fully translated into English and closely link to still other complex words and values.

Ultimately, such words need to be lived to be fully understood. One may be best taught such values by one's parents through storytelling and over time rather than from a textbook. Given the reality of academic imperialism, we should not privilege textbooks with footnotes over indigenous sources including genealogy and lived histories (Hereniko, 2000). While it may be a struggle to fully express to non-Pacific Oceanic language speakers what that word means, those raised with that word know its meaning well from the living but also over generations. Similarly, *sautu*, a seemingly small Fijian word, means something like holistic and communal wellbeing, but that is a greatly simplified version as the faces of Fijian colleagues indicate with a scrunch or wince when those of us who are not native speakers of Fijian do not quite get it right. The term itself is, at its core, large in its collectiveness, holistic nature and relational reach. Both *maha'oe* and *sautu* sit within particular historical, communal, cultural and social contexts which are sometimes extremely specific but also expansive.

The languages of the Pacific have been lived over generations, having travelled and traversed geography over millennia due to voyaging. The peoples who settled Moananuiākea were oral cultures. They did not carry books or iPads but instead virtual libraries residing in memory and language. For Native Hawaiians, creation chants containing one's genealogy and 800 generations of time were memorised and passed down from generation to generation only orally (see, for instance, *The Kumulipo* translated by Beckwith, 1978). These libraries housed and conveyed in language established one's place in the community in relation to the *aina* (land), one's rights, privileges and relations. Cutting-edge science, technology, engineering and mathematics as well as history, leadership, people management and many other knowledges were kept in these virtual libraries which one carried with them everywhere.

Language and culturally safe and responsive research

At a fundamental level, of course, language is essential to ongoing *talanoa* and *vā*. Oral language remains important to relationships between, and to research by, with and about, the descendants of Pacific voyagers. Most Pacific research methodologies rely on relational interaction, especially storied knowledge transmission. Timoti Vaoleti described his *talanoa* methodology as "ecological, oral and interactive ... allow[ing] for more *mo'oni* (pure, real, authentic) information [and] a cultural synthesis of the information, stories, [and] emotions" (Vaoleti, 2006; discussed in Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 334). *Talanoa* is also dialogue based. Similarly, the *fa'afaletui* methodology recognises "the various strands of 'talk' that emerge from a *talanoa* session" (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p.334, discussing Tamasese et al., 2005). Talk is both method and knowledge in various methodologies. This is apparent in methodologies that literally rely on both, such as *tok stori*, a Melanesian culture-grounded relational mode of communication which can be used in research, teaching or leadership (Sanga et al., 2018).

In such exchanges of knowledge, the boundaries between researcher, subject and participant blur as the researcher becomes the learner. Pacific people may then be seen as experts and guardians of

insider even sacred knowledge where access needs to be carefully negotiated. Various Pacific methodologies, including Konai Helu-Thaman's (1993) *kakala* methodology, prioritise the talk, stories and knowledge of Pacific participants over the expertise and academic qualifications of the researcher. In contrast to colonised research methodologies which have devalued Pacific methodologies and knowledges or pathologically stolen from and exploited subjects, communities and knowledges, Pacific research methodologies generally seek to respect and protect the *vā* between people. The *teu le va* approach, for instance, is aimed at "directive action" through "optimal relationships" between stakeholders, "collective knowledge generation" and a focus on "optimal Pasifika education and development outcomes" (Airini et al., 2010, p. 2). The researcher, Pacific or not, retains a responsibility for the cultural safety of participants and for 'custodianship', 'stewardship' or 'guardianship' of the knowledge that has been shared with them. Such responsibility will be 'complex' as the result of 'relational positionality' (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020).

Pacific research methodologies utilise Pacific language to ground conceptual frameworks, data gathering and other aspects of a culturally appropriate and responsive process in metaphor and culture, in what has been called the "linguistic and mythical footprints of connection" (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 201). Such methodologies have a 'rootedness' in Pacific values, understandings, culture, history and genealogy but are also concerned with the decolonisation of indigenous research and knowledge (Smith 1999; Vaioleti, 2013). These methodologies are also "self-conscious" (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p.202). This is evident in concerns that naming methodologies—that is, choosing the very words and language that will encapsulate a research framework and relationships—"is not a passive or inconsequential activity" but has implications for *mana*, *whakapapa*, identity and relationships (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 199).

An ideal form of Pacific educational research has been described as

a 'doing thing', as opposed to being an internal—a 'thinking thing' (mind issue) only. Research is also a purposive activity towards community good, rather than merely a good, interesting thing to do. It is pragmatic and is not a stand-alone activity, but one that is integral to the ways of life and practice of Pacific communities and influenced by these. The title [Research as praxis] draws attention to the importance of critically lining research to the educational experiences of Pacific peoples, using appropriate tools of study that ensure that rigorous critique takes place. (Penetito & Sanga, 2003, p. 25)

Concern for the source of the knowledge as well as the end user and benefit to the end user is a constant concern of the literature. Beyond informed consent prior to research, doing rather than just thinking would seem to require the researcher to consider utility, reciprocity and other values that envision what will or should come into being at the completion of projects for communities and collectives. In this vein, we suggest that a 'rigorous critique' will include the weighing-in of research participants, subjects and end users on what is published. Such a critique can only happen if the language of publication allows stakeholders to be fully informed and literate. Only then is rigorous scrutiny possible. With such scrutiny—with a fully-informed end as well as outset in mind—research involving Pacific knowledges, cultures, communities and people may avoid some of the previous concerns. Rather than keep an abstracted distance from its subjects and stakeholders, research and researchers will be able to better engage in more meaningful relationships with them in a way that better aligns with Pacific values, cultures and relationships.

Medium of instruction, discrimination and education

Language is an ongoing site of colonisation and discrimination. At a recent Rotuman Language Week event, our University of Waikato Pacific community had the chance to listen to two aunts in the Rotuman community speak to our students about the need to preserve and revitalise the Rotuman

language. As many may know, the Rotuman language is on the United Nations' list of "definitely endangered" languages, with an estimate of less than 15,000 speakers left (UNESCO, 2021). The two sisters shared stories of receiving 'hidings' for speaking their own language in school as young girls and, subsequently, wanting to leave school as soon as they could, despite their parents' efforts to keep them in education. With great humour and grace, these women, now in their sixties, shared how they had later come to New Zealand where some Rotuman people forgot how to speak Rotuman and children born in New Zealand did not speak Rotuman in an environment where everyone spoke English.

The experiences of these aunties are too familiar in various parts of the Pacific and countries across the globe where indigenous peoples were subjected to 'colonisation by education'. Pacific, Māori and many other indigenous peoples share a common history whereby

colonial powers and especially settler governments routinely removed, or limited, decision-making about education from indigenous peoples and replaced existing institutions, pedagogies, curricula, and, crucially, the medium of instruction—indigenous languages—with institutions, pedagogies, curricula and language deliberately designed to 'civilise', assimilate and discriminate against indigenous learners. Where indigenous peoples had previously governed themselves in education, 'governments', and 'states' now prescribed the inherently unequal treatment of indigenous learners, denigrated indigenous identity and knowledge, and took indigenous children hostage. Although seemingly arbitrary in its unfairness and changeability, the replication of eerily similar law and policy across various settler societies, distant countries and centuries of time reveals something akin to an off-the-shelf blueprint for subduing indigenous peoples. (Hemi, 2021, p. 472)

In fact, many of us who are of Pacific heritage have grandparents or parents who were corporally punished for speaking the language of their families, homes and core communities, who went on to have children and/or grandchildren who speak English and not our native languages. Hawai'i and Fiji have personal relevance to the authors but also illustrate the range of experience with similar outcomes of language loss impacting indigenous peoples through language and education law and policy.

Hawai'i

In the mid-19th century, as the Hawaiian monarchy became increasingly limited in their powers by law and also sought to adopt Western ways in order to solidify the place of the Hawaiian Kingdom in the world, Richard Armstrong, second minister of education and former American missionary, established an education system which included boarding schools designed to teach indigenous children to be "subservient" and Western (Okiihiro, 2008 pp. 98–133). Like many of his contemporaries, Armstrong believed that Native Hawaiians were "filthy", "ignorant", "lazy" heathen who "hardly know how to do anything" (Okiihiro, 2008, p. 99). The goal was to "Christianise and civilize" the Native Hawaiian child, and to overcome the "deficiency of character" inherent to their *race*. As with African-Americans, Native Hawaiians were portrayed as inherently weak and corruptible, mentally and morally, and, therefore, more in need of "industry" (Okiihiro, 2008, p. 114).

Armstrong similarly believed that "[e]specially in the weak tropical races, idleness like ignorance breeds vice" (Okiihiro, 2008, p. 114). Thus, Armstrong's education system trained young Hawaiian males to become "Westernized, Christianized teachers, preachers and missionaries and young Hawaiian females to be their wives. It also sought to separate Native Hawaiian children from the perceived barbarism of Hawaiian language and culture" (Okiihiro, 2008, pp. 107–111).

The Hawaiian monarchy supported learning English believing that it would help Kanaka Maoli to be on an equal footing with foreigners (Souza & Walk, 2015, p. 1264), but English-only policy was closely connected with colonisation by education and a central feature in Armstrong's policies. The first

government-sponsored public school opened in 1851, taught the “three Rs”¹ in English and was followed by others which began to compete with private Hawaiian-medium schools for staff and resources. Armstrong’s successors “fiscal[ly] neglect[ed]” Hawaiian-medium schools, claiming that there would soon be little need for such instruction as Native Hawaiians were a supposedly dying race (Lucas, 2000; Schutz, 1994). Following the overthrow of the Native Hawaiian-led constitutional monarchy by American businessmen and agents of the US government in 1893, the Hawaiian language was aggressively targeted. The Act of June 8, 1896 of the ‘Republic of Hawaii’ officially mandated that

the English language shall be the medium and basis of instruction in all public and private schools, provided that where it is desired that another language shall be taught in addition to the English language, such instruction may be authorized by the Department, either by its rules, the curriculum of the schools, or by direct order in any particular instance. Any schools that shall not conform to the provisions of this section shall not be recognized by the Department Act of June 8, 1896, ch 7, s 30. (Codified 1897 Haw Comp Laws s 123)

In targeting the Hawaiian language, this law targeted Native Hawaiians generally but especially Native Hawaiian educators, learners and education, decimating Hawaiian-medium schools (Lucas, 2000). Native Hawaiian children were corporally punished and Native Hawaiian teachers dismissed for speaking Hawaiian in the classroom or even on school grounds. Flow-on effects of the law included the decline of once numerous *nūpepa*—Hawaiian language newspapers. Literacy rates fell dramatically amongst Native Hawaiians who had achieved a 75 percent literacy rate in Hawaiian language by 1853, only a few decades after the first primer was created in Hawaiian (Lucas, 2000, p. 2, 9). As the Native Hawaiian population dropped dramatically due to disease and other ills (Osorio, 2002), numbers of Hawaiian speakers also dropped dramatically.

Native Hawaiians were increasingly under pressure to learn English because it had become the language of business and politics and was seen as “an immediate stepping-stone to success and power in the rapidly changing world that intruded on their own” (Souza & Walk, 2015, p. 1264), but many Native Hawaiians resisted. Until the late 19th century, education in Hawai‘i remained largely community-based and taught by Native Hawaiians in the Hawaiian language. Community-run schools were “sites of struggle” in terms of governance, curriculum and language (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2009, pp. 57–59). Despite the power of law, Native Hawaiians actively resisted colonisation by education and language prohibition (Beamer 2008; Osorio, 2002; Preza, 2010; Walk, 2008). As described by the State of Hawai‘i Department of Education, “Hawaiian language would not be heard in schools for the next four generations” (Hawai‘i Department of Education, 2021), but it would experience a renaissance in the 1970s and 1980s due to grassroots efforts by Native Hawaiians and greater legal recognition and protection (Hemi, 2016).

Fiji

Colonisation by education in Fiji has differed in some ways to that experienced in Hawai‘i. Indigenous language has never been prohibited in education but has been superseded or marginalised by English as the language of modernity and progress. Racism in another form has similarly led to poorer outcomes in education.

Benign neglect, stereotyping and racism are apparent in 19th century Fijian colonial education policy. The arrival of indentured Indian sugar cane workers between 1879 and 1920 essentially took much of the British colonial government’s attention off *iTaukei* (indigenous Fijians), leaving the majority to essentially ‘fend for themselves’ in terms of education in their rural village settings. Gillion (1977) states that the colonial government of the day regarded *iTaukei* “at best, as irrelevant to the progress of Fiji as their part in the mainstream of economic life was minimal” (p. 10). Tavola (1991)

cites an early “dispatch from [the] Governor to [the] Secretary of State for the Colonies (CO83/225/8)” (original not dated) who stated “the Fijians [*iTaukei*] are an agricultural people. There is, therefore, nothing in the racial composition of the Fijians [*iTaukei*] to warrant their education in European schools either in or out of Fiji” (p. 19).

By the 1930s, colonial attitudes had begun to temper, although not markedly. White (2001) adds that the focus of the government for *iTaukei* was to prepare them

for a rural village life steeped in subsistence farming ... Thus, a curriculum in rural district and committee schools with increased emphasis on agricultural production complemented the objectives of colonial policies. As Fijians [*iTaukei*] were largely confined to the villages and agriculture, formal education was not oriented toward instruction in skills that would prepare students for employment in urban areas. The exception was the formal education provided for Fijians [*iTaukei*] of chiefly descent who, it was envisaged, would take on civil service positions or assume leadership roles in the Fijian Administration. (pp. 310–311)

Like Native Hawaiians, most Fijians who received an education were, at best, being trained for particular roles in society. Those roles were limited by class but also by race with an inherent presumption that *iTaukei* were not necessarily fit for education.

Agency also played a part in the *iTaukei* experience. Tavola (1991) recognises that *iTaukei* took pride in academic opportunities and the successes of their chiefly oversights and relied on the government to “represent their interests” (p. 21). Cultural practice and language were retained in education but were not seen as progressive. *The Spate Report* in 1959 was aimed at advising the Colonial Government on economic reform and progress towards Fiji independence (for more details, see Aporosa, 2014). In his report, Spate (1959) concluded that *iTaukei* were contributing very little to the country’s economic development and recommended a need for *iTaukei* “technical education” (p. 97).

Later policy allowed Fijian culture and language to remain in schools but also favoured the trajectory of English as the medium of instruction. In subsequent decades, Fijian language and culture were still not necessarily banned from schools (Scarr, 1983; Subramani, 2000; Tavola, 1991), but it would become most closely associated with a rural or local variation on mainstream schooling. In recent decades, the English language has been seen, as in the case of 19th century Hawaii, as the “discourse of schooling” (Puamau, 1999, p. 15) as well as the medium of business, successful careers, economic progress and modernity (Vakatawa & Meciusela, 2009; also see Fiji Times, 2016). Conversely, Fijian language continues to be a medium of instruction in situations which reflect room for “a local bias” (Scarr, 1983, p. 340; Tavola, 1991, pp. 21–22). Mainstream policy, however, is increasingly focused on English-only instruction, described by Aporosa from his experience as a secondary school teacher in the early 2000s as “a concerted effort for teaching solely in English even in rural schools (Aporosa, 2014, pp. 59–62). This duality and tension are not easy to negotiate (Williams, 2000, p. 188). In the meantime, loss of language, including dialects, has become an increasing concern (Vakatawa & Meciusela, 2009; also see Fiji Times, 2016).

In both the Hawaiian and Fijian cases, English became the language of education, learning and ‘progress’ while indigenous languages were, at least to some extent, marginalised. Medium of instruction drove a prioritisation of English closely linked to the changing medium of expression in law, business and everyday life. While the agency of indigenous peoples in these scenarios is evident in various responses to educational law and policy, language law and policy often put significant pressure on agency and even oppressed indigenous Pacific peoples to adopt English. In the case of Native Hawaiians, speaking that language in a classroom was punishable. In both cases, the loss of languages, especially in education, contributed to poorer, more limited educational outcomes for Pacific peoples over generations (Aporosa, 2014, 2016; Hemi, 2016, 2017, 2021).

Language, discrimination and assimilation

In settler nations, colonisation by education was frequently violent and had traumatic intergenerational impact. Armstrong's boarding schools in Hawai'i would eventually inspire the creation of the infamous boarding school system which essentially took Native American children hostage and tried to forcibly assimilate them into American culture at locations such as the Carlisle Boarding School (Okiihiro, 2008). These institutions, which were often part-workhouse, were designed to 'kill the Indian' in order to 'save the child' from their families, communities and cultures. Language denial played a key role in severing indigenous children from their families, communities and cultures. Many children would return home after long separation only to find that they could no longer understand their families (Hemi, 2016, 2021). Linguistic denial and denigration were part of a raft of injustices against indigenous children including neglect, sexual abuse and homicide. What happened at Canadian boarding schools in the 19th century and beyond was so severe that the kind of truth and reconciliation process frequently utilised after mass human rights abuses and civil wars was established to work through the history. In its final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada linked physical and linguistic genocide (Hemi, 2021). Sadly, as this paper goes to press, media are reporting the discovery of

751 unmarked graves at the site of a former residential school in Saskatchewan [Canada ... which came just] weeks after the remains of 215 children were found at a similar residential school in British Columbia... [The latest find at] The Marieval Indian Residential School was operated by the Roman Catholic Church from 1899 to 1997... It was one of more than 130 compulsory boarding schools funded by the Canadian government and run by religious authorities ... with the aim of assimilating indigenous youth. An estimated 6,000 children died while attending these schools, due in large part to the squalid health conditions inside. Students were often housed in poorly built, poorly heated, and unsanitary facilities. (BBC, 2021)

The so-called 'Stolen Generations' of Australia included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly taken from their homes and families and aggressively assimilated by a settler government. In each case, indigenous languages were directly assaulted as a means of assimilation which severed children physically, socially, culturally and linguistically from their families and *turangawaewae*² (Rapatahana & Bunce, 2012, p. 83, 86).

As the experience of Māori learners under settler and successive governments has also shown, assimilative, discriminative and even integration-based education law and policy which prohibited medium of instruction had multigenerational impact on indigenous peoples, including historical trauma and low achievement. For Māori, loss of language has been causally linked with "educational underachievement for decades" (Tomlins-Jahnke & Te Rina Warren 2013, cited in Tawhai and Gray-Sharp 2013, p. 23). Language loss leads to greater "capability deprivation", diminished life chances and poverty (Skutnabb-Kangas, cited in Rapatahana & Bunce, 2012, p. xv). Researchers have demonstrated a causal link between disparities in rates of diabetes, heart disease, mental health issues, alcoholism and the adverse childhood experiences experienced by Native Americans in boarding schools. The colonisation in Hawai'i has been causally linked by medical researchers to higher levels of resilience but also disproportionate levels of 'chronic stress' and higher 'allostatic loads' impacting Native Hawaiians over lifetimes and generations (Hemi, 2017; Liu & Alameda, 2011). It is possible to transmit chronic stress over generations due to epigenetic changes, so that the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of boarding school students may inherit the trauma (Hemi, 2017; also see Szyf et al., 2010, p. 26).

In the wake of colonisation by education, Pacific and other indigenous languages are considered to be human rights essential to the realisation of fundamental human rights including self-determination, equality and non-discrimination in international law (Hemi, 2021). A range of international conventions,

treaties and declarations have recognised that indigenous peoples, including those in the Pacific, have rights to speak, teach and learn in their own languages and not to be discriminated against on the basis of language (see, for instance, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966; the Minorities Declaration 1992 in United Nations, 1992; and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 in United Nations, 2007).

States are to prevent, among other forms of discrimination, “[a]ny action which has the aim or effect of depriving ... [indigenous individuals] ... of their cultural values or ethnic identities ... [a]ny form of forced assimilation or integration [and] [a]ny form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them” (United Nations, 2007, Art 8(2), a,d,e). Indigenous communities similarly retain rights to “practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs” (United Nations, 2007, Art 11(1)), “manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies” (United Nations, 2007, Art 12(1)) and “revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations ... [community] history ... languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures” (United Nations, 2007, Art 13(1)).

Under Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007, p. 10), the right to education includes the following:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

...

3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Language rights feature prominently in these rights guarantees and are closely connected to fundamental human rights and guarantees including equality, non-discrimination and self-determination (Hemi, 2021).

Language, histories and the need for validation

The NZ Ministry of Education is currently conducting *fono* with the Pacific community regarding the NZ History Curriculum. The current Government has said that it wants to make the curriculum compulsory for all students in New Zealand. A panel of experts, including Pro-Vice Chancellor Associate Professor Damon Salesa from the University of Auckland, a Samoan historian, have been part of the process. Associate Professor Salesa has stressed the need for the curriculum to go beyond events like the Mau in Samoa and the Dawn Raids in Aotearoa New Zealand to the contributions of Pacific peoples to Aotearoa over generations (Universities New Zealand, 2021). Pacific peoples in New Zealand have long memories of discriminatory history including the enslavement of Pacific peoples from places including Hawai‘i, Tonga, and Fiji sometimes euphemistically called ‘blackbirding’ (Hamilton, 2016; Horne, 2007). Pacific New Zealanders remember the Citizenship (Western Samoa) Act 1982 (NZ) that singled out Samoan New Zealanders as the only immigrants who were denied dual citizenship, essentially forcing them to choose between being a New Zealander or a Samoan. These histories still cause pain, anger and a sense of injustice in the memories of older and subsequent generations and complex issues for researchers engaging with these histories and communities.

In fact, history has been a particularly insidious site of assimilation and discrimination. Textbooks and curriculum have historically been used to denigrate, dismiss and re-write the history of Pacific and other indigenous peoples. Rotuman scholar and playwright Vilsoni Hereniko described how Western

histories demonstrate ‘academic imperialism’ characterised by a dismissiveness and inhospitality towards other knowledges and ‘truths’. By contrast, Hereniko (2000) describes how he was taught history by his father through *hanuju* (the Rotuman art of storytelling and teaching) which were values-based, made room for debate and dialogue, and enabled one to sense ‘the unseen’. In contrast to Western histories, so-called ‘mythologies’, genealogies and relationships act much like footnotes to provide authority in Rotuman histories (Hereniko, 2000).

As discussed above, languages are vehicles of knowledges. Inhospitality towards Pacific languages and dismissiveness towards Pacific truths may actually act to the detriment of historical accuracy. The work of Kanaka Maoli scholar, Noenoe Silva, for instance, has strongly refuted previous presumptions in histories written by non-Hawaiians that Native Hawaiians did not resist the illegal overthrow of their government in 1893, subsequent occupation of their country by foreign powers, or language prohibitions. In fact, Silva found that Native Hawaiians actively sought legal redress, formed political groups, maintained their language and culture despite discriminatory legal prohibitions, and otherwise made efforts to resist the occupation of their country and remain a distinct people from the overthrow in 1893 (Silva, 2004). The crucial difference in Silva’s approach was that she spoke ‘*ōlelo Hawai‘i*’—Hawaiian language—and went to Hawaiian language sources for her research where there was plentiful evidence (Silva, 2004; Hemi, 2019).

Reflecting on her research, Silva (2004) asked:

Why does it matter that we read what Kanaka Maoli wrote in their own language a hundred and more years ago? We might just as well ask: How do a people come to know who they are? How do a colonized people recover from the violence done to their past by the linguicide that accompanies colonialism? [emphasis added] (p. 3)

Part of her answer included:

The epistemology of the school system is firmly Western in nature: what is written counts. When the stories can be validated, as happens when scholars read the literature in Hawaiian and make the findings available to the community, people begin to recover from the wounds caused by the disjuncture in their consciousness and caused by supposedly historical events [emphasis added]. (p. 3)

As one of the authors has written elsewhere (Hemi, 2019), validation in the wake of colonisation by education implies accuracy, including in the form of ‘confirmation’, ‘corroboration’ and ‘testimony’; a reconciliation of non-abstracted, sometimes “gritty and uncomfortable” facts; acceptability to and resonance with indigenous peoples and within indigenous communities; and consensus amongst indigenous peoples. As Silva’s work demonstrates, such validation may only be possible where Pacific languages and Pacific scholars are engaged in the research. As a kind of intersectional interrogation of knowledges and truths, validation through language and stakeholder engagement is essential to *talanoa-vā*.

Stakeholder positioning and vulnerability

Engaging a number of Pacific stakeholder groups in a Pacific research journal is essential for other reasons beyond accuracy and validation.

Aporosa’s experience in Fiji provides an example. Following the completion of his Master’s degree, he translated (with the assistance of a friend) a summary of his findings to provide a language-friendly record for his research participants. That summary then evolved into a Fijian-English language parallel paper prepared for publication aimed at providing for a wider Fijian audience. Although this bilingual work seemingly increased the reach of the research, it met several hurdles, including a lack of publishers who would publish it. After many months and repeated declines from publishers who stated

they published solely in the English language, Aporosa encouraged *Domodomo*, a journal published by the Fijian Museum, to publish the article (Aporosa, 2010). When reflecting on the experience, Aporosa (2021) remembered:

I was surprised at the amount of stonewalling I encountered. This included a prominent Pacific-focused journal, with the Editor saying their [journal] constitution stipulates they publish only in English. Even *Domodomo* were a little hesitant at first. I expected they would have jumped at this because the paper was in our [Fijian] language. There seems to be this unquestioned and accepted idea out there that academic publications are supposed to be in English. (Personal communication)

Fortunately, this was not the proverbial end of the story. At a recent discussion, Aporosa also reflected on what it was like to take the bilingual article now published in the *Domodomo* publication back to Fiji:

I have taken research summaries home to the village in Fiji and can assure you that when locals see it is written in English, that research is mostly put to good use starting the fire to cook dinner. Conversely, when I took the *Domodomo* summary home, because it was written in Fijian, I watched this start fires of *talanoa*; discussion that went on for weeks. Even small things led to alternative types of discourse. For instance, we don't have a word in Fijian for 'kavalactones'—or the lactone compounds in kava that cause kava's psychotropic effects—so I came up with 'kavaleketoni'. This one word created a lot of *talanoa* around kava chemistry linked to kavalactones, which most had never heard of before. But it also led to some of the villagers using the word themselves in sentences, particularly when joking with one another.

I remember the first time that happened [joking using 'kavaleketoni']; it was on the day I took a few copies of the *Domodomo* summary to kava in the village hall. Someone got cheeky to their *tavale* (cross-cousin), and that *tavale* responded, *na gunuvi ni kavaleketoni me itotogi*, which literally meant the cheeky one was going to be punished by being forced to drink a 'cup of kavalactones' (instead of a cup of kava). The guffaw by those present in the hall was hilarious—yeah, maybe you had to be there [chuckle]. And even today, more than 10 years on, people at home are still using that created word, with one of my jokester *tavale* calling me *Doctor Kavaleketoni* last time I was in Fiji.

The point I'm trying to make is, while they may joke about things like *kavaleketoni*, it was the *talanoa* and learning that resulted, only made possible in that the villagers were able to read research about themselves and their culture in their own language. That *talanoa* then led to new knowledge creation as themes and ideas were unpacked. It also added new levels of *veiyaloni* (vā) as *talanoa* gained depth and ideas were wrestled. See, our people want to know what is being written about them in research, they also want to be able to pull that research apart and add to it to increase both local understanding and knowledge systems. This can't happen if we give our participants and research communities findings written in English. They won't even bother reading them; and anyway, why should they when English is not their language? Our participants give their knowledge freely to us as researchers, knowledge that often results in us gaining higher degree qualifications and sometimes prestige and academic notoriety. We then go and teach what we have learnt to others as though we are authors and masters of the knowledge, knowledge that doesn't actually belong to us, knowledge that has been entrusted to us. So, it's only reasonable that we reciprocate that knowledge gift and entrustment in a way that is fair, equitable and most importantly, understandable to the actual owners. (Personal communication, 2021)

We propose that incidents like this, in which Pacific research participants and communities are able to read summary findings in their own language, should be the norm as opposed to the exception.

The number of articles, book chapters, reports, books, and other publications which have been written *about* Pacific people, communities and issues of importance are probably innumerable. We are not statisticians and would not presume to know where to begin; however, subjects like climate change, which investigate complex, even wicked problems that are interdisciplinary and international and frequently discuss the Pacific as a kind of ground zero, may on their own generate any number of streams of research and publication about the Pacific. The gross majority of these publications are likely to be in non-Pacific languages, where those from outside Pacific communities speak about issues which are disproportionately impacting Pacific peoples in real-time. This raises a number of issues in terms of stakeholder positioning in the *talanoa-vā*.

First, medium of publication may impact data sovereignty issues and otherwise lead to the exploitation of Pacific peoples and communities. Vestiges of colonisation by education and blatant discrimination are too often evident in the research produced and published by educational institutions, including universities. A particularly illustrative example occurred when a member of the Havasupai people of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, USA, attended a lecture where she discovered that her university had been improperly using blood samples originally provided by the tribe to improve health outcomes to destroy their creation stories and to negatively portray them in terms of mental health. The university was profiting from their own research and from sharing the samples with other universities (Mello & Wolf, 2010). Similar incidents occurring with other minority groups (see, for instance, the increasing scholarly and other discussion on Henrietta Lacks: Skloot, 2010; Sodeke & Powell, 2019; and recent coverage of the possession and teaching use of the remains of African American children killed in the MOVE bombing by an American university: Pilkington, 2021) occur when vulnerable stakeholders do not know what is happening. An inability to read the research may similarly prevent affected stakeholders, including those being studied, from being aware of all implications and outcomes. An inability to read the research in one's own language, in fact, increases the likelihood of unethical behaviour, including exploitation, occurring.

Some of these incidents have inspired best practice guidelines requiring a number of ethical considerations to be considered (see, for instance, Claw et al., 2018). While genomics provides a dramatic example of how these things can go horribly wrong, any research, including educational research, may become more ethical through medium of publication. In New Zealand, the Health Research Council guidelines for Pacific research are often cited. These include a number of principles including *respect, cultural competency, meaningful engagement, utility, rights, reciprocity, balance, protection, capacity-building* and *participation*. Most of these principles will benefit from translation into the language of relevant stakeholders and communities. For instance, balance includes a stipulation that “[a]ny research partnerships formed with Pacific peoples should be equitable and fair for both parties, engendering symmetry in the balance of power”, while capacity-building requires “the empowerment of the Pacific community” (Health Research Council, 2019, pp. 1–2.) Both symmetry and empowerment may be enhanced where Pacific languages are given an equal place in the published research and the research becomes more accessible to Pacific people.

Mila-Schaaf (2009) describes ethical research with Pacific peoples as a

negotiated space [that] relies on grace, goodwill, cognisance of unequal power relations and the ability to move beyond the stalemate of both historical grievance and contemporary inequities. This is consistent with what Okere et al. describe as ‘healing the breach between local knowledge practices and other civilizational systems of knowledge’ by ‘building bridges’ and ‘border-linking’. (p. 138)

Publishing the research in the language of the people should make researchers more accountable to those people.

Second, such situations may also raise fundamental issues about the place of Pacific participants in standard ethics applications. For instance, researchers are required to gain ethics approval prior to engaging with participants and undertaking data collection. The researcher completes an ethics application, which typically requires that the applicant state how they will report back to participants and communities on their research. This may or may not include stipulations about the language of reporting back. Some universities refer to the need for participants to ‘comprehend’ the information, but language is also not necessarily stipulated at this point. In our experience, feedback to Pacific participants is often provided in English (personal communication, Aporosa, 2021), leaving the door open for various interpretations of communication and comprehension. The focus of ethics applications are also participants rather than end-users, meaning that dissemination may exclude entire cohorts of stakeholders at the tail end, even prior to questions of literacy.

Third, medium of publication can impact the development and research trajectories of Pacific researchers. Pacific scholars face inherently unfair decisions when it comes to language and their research and career paths. A new and emerging Pacific scholar who requested a meeting for advice on her research plan is just one example. Unlike native speakers of English and many New Zealand-born scholars, her dilemma was not just which research journals that she should try to publish in given her field but also which language she should publish in. Given that most peer-reviewed research journals in her field are written in English, she decided to focus on research in English publications, despite her desire to write in her mother tongue for the benefit of her own people back home in the Islands. Whilst many Pacific academics may continue to need to publish first in a language other than their own, they will at least be able to also publish their peer-reviewed articles in their own language.

As New Zealand universities grapple with the low numbers of Pacific academics and researchers (Naepi, 2019), we are becoming more aware of stories like these and the hard choices that Pacific researchers may face in their career trajectory which other researchers and academics do not. Such choices create inequities demonstrating aspects of indirect and systemic discrimination—that is, discrimination, not by direct stipulation of law or rules, but discrimination resulting, nonetheless, from the way things are structured and done (Hemi, 2021)—such as the continuing centrality of the English language in research in New Zealand and other settler states. Whilst English remains the everyday language of business and education, the hard choices of Pacific researchers just seem unfair.

Fourth, these issues have local implications for us as a university, particularly in terms of strategic commitments to engage with and build relationships with various stakeholders but also to grow and attract Pacific researchers and academics (Hemi, 2021).

Finally, such issues punctuate existing well-known research issues for Pacific communities, namely:

- Low numbers of Pacific researchers available to conduct research with communities.
- Ongoing need to decolonise methodologies, including exploring power differentials.
- Frequently studied communities with a lower level of trust in researchers and institutions.
- Impact of low-level trust on data and research quality.
- Utility of research—including whether it can lead to real-time outcomes for Pacific communities.
- Ongoing lack of meaningful engagement and dialogue with participants and end users.

These issues will only become more pressing as the gaps and disparities affecting Pacific people in education and other fields continue to exist and grow, thereby generating the need for more research on Pacific people in these fields. In contrast, publishing research about Pacific people, communities and issues in Pacific Oceanic languages may enhance the following benefits of indigenous-centred research discussed by Leone Samu Tui (2020), including:

- Re-centr[ing] indigenous knowledge systems.
- Return[ing] agency ... [to] ... “participating communities.

- Reject[ing] racism ... [especially the] ... blind epistemological racism that exists in the Western research paradigm.
- Reconfigur[ing] research paradigms.

In Our Language: Journal of Pacific Research

With these challenges and opportunities in mind and under the auspices of the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, the University of Waikato launched a brand-new online academic journal at the Chancellor's *Veiqaraqaravi Vakavanua* ceremony in March 2021 (see article in this Special Issue entitled 'Grounding Pacific practice: *Fono at the Fale* and *Veiqaraqaravi Vakavanua*'). The *In Our Language: Journal of Pacific Research* ([IOL] see www.iol.ac.nz) is now available to publish existing peer-reviewed research, reviews, poems, short stories and essays that have been directly translated—typically from English—to a Pacific Oceanic language. Pacific scholars, as well as scholars whose work relates to the Pacific, are warmly invited to submit their work. The goal of *IOL* is to provide an ethical and culturally appropriate means of reporting back to research communities and participants, Pacific stakeholders, researchers, students, consultation groups and policy makers in their native tongue. The journal's peer review process focuses on translation quality given that all pieces have previously been peer-reviewed.

The journal is the brainchild of Dr S. Apo Aporosa. Dr Keakaokawai Hemi is the co-editor. The journal's editorial board has attracted notable scholars and practitioners including Associate Professor Albert Refiti, Associate Professor Kabini Sanga, Pediatric Surgeon and Pasifika Medical Association Executive Board Member Dr Jitoko Cama and Reverend Dr Matagi Jessop Vilitama, to name just a few. The board collectively represents multicultural, multilingual and multinational Pacific and scholarly voices with expertise in education. The calibre of the board also seems to represent the uniqueness and value of this opportunity to Pacific scholars and people. While members of the Board have kindly agreed to help with translation, authors are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues and students in the translation process, and therefore assisting Pacific academic capacity building. These collaborators are named as authors as opposed to translators due to the value of their input which is linked to traditional knowledge systems. Additionally, the collaborators are encouraged to consult with members of the community who also speak the language to assist academic and translation quality.

One of the main aims of this journal is to make knowledge created by the researchers more accessible and available to Pacific peoples and communities in Aotearoa and the Pacific. For this reason, *IOL* articles are free and open access. The layout of articles is designed to be user-friendly for Pacific peoples in various places, with varied access to internet coverage and access to data. For example, article pages have been deliberately formatted into columns to provide an enlargeable layout for viewing on smaller mobile devices. In this way, and others, dissemination is being imagined through the eyes and experience of Pacific people via digital technologies. As the journal develops, we will continue to look for ways to see the journal from the perspective of its end-users rather than the usual audience of academics and researchers.



Conclusion: Life in language

The photographic image on the front of the *IOL* journal cover (see previous section above) was shot by award-winning photographer and documentary filmmaker Todd M. Henry³³. Henry is also a University of Waikato alumnus and lead author on a paper within this Special Issue. Henry has described the photo thus:

I was fortunate to visit the Solomon Islands in December 2019 as lead photographer on an International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) photo mission. One evening after a full day of documenting cocoa production in southern Malaita, I took a stroll through the provincial capital of Auki. I slowly walked along the dusty road that leads away from the city's bustling central market and along Auki's Harbour. The sun set as I watched men sail into shore on small wooden fishing boats with the day's catch. Betel nut vendors busily stocked their stands, and locals sat in small groups along the waterfront chatting casually in Pijin. The setting sun created an attractive visual contrast between the harbour and the porch that extended over the shallows of this traditional leaf house. That silhouetted two young men sitting outside the house in discussion, and I exchanged a casual wave, smile, and a nod of the head. I may not have been compelled to shoot this photo if it wasn't for the short and silent acknowledgement of the space between them and myself through simple but universally understood gestures, but I felt that the essence of Auki as I experienced it at that very moment was able to be encapsulated within the frame of my lens. My photographic ethos places emphasis on capturing authentic moments while visually representing human connections and relationships.

The *vā* is also evident in the *IOL* logo. Graphic designer Kylie Mills-Lolohea generously gifted the image, drawing on the circular form around the top edge of a kava bowl, linking this to the *vā*-circle of relationship. Kylie then included traditional patterns from across Moananuiākea to show Pacific diversity and relationality. The fourth element, the conch, represents a Pacific tool and icon of communication, especially for communicating over distance. Both Todd and Kylie's work provide visual representations of language and *talanoa/vā*.



We believe that by providing Pacific researchers, peoples and communities with better access to such research their current contributions to the *talanoa-vā* will be more evident but also that they will be able to further contribute to *talanoa-vā*. By taking what has been written about Pacific people and translating it into their own languages we open the door to *talanoa-vā*, to be challenged by Pacific peoples and communities, to hold ourselves to a higher standard and to include them in the conversation. We envision opportunities to check inaccuracies, to corroborate and bear testimony and to find consensus, to validate histories and experiences, knowledges and truths. We hope to challenge and address histories of assimilation, discrimination and colonisation by education—and by research.

A famous Hawaiian *‘ōlelo no ‘eau* (proverb) says: *I ka ‘ōlelo ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo ka make* (In language there is life. In language, there is death). While Fiji does not have a *vosavosa vakaViti* (traditional proverb) speaking specifically to the language, a saying in Fijian has recently become popular in Aotearoa New Zealand. Evolving out of the COVID-19 period of 2020 and then designated as the 2020 Fiji Language Week idiom, *Noqu vosa, noqu isema bula* literally means *My language, my living link*. For both Native Hawaiians and *iTaukei*, language is closely connected to life and living.

In this imagining and exercise of *talanoa-vā* through Pacific language and initiatives such as *IOL*, we hope to ‘live’, to encourage ethical, culturally responsive and safe research practice, research characterised by utility and reciprocity for Pacific researchers and communities, and the enhancement and strengthening of cultural resilience through our languages.

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Notes

¹ The three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic (typically said as 'reading, writing, and 'rithmetic')

² A sense of identity and independence associated with having a particular home base (Māori online dictionary <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/>).

³ Todd M. Henry's photographic awards include (but are not limited to: Winner, 2019 Sony New Zealand World Photography Award; Runner-up, 2019 Australian Photography Mono Awards; Runner-up, 2018 New Zealand Geographic Photographer of the Year; 2020 Voyager Media Awards finalist for the Vice (NZ) Zealandia Series documentary 'Deportees of Tonga: Gangsters in paradise'ee