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Memoirs of an anthropological linguist

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Memoirs of an anthropological linguist

Andrew Pawley

I've had a fairly complicated career, in that I've taught at universities in several different countries and done research on quite a diverse range of topics¹ A large part of my research and teaching has been concerned with the description and historical development of Austronesian and Papuan languages (which together number about 2000, or almost a third of the world's languages) and with what linguistics and other disciplines can tell us about the history of human settlement in the Pacific. Other bits have to do with such matters as the role of speech formulae in natively like command of a language, short term memory constraints on encoding speech, Australian Vernacular English, English rhyming compounds, cricket commentaries, ethnobiology, and the craft of lexicography.

I've been very fortunate in having mentors and colleagues who provided inspiration and opportunities at various key points. I also owe a huge debt to my wife, Medina, who has managed family and job during my frequent lengthy absences on fieldwork and has spent years hosting speakers of Pacific Island languages who have come to live with us.

I was born in Sydney but had a mobile childhood. My parents, both graduates of the University of Sydney, separated when I was two. I did not meet my father again till I was 33; for most of his career as an agricultural economist he was based in Rome. My mother's profession as a high school teacher took her to many places and I attended about 12 different primary schools, chiefly in her home state of Tasmania and in New Zealand. High school years, from 1954 to 1957, were more stable - I went to Napier Boys High, on the east coast of the North Island of New Zealand. There I played quite a lot of sport and did English, French, History and Geography for University Entrance (UE) exams, and taught myself a bit of German on the side.

1958 was a watershed year. The connections I made in the course of that year pretty much determined the direction of the rest of my life. At the end of 1957, when I was 16, I decided to leave school and go to the University of Auckland to study anthropology. Customarily, after getting the UE qualification, students with an academic or sporting bent would stay on at high school for another year in order to study for national scholarship exams and/or play for the schools' elite sporting teams. I had no real chance of getting a national scholarship - there were only a few offered and they favoured maths and science students. Anyway, in those days there were no fees for university enrolment - all you had to do was 'get UE' and roll up. I had developed certain intellectual enthusiasms that I was keen to pursue at university. In particular I'd become interested in human origins as revealed by archaeology, the fossil record and study of the primates. While at high school I scoured the city library's shelves for books in this field. I remember reading Earnest

Hooton's *Up from the Ape* from cover to cover. I also read Mario Pei's *The Story of Language* but I don't recall that it made a deep impression.

Late in 1957 I gained an interest in the Maori language. This was less intellectual in origin – more of a case of *cherchez la femme* (or *les femmes*). That year my mother was employed to teach English and other subjects at Hukarere College for Maori Girls, a private boarding school in Napier. It fell to her to direct the school's annual theatrical production. She chose the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical 'Oklahoma!' and for some reason decided to rewrite the story and librettos to set it in China. I helped a bit with the rewriting and attended some of the rehearsals. I was captivated by the beautiful singing voices and lively personalities of the girls and thought "I'd like to know more about the Maori world. I must learn Maori". In December – though hampered by a 7 days a week holiday job on the night shift at Wattie's Canneries in Hastings – I made a start, studying H. W. Wills' *Lessons in Maori* and listening to Wiremu Parker's weekly news broadcasts in Maori, with the aim of enrolling in Maori Studies at Auckland.

At that time a BA degree at Auckland consisted of nine units encompassing about 20 'papers' (courses) divided between five different subjects, including at least one Stage III unit. I enrolled for Stage I Anthropology, English and French. My attempt to enrol in Stage I Maori Studies was rebuffed. Maori Studies was administratively placed with the Department of Anthropology but was a separate subject. The head of Maori Studies, Bruce Biggs, had just returned, having taken two years leave to do a PhD in Linguistics at the University of Indiana. He was a rather stern-looking man in his mid-30s. When I approached him for permission to enrol he asked "Do you have a UE pass in Maori?" To obtain that I would normally have had to do four years of Maori at high school. I said "No, I've been studying Maori for the last two months." – "That's not exactly the same, is it?" – "No, but I'm very keen!" – "Well, let's see what you've learnt." He asked me a few questions in Maori. I was able to reply quite well and he said "You seem to have some talent for this but I advise you to do a year's private study and we'll look at it again next year."

Despite the rebuff, Biggs engaged me to help him catalogue his large collection of tape recordings of Maori oratory and news broadcasts. For a few weeks I would come and work in a little annex to his office in the old bungalow that housed the Anthropology and Maori Studies staff. The academic staff consisted of two social anthropologists, one archaeologist, and one lecturer in Maori Studies, supplemented by a few part-time lecturers and tutors. Head of Department was Professor Ralph Piddington, an Australian social anthropologist, who came from Edinburgh to found the Department in 1950. The staff were friendly and inclusive and I was soon on first name terms with most of them.

Lectures in Anthropology I were a mixed bag. Jack Golson, a charismatic young Englishman, gave fascinating accounts of the archaeology of the Palaeolithic and the Middle-Eastern Neolithic. But my naïve visions of a career as a fossil hunting anthropologist faded. The part-time lecturer on the evolution of *Homo sapiens* was a dentist, whose weekly lecture at 7 pm generally consisted of telling us, for a whole hour, in a monotonous voice, to underline particular sentences or paragraphs in the textbook. Ralph (pronounced 'Rafe') Bulmer, a 6 foot 6 Englishman, newly arrived from doing a PhD at the Australian National University, gave excellent introductory lectures on social anthropology, largely illustrated by descriptions and slides of New Guinea highland communities among whom he had

done fieldwork. A few years later Bulmer invited me to join him in a research project in New Guinea, a project that continues to this day.

Anthro I also included a couple of lectures by Bruce Biggs on the linguistic analysis of Maori. His lecturing style could only be described as dry, but he outlined methods of analysis that were satisfyingly rigorous and clear and this clicked a switch in my brain.

Joining the University Maori Club took me into a new world. Maori students at the U. Auckland were not many in those days, maybe around 30 or 40. They were nearly all from country places and the Maori Club was their family away from home. The group had a very active social life. Every weekend there were parties at someone's house or flat, filled with singing, and one evening a week there were practices for concert party performances. I practised with the concert party and after a while joined their performances at venues in Auckland such as the Auckland Prison and the Maori Community Centre. I had never been part of anything like this and I loved it. Occasionally we made bus tours to visit Maori communities in distant parts of the country. These trips were a good introduction to the impressive formal rituals of Maori society. On arriving at a marae (ceremonial centre) our party, as guests, who were initially tapu (ceremonially restricted, set apart from the hosts), were greeted with a welcoming lament by women of the place paying respects to the dead, speeches were exchanged, after which the degree of tapu of the guests was reduced and we'd line up and press noses and shake hands with the hosts. After a communal meal the guests and hosts would retire to the wharenuī (large meeting house) where mattresses had been laid out and speech-making in Maori would resume and sometimes go on till the small hours. The speeches often touched on Maori societal and educational issues. At first most of the talk was over my head but my Maori steadily improved. I became aware that Maori oratory was highly structured and that to become a competent orator you had to know what things to say, how to say them – drawing on a body of speech formulae – and when to say them. It did not occur to me until later that this is the key to gaining competence in any linguistic genre. I hoped to become good enough one day to speak on the marae.

I also joined the Auckland branch of the NZ Archaeological Society and at Easter took part in a four-day dig directed by Jack Golson, at a 'Moahunter' (now called 'Archaic Maori') site on Motutapu, an island in the Hauraki Gulf. After the day's work and dinner we sat around a blazing campfire, sang NZ folk songs to Rudy Sunde's banjo and I listened while Golson and others debated Andrew Sharp's controversial recent book *Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific*, which argued forcefully against claims that in pre-contact times Polynesians made deliberate two-way and three-way voyages between remote island groups, such as Tahiti and Hawaii, or Tahiti and New Zealand. Over the next few years I took part in several more archaeological digs. I soon realised that I was not cut out to be an archaeologist – it involved too many kinds of hard work – but the stories archaeology tells continue to fascinate.

In that first year at university I got to know the three scholars who were to shape my career. Two have already been mentioned: Bruce Biggs and Ralph Bulmer. Late in the year I met another who was to become an important influence and my co-author in a number of papers: Roger Green, a dynamic young American archaeologist who was in NZ on a Fulbright scholarship. One of his favourite words

was 'triangulation'. He believed that combining the testimonies of archaeology with other historical disciplines, especially historical linguistics, would yield the most complete reconstruction of the history of Pacific Island peoples and their cultures. Green returned to Auckland in 1961 to take a position in Anthropology after Golson moved to Australia. He soon became a major force in Pacific archaeology.

That year also brought the beginning of a lifelong friendship with Viktor Krupa, then a student in Bratislava, Slovakia. Krupa wrote to Biggs seeking a pen-friend who might send him books on Maori language and culture, and his letter was pinned on the Department noticeboard. I obliged. Krupa became one of Europe's leading Polynesianists and in later years he travelled to the South Pacific and I travelled many times to Bratislava to visit him.

Becoming a linguist

In 1958 there were no undergraduate courses in linguistics offered at any university in New Zealand. However, during that year the Linguistic Society of New Zealand was established by Bruce Biggs and Jim Hollyman, the latter then a senior lecturer in French at Auckland. Hollyman took on the editorship of the Society's journal, *Te Reo*, published annually. I don't recall hearing about the Society until the following year, when half a dozen meetings were held in Auckland, attended mainly by a number of staff and students from the various language departments along with a solitary mathematician.

In 1959 Biggs introduced a course in descriptive linguistics as an optional paper in Anthro II. It consisted of a weekly lecture on method and theory, focusing on phonetics, phonology and grammar, and a weekly field methods session in which he and the students worked with a native speaker of Rotuman to analyse the phonology and bits of the morphology of that language. Rotuman, spoken on an island 400 km north-west of Fiji, is famous for the complexity of its sound system, including very productive metathesis. Our textbook was Gleason's *Introduction to descriptive linguistics*.

After taking this course I knew that I wanted to be a linguist and to specialise in research on indigenous languages of the Pacific. But getting a proper training let alone a job in linguistics wasn't a straightforward matter. At that time no one could have foreseen that the 1960s and 1970s would see a rapid expansion of universities in the Western world that would provide plentiful career opportunities in linguistics. There were no other courses in linguistics offered during my time as an undergraduate at Auckland, so I majored in Anthropology for the BA, taking courses in social anthropology and archaeology, and did the same for Master's papers in 1962. However, Biggs and Hollyman ensured that the University library acquired a substantial linguistics collection and I made good use of this. I also took Maori to Stage II (Stage III was not offered until some years later).

For the Master's thesis I was able to do something in linguistics – an analysis of the structure of the major types of syntactic phrases in Samoan, with Biggs as supervisor. The connection with Samoan began by accident early in 1960 when I became friends with some young Samoan men and women who lived near my lodgings in Mt Eden. I began to learn the language, initially as a fun thing, hanging out with them and with the few Samoan students at the U. Auckland, but soon the

study of Samoan became a combination of hobby and research. With Biggs' encouragement and critiques I published two short papers analysing features of Samoan phonology and grammar in *Te Reo* in 1960 and 1961. The MA thesis, submitted in mid 1963, followed quite closely the analytic model Biggs had used for his PhD dissertation on Maori at Indiana U. My external examiner was C.F. Voegelin, who had been his chief supervisor at Indiana. The thesis was published in 1966 as an issue of the American journal, *Anthropological Linguistics*, of which Voegelin was an editor.

In 1962 and 1963 I was employed as a junior lecturer to teach the Introduction to Linguistics course. A good place to find Pacific Island informants for the fieldwork methods component of these classes was St John's Theological College for Anglican priests and I engaged speakers of Bambatana (Solomon Is.) and Kiribati. I also taught a course in Samoan for an Adult Education evening class.

Papua New Guinea 1963

Early in 1963 came an unexpected development. Ralph Bulmer had begun a project studying the way of life of the Kalam people of the Upper Kaironk Valley, in the remote Schrader Range, Madang Province, in what is now Papua New Guinea. These were people whose first direct contact with the Australian Administration was very recent – in the 1950s – and for whom hunting and gathering was an important supplement to their horticulture. Bulmer's passion, along with social anthropology, was natural history, and his main aim was to study the Kalam's perception and use of their natural environment, collaborating with a linguist and with specialists in various biological disciplines – botanists, mammologists, herpetologists, etc. (he himself was an expert ornithologist). He had initially co-opted Bruce Biggs to be the project's linguist and Biggs had joined him on a first spell of fieldwork in 1960. However, Biggs had decided that he had too many other commitments to devote much more time to the project, so Bulmer invited me to take on the main linguist's role. My first assignment would be to write a grammar of the Kalam language for a PhD thesis, based on extended fieldwork. A second, longer term task would be to collaborate with Bulmer and Biggs in compiling a dictionary.

I jumped at the chance and began reading the slim literature on languages of the New Guinea highlands and learning the basics of New Guinea Pidgin, aka Tok Pisin, knowing that competence in this language would be essential. Bulmer and I spent August to December 1963 with the Kalam. Arriving in Papua New Guinea, then an Australian Territory, felt like a time travel experience. These were almost the last days of Empire but in the humid coastal towns we visited – Port Moresby and Madang – there was little sense that the colonial era was ending. The hotel bars and dining rooms were filled by white expatriates served by subdued, barefooted Melanesian men wearing waist-cloths. To then arrive among the Kalam, an exuberant people living self-sufficiently in ruggedly beautiful, forest-crested, V-shaped mountain valleys, less than a decade after 'first contact', was exhilarating. Bulmer and I lived some distance apart from each other, with different kin-based territorial groups who, it turned out, spoke dialects about as divergent from each other as Spanish and Portuguese. We entered these communities as colonial

intruders, too, but were soon treated as honorary kinsmen and 'big-men', addressed as such and expected to behave as such.

My main informants were certain teenage boys who were the only Kalam people in the immediate area who spoke Tok Pisin fluently. One of them, John Kias, proved to be talented at linguistic analysis, adept at giving complete verb paradigms for particular tenses, aspects and moods. Some days I caught glimpses of Bulmer emerging with a retinue of Kalam men and boys from the mountain forest where they had been identifying and collecting specimens of plants and animals. The Kalam turned out to distinguish by name more than 800 kinds of plants (including 450 trees, shrubs, and vines and 250 taxa of cultivated plants), about 180 kinds of birds, 50 wild mammals, 35 frogs, and over 100 invertebrates. Besides the linguistic work I took a lot of photos and received specimens of creatures that Kalam people brought in for Bulmer's collection.

For the first two or three months we both tried in vain to elicit folk tales. Our informants denied they had any. Then one day I heard a boy of about 12 telling what seemed like a folk tale. "What do you call that kind of talk?" I asked. "*Sosm*," he said. "Do you know any more *sosm*?" - "Yes, lots!" We sent out a call to the community offering to pay a small reward for each *sosm* people could tell and in two or three days we recorded over a hundred.

Kalam is in most respects a typical language of the large Trans New Guinea family, with SOV order and fairly complex suffixing verb morphology including switch reference marking, but it has some unusual features. Many words have the phonemic shapes CC, CCC, CCCC, etc., with all non-final consonants followed by a predictable short epenthetic vowel. The language has only about 130 verb roots, a closed class. The verb root lexicon is supplemented by more than 2000 phrasal verbs. There are very elaborate serial verb constructions, with up to 8 or 9 (usually monosyllabic) bare verb roots occurring in succession in a single intonation span. We call these 'narrative' serial verb constructions because they allow a complex sequence of events to be expressed by a single clause.

The ordinary language stands alongside a special avoidance language used when gathering mountain pandanus nuts in the high altitude forest, in which the entire lexicon is replaced by substitutes except for functor morphemes. I was surprised to find that Kalam speakers use a range of rhyming compounds formally and semantically parallel to the types of English *higgledy-piggledy*, *hocus-pocus*, *criss-cross*, *jingle-jangle* and *argy-bargy*. Testament to the psychic unity of mankind.

In January 1965 I began a second spell of fieldwork among the Kalam and four months later brought two young Kalam men, John Kias and Simon Peter Gi, aged about 17 and 19, to Auckland to work with Bulmer, Biggs and me for seven months, chiefly on the dictionary, which I was put in charge of. Initially they stayed with me at my mother's house. They attended a local primary school, took evening classes in woodwork and visited factories to witness the manufacture of such things as clothing and tinned corned beef. Unsurprisingly, newly contacted New Guinea people were mystified as to how Westerners, who never appeared to make anything themselves, acquired their amazing array of goods, and were inclined to attribute this to supernatural causes.

My PhD thesis was submitted in July 1966. I have continued to work and publish on Kalam ever since, making eight field trips to Papua New Guinea in all. Bulmer and/or I brought Kalam consultants to Auckland or Canberra on six

occasions. But times have changed. There is still no road connecting Kalam territory to the outside world but the children of the men who were our first informants in the 1960s now call me on their mobile phones.

It was Bulmer who taught me how to make an ethnographically rich dictionary, by the example of his entries and the kinds of cross-disciplinary research that underpinned them. He published extensively on Kalam ethnobiology and developed a remarkable partnership with Ian Saem Majnep, a Kalam man with a profound knowledge of the animals and plants of his homeland. Together they wrote two books about Kalam knowledge and use of birds and wild mammals and were planning a third, on plants, when Bulmer died of cancer in July 1988.

A dictionary of Kalam with ethnographic notes, running to 800 pages, went through several drafts and was finally published in 2011, 48 years after we began it. I estimate I spent more than 10,000 hours on it. There was a grand launch at Divine Word University in Madang, attended by about 150 Kalam people.

Hawaii and Bloomington 1964

After the first spell of fieldwork in PNG I had expected to return to Auckland to work on the Kalam data while teaching part-time. However, while I was in New Guinea Bruce Biggs sent word that he had accepted an invitation to spend most of 1964 at the East West Center, on the campus of the University of Hawaii, as a visiting scholar at the Institute of Advanced Projects. A bonus was that he was invited to bring along a PhD student. I was the only one he had at that time. (He had arranged for a talented Maori student, Pat Hohepa, to do a PhD in linguistics at the U. Indiana.)

It was too good a chance to miss. A Linguistics Department had recently been established at the U. Hawaii. Its focus was on the descriptive and comparative study of the Austronesian languages. Among the staff were Sam Elbert, a well known Polynesianist, Albert Schütz, a young Fijianist, and Howard McKaughan, a Philippinist who had also worked on a Papuan language of the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Another visitor at the East West Center was George Grace, the leading scholar of Oceanic historical linguistics, Oceanic being the large branch of Austronesian that consists of the Polynesian group, most languages of Micronesia and some 400 of the languages of Melanesia.

En route to Hawaii at the end of January 1964 the Biggs family and I stopped for a few days in Fiji in order to visit old friends of Bruce's at Yadua village on Viti Levu. He had spent four years in Fiji as a soldier during World War 2. It turned out that several young Fijian men were studying at the East West Center and I arranged to take lessons in Standard Fijian (aka 'Bauan'), the most important of the Fijian languages, from one of them, Manu Taunaolo, using materials written by an American linguist, Floyd Cammack. That was the beginning of an association with Fiji and the Fijian languages that has continued ever since.

Grace, encouraged by Roger Green, got Bruce and me hooked on Oceanic historical linguistics. While at the EWC Biggs wrote a paper on the history of Rotuman phonology that remains a methodological classic. The following year Green and Biggs obtained substantial grants to support descriptive and comparative

work on Polynesian languages by Biggs and graduate students. From this came an ambitious project aimed at compiling a comparative dictionary of Polynesian ('POLLEX') which Biggs directed (initially together with David Walsh) and continued to work on for the rest of his life.

After reading Grace's book arguing that the closest relatives of the Polynesian subgroup are probably the Fijian languages and Rotuman, I became fascinated by the challenge of constructing a family tree or internal classification for Polynesian. At that time the conventional view was that, for the languages spoken within the Polynesian Triangle, the primary division was between an Eastern group, including Maori, Tahitian, Hawaiian, Marquesan, Rarotongan and Easter Island, and a Western group, including Samoan, Tongan, Niuean, Futunan, Uvean, Tokelauan, and Tuvaluan. However, the experience of learning Bauan Fijian made me aware that certain personal pronouns of Tongan and Niuean showed formal resemblances to Bauan that mark them as conservative, whereas the corresponding pronouns of Samoan and the other 'Western' languages share innovations with the 'Eastern' languages. Several other morphological innovations pattern the same way. Accordingly, I wrote a paper for the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* arguing that there is no Western Polynesian subgroup. Instead the primary split in Polynesian is between Tongic (Tongan and Niuean) and a Nuclear Polynesian subgroup, comprising all other languages of the Triangle (with the possible exception of Uvean, where extensive borrowing has blurred the picture). It made sense for the initial diversification of Polynesian to be in the Tonga-Samoa region, which archaeology has shown to be the first part of the Polynesian Triangle to be settled. A follow-up paper demonstrated that all 14 or so Polynesian 'outlier' languages (those spoken in Melanesia and on the fringes of Micronesia) belong to Nuclear Polynesian, and derive from westward movements out of the Triangle.

A highlight of 1964 was attending the six-week Summer Institute of the Linguistic Society of America, held at the magnificent U. Indiana campus at Bloomington. There were series of lectures and/or courses given by Roman Jakobson, Charles Hockett, Kenneth Pike, Paul Postal, Fred Householder, Eric Hamp, Michael Halliday and other leading lights. But above all, this was the Institute where Chomsky gave the lectures that were a preview of his *Aspects of the theory of syntax* and where the transformational-generative linguists consolidated their theoretical dominance over the Neo-Bloomfieldians and other structuralists. When Chomsky spoke the auditorium was overflowing and the audience was spellbound. Biggs and I were impressed by the brilliance of Chomsky and his disciples but, as Neo-Bloomfieldians, were bemused by the novelty of their ways of talking about language. I was moved to write a longish poem (or piece of doggerel) about this, titled 'The song of Noam'. A typical verse:

The speech of a man may be finite in span
In performing he stutters and stammers
But don't be misled, it's what's in his head
That's the stuff of non-trivial grammars

After *Aspects* came out I encouraged my students to write grammars with ordered phrase structure rules and transformations. Seen in retrospect, the formalisms of early TG were not such a big step up from the formalisms of the structuralists. Later, as theories of grammar kept proliferating, often with short shelf lives, I preferred to do grammatical analysis using the terms and concepts of what

has come to be called 'basic linguistic theory', so that the resulting descriptions will remain intelligible to a wide audience.

During that year in Hawaii I got engaged to Medina Asuncion, who was working at the EWC as a research assistant to Biggs and Grace. Medina, from the Philippines, had recently completed an MA in Teaching English as a Second Language at the U. Hawaii and had initiated Tagalog and Ilocano courses there. We were married in Honolulu in August 1965 and set up house in Auckland. For the first three months of our marriage our household had a third member, a Kalam man, Simon Peter Gi. (As mentioned earlier, in May 1965 I had brought Simon Peter and John Kias to Auckland to work with us on the dictionary.)

Fijian projects

In 1966 I got a lectureship at Auckland, initially teaching linguistics courses that were options in Stage II and Stage III Anthropology and (in the case of a comparative Polynesian course) also in Stage II Maori Studies. In 1967 the informant for one course was Merewalesi ('Mere') Sayaba, a speaker of Wayan, a dialect of the Western Fijian language spoken on Waya, the southernmost of the Yasawa Islands. Because they were possibly the closest relatives of Polynesian I was keen to investigate the history of the Fijian languages. There are hundreds of distinct Fijian communalects. A survey of 100 or so of these by Albert Schütz indicated a fairly well-defined division between an Eastern and a Western Fijian subgroup. However, descriptive data on almost all communalects were very limited so the first priority was to obtain better descriptions of a geographically representative sample. The Wenner-Gren Foundation provided a grant to fund fieldwork by two students and me on communalects in three different regions: Waya, Tavuki (Kadavu Is.) and Delaiyadua (Ra Province, Viti Levu).

During the summer break of 1967-68 Medina and I, along with Mere, spent 11 weeks based in Yalobi village, on Waya. I worked mainly with Mere's father, Ratu Timoci Sayaba (c = th, as in *this*, b = mb), recording and defining several thousand Wayan words, using the dictionary of Bauan (an Eastern Fijian language) as a prompt. Timoci had a very sharp intellect and was so fascinated by the project he was keen for us to work seven days a week. Knowing that in Fijian villages no one works on the Sabbath, I protested that the villagers might be upset by this regime. 'Don't worry,' said Timoci, 'Leave the villagers to me'. 'OK, but what about God?' I asked. - 'I'm sure God will be very pleased that this important work is going ahead.'

Productive as it was, that summer taught me a salutary lesson. The first draft of the Wayan-English dictionary was riddled with errors which took years of work to correct. Part of the problem was that my method of eliciting Wayan equivalents of Bauan roots and derived words, often without supporting illustrative sentences, was prone to yielding false equivalents and I was not yet fluent enough in Wayan, nor familiar enough with many aspects of Wayan culture, to pick up these errors. Beware of instant dictionaries.

In the following years Timoci and I travelled to villages in various parts of Fiji gathering data on a dozen different local communalects. In 1971 we published a short account of the history of the Fijian dialect network, a history whose complexity

cannot be satisfactorily described in terms of a family tree model. Our account was soon superseded by that of a young Englishman, Paul Geraghty, whose PhD thesis (and later, book) on this subject must rank among the finest work ever done in historical linguistics.

It was not until 1980 that we resumed intensive work on the Wayan dictionary. Timoci spent most of 1981 and 1986 living with me and my family in Auckland. In the summer break I made annual trips to Waya, sometimes accompanied by members of my family. After Timoci's sudden death in 1987 I continued working with his daughters, nephews and nieces and other members of the Wayan community. The dictionary went through many drafts and grew to 1,400 pages. Why is the Wayan to English part (with more than 30,000 sense units) considerably larger than the Kalam to English dictionary (about 14,000 sense units)? The main reason is that Wayan, like many Austronesian languages, has a very rich derivational system. From many verb roots one can derive 15 or 20 morphologically complex words.

In 1971 the film star Raymond Burr, who owned land in Fiji, offered to provide funds to support the making of a new dictionary of Standard Fijian. A conference to discuss how this might be done was held at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, attended by interested linguists and representatives of the Fijian community. The general assumption was that it should be a bilingual dictionary, updating Capell's Fijian-English dictionary. However, Bruce Biggs and I startled the meeting by arguing that a monolingual dictionary, with entries all in Standard Fijian, would be of more value to Fijians. To show that it could be done Timoci Sayaba's daughter Luisa prepared some sample entries, where Fijian headwords were defined in Fijian. Opinion among the Fijians was divided. The younger generation favoured a bilingual work because it would help Fijians improve their English. But they were over-ruled by the elders who saw a monolingual work as a means of establishing an indigenous tradition of study of their language. The story of the making of the dictionary is a long and complicated one. Suffice to say that Albert Schütz agreed to serve as the first director, two Fijian men, Tevita Nawadra and Jemesa Robarobalevu, received training in lexicography at the U. Hawaii, then work by a team proceeded at the newly established Institute of Fijian Language and Culture in Suva, and after many ups and downs, a 1000 page dictionary, *Na ivolavosa Vakaviti*, was published in 2005.

Linguistics programs grow

The 1960s and 70s saw a rapid growth in universities throughout the Western world, and this included programs in linguistics. In New Zealand linguistics programs began to take shape at Victoria U. of Wellington and U. Canterbury, as well as at Auckland. At Victoria and Canterbury they began as a few courses in the English Department and expanded to become well-rounded programs in independent Departments of Linguistics. In 1976 the Linguistic Society of New Zealand began to hold biennial conferences. The first conference, at Auckland, featured 29 papers on a wide variety of research topics. In later decades programs in linguistics were established at Otago, Massey and Waikato.

For research on Pacific Island languages the main centres were Hawaii, Auckland and the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra, the School of Oriental and African Studies at the U. London and the Laboratoire de Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris.

At Auckland, through the 1970s and beyond, the core courses of the linguistics program continued to be taught mainly by two or three Anthropology staff but were supplemented by courses taught by linguists in the language departments, especially Jim Hollyman and Chris Corne in Romance Languages, and Colin Bowley and Forrest Scott and later Scott Allan in English. In 1973 Ross Clark, a young Canadian linguist with a PhD from UC San Diego, joined the Anthropology Department. An expert in Polynesian comparative grammar, Clark undertook fieldwork on various languages spoken in northern Vanuatu, investigated the origins of Pacific Pidgin English and later became Biggs' co-author in the comparative Polynesian dictionary (POLLEX) project. The POLLEX data had been digitised by Jon Jensen, an American linguist with a PhD from U. Hawaii, who took my place while I was on leave at the U. Hawaii from 1973-75. By the 1990s the POLLEX file exceeded 3500 cognate sets. The archaeologists Patrick Kirch and Roger Green drew heavily on POLLEX in their 2001 book on reconstructing ancestral Polynesian culture.

The late 1960s and the 1970s were something of a golden age for research on Polynesian languages at Auckland, with graduate students doing fieldwork on and writing grammatical descriptions of several previously poorly-described languages, such as those of Aitutaki, Luangiua, Nanumea, Niue, Sikaiana, Tikopia and Tokelau. Not many people know that Sir Pita Sharples, the prominent Maori politician, wrote substantial grammars of two Polynesian languages (Sikaianan, for his MA thesis and Tokelauan, for his PhD). The same period at the U. Hawaii saw a parallel efflorescence of descriptive work on Micronesian and Philippine languages. Because of the strategic role of Micronesia and the Philippines in American national security, funds for research on languages of these regions were readily obtainable.

In 1969 I took leave for a year to introduce courses in linguistics at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby, under the umbrella of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, of which Ralph Bulmer was the foundation professor. The University had been established in 1966 after it had become clear to the Australian government that the Territory of Papua and New Guinea would soon become an independent country. In 1975 a separate Department of Linguistics was established at UPNG, initially staffed by Tom Dutton and John Lynch and later, Terry Crowley, and from this emerged the first generation of indigenous Papua New Guinean linguists.

While at UPNG I investigated the historical development of the Oceanic languages of what is today the Central Province of PNG and, with Bill Tomasetti, collected basic vocabulary lists for several hundred languages from high school students throughout PNG. In August 1969 a two-week interdisciplinary symposium on Oceanic culture history was held at Sigatoka, Fiji, organised by Roger Green and Marion Kelly. My contribution to the three volume conference proceedings was a 100,000 word comparative study of 31 Oceanic languages of the Southeast Solomons,

Northern Vanuatu, Fiji, Rotuma and Kiripati, leading to a subgrouping and reconstruction of fragments of the grammar of Proto Eastern Oceanic (Pawley 1972).

Investigating spoken English

Early in 1972 I received an SOS from the head of English teaching at Auckland Grammar School. At the recommendation of Prof John Pride of Victoria U. Wellington the NZ Department of Education had changed the English language syllabus in secondary schools, emphasising sociolinguistics and excluding grammar. However, no course materials had been provided for teachers. Could I help? Not easy, as the term 'sociolinguistics' covers a diverse range of subject matters and methods and there was then no suitable textbook. I ended up teaching a 6th form class once a week through the year, and made course notes available to other teachers at the school.

That experience spurred me to begin a research project with my mother, Frances Hodgetts Syder, investigating the language and social dynamics of English speakers' conversation. My mother had for many years been interested in how and why conversational English differs from written English, and in analysing conversation as strategic interaction, closely paralleling the sociologist Erving Goffman's approach. In the 1960s she had compiled a draft dictionary of idioms and other formulaic expressions that serve conversational functions, intended for students learning English as a foreign language. In 1972 the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) gave us a modest grant to employ assistants to record and transcribe conversations among family and friends and on radio, from Tasmanian and New Zealand sources. Over the next few years this project yielded a corpus of about 300,000 words (alas, not in machine-readable form – this was the 1970s), a number of papers and as well as many essays by students who drew on the corpus, and a book by Syder (*The fourth R: spoken language, English teaching and social competence*).

One joint paper was 'Two puzzles for linguistic theory: nativelylike selection and nativelylike fluency' (written in 1978 but published in 1983). Having struggled to gain some degree of proficiency in half a dozen foreign languages I was aware that knowing how to say things grammatically is not the same as knowing how to say things idiomatically. In that respect grammars over-generate massively. Only a tiny fraction of the grammatically possible ways of saying something, e.g. telling the time of day, or proposing marriage, are actually used by native speakers. Syder and I argued that to achieve nativelylike command of a language one has to learn (among other things) a large stock of 'lexicalised sentence stems' (essentially sentence-sized formulaic expressions with variable constituents). (Here I must acknowledge the influence of George Grace, my colleague at the University of Hawaii in the 1970s, of which I will say more below, and of Peter Crisp, a former high school classmate and a research assistant on the project, who drew my attention to the literature on the Yugoslav and Homeric traditions of epic sung poetry as an oral formulaic genre.) While the 'Two puzzles' paper had no impact on mainstream grammarians (though it anticipated construction grammar) it is now approaching 3000 citations in publications on phraseology, second language acquisition and aphasia.

The task of transcribing, and of recording intonation units, slowdowns, pauses and fillers made us think about the cognitive challenges faced by speakers when encoding spontaneous speech. We noted a pattern of dysfluencies and tempo variations which suggested that speakers cannot encode novel lexical combinations across independent clause boundaries in a single focus of consciousness. Fluent units containing more than one independent clause occur but these are prefabricated, i.e. stored as chunks in the long-term memory. Nativelike fluency depends heavily on knowledge of such prefabs. 'The one clause at a time hypothesis' was presented at the first conference of the NZ Linguistic Society in 1976 (but not published till 2000). At the third NZLS conference in 1980 Koenraad Kuiper, of the U. Canterbury, presented the first of his many papers on oral formulaic genres, and we discovered we shared much common ground. Another paper with Syder, 'Natural selection in syntax' (1983), argued that differences between construction types found in spontaneous speech and in written language are adaptive to different conditions and purposes of discourse production. To my regret our more sociological papers were never polished for publication, chiefly because I had too much on my plate.

University of Hawaii 1973-78

When Sam Elbert, veteran Polynesianist, retired from the University of Hawaii in 1972 I was offered a job as his replacement. I was keen to accept for a limited term, but not to resign from Auckland. Under the wise chairmanship of Byron Bender, the UH Linguistics Department, with more than a dozen faculty and a number of brilliant graduate students, provided a stimulating intellectual environment, and Hawaii also offered job possibilities for Medina.

I was at the UH from 1973 to 1975, for a small part of 1977 and for the whole of 1978. I taught Linguistics 102 regularly but was otherwise free to teach whatever I chose. Besides courses on Polynesian, Samoan, Fijian and other Austronesian topics, I taught courses on Kalam syntax and semantics, and conversation analysis. I often learned more from the students than they did from me. One of the outstanding graduate students was Robert Blust, already well on his way to becoming the leading scholar in Austronesian historical linguistics. Another was Paul Geraghty, the young Englishman whose remarkable work on the history of the Fijian languages I have already mentioned. Yet another was a Canadian from Czechoslovakia, Frantisek (Frank) Lichtenberk, who went on to become, in my view, the best all round linguist - grammarian, lexicographer, typologist, historical linguist - to specialise in the languages of Oceania. William (Pila) Wilson was to make his mark as a comparative Polynesianist and as a major figure in the teaching of Hawaiian language. I have named only a few of the stellar students at UH in that era.

Around this time I worked a good deal on reconstructing elements of the grammar of early Austronesian stages, including Proto Austronesian, Proto Oceanic and Proto Eastern Oceanic. At the 1977 Linguistic Institute in Honolulu Lawrence Reid and I taught a course in Austronesian historical grammar, from which came a controversial paper (co-authored with Stan Starosta and Reid) arguing that the verbal affixes central to the 'focus' system' typical of Philippine languages (where

noun phrases standing in diverse semantic relations other than agent – undergoer, location, instrument, concomitant, beneficiary, etc. – to a transitive verb, may be the subject of the clause) originated as nominalisers in Proto-Austronesian.

In 1976, conscious that descriptive and comparative-historical work in Oceanic linguistics had up till now had an ‘Eastern Oceanic’ bias, strongly favouring the languages of Polynesia, Micronesia and eastern Melanesia over those of western Melanesia, George Grace and I obtained a US National Science Foundation grant to fund descriptive research on Oceanic languages of the north coast of New Guinea by Joel Bradshaw and Frank Lichtenberk (PhD students) and Piet Lincoln (postdoc). A few years later the regional imbalance in comparative-historical work was redressed by a very detailed study of western Oceanic languages by Malcolm Ross at ANU (Ross 1988).

Grace taught a brilliantly subversive course entitled ‘Ethnolinguistics’ (later the basis of his 1981 book *An essay on language*), which helped clarify my thinking about what is entailed in describing a language. I had long felt that my grammar of Kalam failed to capture what one might call the genius of the language. Grace pointed to the limitations of the ‘grammar-lexicon’ model that has dominated both descriptive and theoretical linguistics. There is a lot more to languages, he said, than grammar and lexicon. There is, for example, the phenomenon of idiomaticity (in the sense of how to say things idiomatically, as a native speaker would) and the challenge that this creates for translation. Current linguistic theories are not able to explain how translation works. To account for translation we need to distinguish the thing that is said (the idea or meaning) from the way that it is said (the linguistic expression). What is preserved by any fair paraphrase or translation is the idea or meaning. Close translation between languages X and Y is impossible when X and Y have different conventions for representing certain kinds of events and situations. I wrote several papers reflecting on how Kalam and English differ in this respect, e.g. Pawley (1987, 1993). Grace’s influence is also evident in ‘Two puzzles for linguistic theory’.

Much as I valued my time at the UH, it was not possible to keep moving back and forth between Hawaii and Auckland. With our sons’ future in mind, Medina and I decided to return to NZ for good at the end of 1978.

1980s

In 1981 the linguistics program at Auckland was boosted by the appointment of Frank Lichtenberk. However, with the retirement of Bruce Biggs at the end of 1983 we had only three core staff – Ross Clark, Lichtenberk and me – to teach a full curriculum of BA and MA courses and to supervise Masters and PhD theses. I often taught five courses simultaneously.

In 1983, for the first time, I took a sabbatical. Part of it was spent at UC Berkeley, where I was especially interested in the work of Wallace Chafe on spoken vs written language and on the relation between the flow of speech and the flow of thought and of Charles and Lily Fillmore on formulaic language. I taught a course on ‘Speech formulas: linguistic competence between syntax and lexicon’ at the 1985 Linguistic Institute at Georgetown University, Washington DC.

Around this time I began examining the distinctive features of 'Australian Vernacular English' (AVE), a variety which can be heard in the informal speech of some Australians, especially working class and country people. The transcripts of my Tasmanian relatives' conversational speech in the NZCER corpus provided an initial database. AVE is characterised by the frequent occurrence of certain phonological and grammatical features that are rare in more standard varieties. Some of these features appear to have considerable antiquity in the history of English. Among them is assignment of animate pronominal gender to inanimate nouns. In AVE most inanimate nouns can take feminine pronouns (machines, boats, cars, weather, roads, rivers, houses, body parts, situations, countries, etc.), with masculine gender restricted chiefly to plants, vehicles under the control of a driver or pilot of unknown sex and objects to which the speaker wishes to express emotional detachment.

Before Ralph Bulmer died in 1988 he gave me instructions for editing and completing his second and unfinished book with Ian Saem Majnep, to be titled 'Animals the ancestors hunted', on the wild mammals of the Kalam area, and also for carrying on with a planned third book with Majnep, to be titled 'Kalam plant lore', about Kalam knowledge and use of plants other than cultigens. The Animals material was to appear first as a series of 12 working papers with bilingual text (original Kalam by Majnep with English translation by Bulmer and Majnep). The next step, not completed until many years later, with the help of Robin Hide, was a book version, with English-only text with addition of commentary, footnotes, photos, multiple indices, etc. In the meantime Majnep received an honorary doctorate from the University of Papua New Guinea and was the subject of a feature article in Time magazine.

At the ANU: 1990s and beyond

In 1990 Medina and I made the difficult decision to leave Auckland so I could take a post at the Australian National University in Canberra, succeeding Stephen Wurm as head of the Linguistics Department in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS). Under Wurm the Department, with an academic staff of five, ample support staff, and many PhD students, had become the leading centre for research on languages of New Guinea and Island Melanesia, with some coverage of SE Asian languages. It also ran a very valuable and prolific publishing program, titled Pacific Linguistics, which has put out more than 600 books on languages of the Pacific and SE Asia since its inception in 1963. I was fortunate to inherit several very able and experienced colleagues, Tom Dutton, Malcolm Ross and Darrell Tryon, to help run the Department and the publishing program.

There was work to be done in improving interdepartmental relations. The ANU in 1990 had two halves, with functions that were both complementary and overlapping. The Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS), consisting of eight research schools with departments in various disciplines, was responsible chiefly for research and the supervision of higher degree research students. RSPAS was part of the IAS. The other half was The Faculties, consisting of departments in various disciplines which taught undergraduate students but also undertook research and supervised

graduate students. There was another Linguistics Department in the Faculties, staffed by seven to ten linguists, headed by R.M.W. (Bob) Dixon, the eminent grammarian. There was very little interaction between two Departments of Linguistics – their respective foundation professors had fallen out many years before. However, I was on good terms with Dixon and his colleagues and encouraged interdepartmental collegiality and collaboration in the form of joint supervision of graduate students, the teaching of some undergraduate courses by RSPAS linguists, giving guest lectures, attendance of each others' seminars, and so on. The RSPAS department benefited in various ways, e.g., many excellent graduate students from The Faculties moved across to RSPAS to do PhD theses on languages of the Pacific and SE Asia.

The other departments in RSPAS (Anthropology, History, Prehistory, Human Geography, Political Studies and Social Change, etc.) were mainly concerned with human society and regarded linguistic publications as arcane ("like mathematics") and largely irrelevant to their interests (except for language maps). Malcolm Ross and I, with Meredith Osmond as research assistant and co-author, embarked on a project intended to counteract this perception, by producing a series of volumes reconstructing and analysing the lexicon of Proto Oceanic, the Austronesian language associated with the bearers of the famous archaeological culture known as Lapita, who colonised the SW Pacific as far east as Tonga and Samoa about 3000 years ago. Each volume consists of a set of essays using lexical reconstructions to draw inferences about particular domains of the culture and environment of the ancestral Oceanic speech community. So far five volumes, totalling some 2,600 pages, have appeared (on material culture, the inanimate physical environment, plants, animals, and people: body and mind, respectively), with a sixth (people: society) well advanced.

Another project undertaken by the same team has been to revisit the ambitious but much criticised Trans New Guinea hypothesis, proposed by Stephen Wurm and associates in the 1970s. This claimed, on very slender evidence, that almost 500 of the 800 or so non-Austronesian languages of the New Guinea area belong to a single family. We published a number of papers presenting evidence that a version of the Trans New Guinea hypothesis with reduced membership is valid. The evidence included reconstruction of the independent pronouns of Proto Trans New Guinea and of their development in particular subgroups, and reconstruction of the core of the PTNG sound system, based on correspondences in cognate basic vocabulary. A multidisciplinary conference held at the ANU in 2000 yielded a volume titled *Papuan Pasts* which brought together findings from historical linguistics, archaeology, population genetics, environmental sciences and social anthropology, bearing on the prehistory of the Papuan (i.e. non-Austronesian) speaking peoples of Melanesia.

The Kalam plant lore project progressed slowly. Like the *Animals* book, it exemplifies the complexities that arise when outsiders collaborate with an indigenous author in producing a scholarly book on folk biology. First I had to find funds to support the work of Majnep and the project's botanist, Rhys Gardner. In the course of three field trips between 1993 and 2000 Gardner collected and identified by species or genus specimens of about 500 Kalam taxa, duplicating and adding to the extensive plant collections made by Bulmer. Majnep would first tape-record in Kalam accounts of particular trees, vines, grasses, ferns, etc., then transcribe the

recorded texts in notebooks, add Tok Pisin translations and mail the notebooks to me. At that point it became my job to keyboard and heavily edit the Kalam texts (correcting Majnep's idiosyncratic spelling, creating paragraphs, eliminating repetitions, reordering sections to include afterthoughts, etc.) and to produce a fairly literal English translation of the edited draft, then a more stylistically pleasing free translation. Between about 1995 and 2006 Majnep wrote accounts of nearly all the significant wild plants, amounting to some 300 manuscript pages of Kalam text, and made Tok Pisin translations of most. This material was keyboarded and about 60 pages were edited and given free English translations.

The story does not have a happy ending. In September 2007 Majnep died suddenly. Thousands of hours of very challenging work remains. Most of the Kalam text remains to be edited and translated. Then I must decide how to form chapters from the scores of texts describing particular kinds of plants and how to order the chapters. Then introductory commentaries, footnotes, photos and drawings need to be added. Finally, a publisher must be found and when the page proofs are ready multiple indices must be prepared. With heavy heart I have opted to archive the existing text but to otherwise give my time to other unfinished projects. On the positive side, much information about Kalam knowledge and use of plants is published in the Kalam dictionary, in Majnep and Bulmer's books on birds and wild mammals and in a lengthy paper by Gardner.

After 17 years as HOD I retired at the end of 2006. Since then I've remained attached to the Department and have tried to make myself useful by continuing to co-supervise a few PhD students, reviewing manuscripts, grant applications, etc, and editing for publication a number of dictionary MSS whose authors have died or become incapacitated, as well as by pushing on with my own research projects.

My successor was Nicholas Evans, a scholar of wonderfully diverse accomplishments and a dynamic academic entrepreneur. He arrived at a time when the financial position of RSPAS was deteriorating, due to fundamental changes in the structure of the ANU, leading to a savage reduction in the number of continuing positions in the RSPAS (renamed the School of History, Culture and Language). Linguistics retains just three such academic positions. Two productive linguists lost their jobs. In the meantime Evans and his research collaborators have won large external grants supporting many doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows. However, grants do not fund continuing positions, and in an era when universities are being run as businesses based on enrolment numbers, the humanities are under threat and the long term outlook for the linguistics program in the School, and for Pacific Linguistics as a publisher, is uncertain. This is particularly disturbing given their central role in descriptive research and publishing on the 2000 or so languages of SE Asia and the Pacific Islands, many of which are likely to disappear within the next few generations.

I share the concerns of Evans when he says, "[T]he field of linguistics ... needs a massive turn-around of professional priorities, an expansion of field training, and a proper recognition of the value and the time demands of descriptive work. Only then can we marshal the number of trained linguistic scholars ... needed to document our fragile linguistic heritage" (Evans 2010: 223). And to stay in the business, scholars need jobs.

Note

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