1. Background

1.1 Geographical information

By the “South Pacific”, we refer to the countries and territories of Melanesia and Polynesia (excluding New Zealand and Hawai’i). Since we are dealing with English as a first or second language, we will pay virtually no attention to the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya (the western half of the island of New Guinea), the French overseas territories of New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia (but see §10.3), or the Chilean territory of Easter Island. In all of these territories, English is a subject in at least some high schools, but it is very much a foreign language in the national context.

Our focus will therefore be on the following countries (moving roughly west to east), in which (i) English is an official language, (ii) a small percentage of the population speak English as their first language, and (iii) the majority of educated people use English daily at work and in at least some other forms of communication:

a. in Melanesia – Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji.

b. in Polynesia – Tuvalu, Tonga, Tokelau, Samoa (until recently called Western Samoa), American Samoa, Niue, and the Cook Islands.

This map shows the location of these countries and territories.

1.2 Brief history

The New Guinea-Australia area was originally settled at least 50,000 years ago, probably from somewhere in eastern Indonesia, and parts of north-west Island Melanesia (New Britain, New Ireland, and the western Solomon Islands) were settled by thirty to thirty-five thousand years ago. These people were the ancestors of modern-day speakers of Papuan languages (see §2).

About 5000 years ago, the ancestors of modern-day speakers of Austronesian languages (see §2) began moving out from the South-east Asian mainland, through the islands of the Philippines and Indonesia, and into the Melanesian area. Migrations continued in a mostly west-to-east direction, with Fiji, Tonga and Samoa being settled about 3000 years ago and most other parts of Polynesia within the last one to two thousand years.

European penetration into the South Pacific began only a few centuries ago, with names like Quiros, Mendaña, Bougainville, Cook and Bligh becoming famous in the western world for their deeds of “exploration” long after the South Pacific had been explored and settled by the ancestors of modern South Pacific Islanders. Missionaries, traders, whalers, beachcombers and exploiters of sandalwood stands followed, and metropolitan governments were soon forced to take an interest. By the end of the Nineteenth Century Britain, France, Germany and the United States of America all had a colonial presence in the region, with Australia and New Zealand later taking over some of Britain’s colonies. Only the Kingdom of Tonga was never formally colonised.

The Second World War saw considerable fighting in the western part of the South Pacific. The post-war period brought a dramatic increase in education and economic and political development, with most of the countries we are discussing becoming independent in the 1970s.

1.3 Demographic information

The population of the region under consideration is just under six million. Approximate populations for each country are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Populations</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There has been substantial emigration from a number of the Polynesian countries, especially to New Zealand and the United States. Indeed, there are more Niueans and Tokelauans in New Zealand than there are in Niue and Tokelau respectively.

2. Linguistic background and contacts

In terms of both the number of languages spoken and the relationships between those languages, the region is extremely diverse linguistically, despite its small population. This is particularly true of the Melanesian area. There are between 900 and 1000 distinct indigenous languages spoken in the region we are considering, as shown in Table 2. (The table also includes the names of languages with official status in each country.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Indigenous Languages</th>
<th>Languages with Official Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>750+</td>
<td>English, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>70±</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>105±</td>
<td>English, French, Bislama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>English, Fijian, Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English, Tuvaluan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>English, Tongan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokelau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English, Tokelauan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English, Samoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Samoa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English, Samoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>English, Niuean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td></td>
<td>English, Rarotongan (Cook Is. Mori)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Solomon Islands, all of the languages of the other countries are related to each other, and belong to the Oceanic branch of the Austronesian family. Other members of Oceanic are spoken in Micronesia, Irian Jaya, the French and Chilean territories mentioned above, New Zealand and Hawai‘i, while other (non-Oceanic) Austronesian languages include those of Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Madagascar. Over 90% of Solomon Islands languages and about 30% of Papua New Guinea languages are also classified as Oceanic.

The remaining languages (500+) in Papua New Guinea and about half a dozen in Solomon Islands belong to a number of apparently unrelated language families (many of them quite small in terms of membership) for which the cover terms "Papuan" or "Non-Austronesian" are generally used. These languages do not appear (at this stage of research) to be related to any languages outside the region.

South Pacific languages are spoken by very small populations. Table 3 shows the only indigenous languages in our region with more than 100,000 speakers. (Note that Tahitian and New Zealand Mori also have about 100,000 speakers, though in the latter case many of these speak English as their first language and Mori as a second
The figures for Tongan, Fijian and particularly Samoan include substantial numbers of speakers living outside their home country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enga (PNG)</td>
<td>165,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuman (PNG)</td>
<td>140,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hagen (PNG)</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolai (PNG)</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, about 160 languages in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are spoken by fewer than 200 people. Many of these, obviously, are under threat of extinction within the next few generations. But this depends to a considerably extent on the mobility of populations and contact with neighbours speaking other, more dominant, languages. In many parts of Melanesia, "small" languages like these do not face a serious immediate threat of extinction if they are spoken by a fairly isolated population, if most children grow up in their home villages, and if there is not a high rate of marriage with speakers of other languages; in the next two or three generations, however, such languages may well be more vulnerable.

In the countries we are concerned with, the major introduced language other than English is Hindi, a variety of which, known as Fiji Hindi, is spoken as a first language by about half the population of Fiji (about 380,000 Indo-Fijians) whose ancestors were brought as indentured labourers to work on the sugarcane plantations between 1879 and 1916.

A number of closely-related pidgins based on English developed in many parts of the South Pacific as a result of contact in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, and although these died out in Fiji, Polynesia and the French territories, they have creolised and become the major lingua francas of the other Melanesian countries. Known as Tok Pisin in PNG, Pijin in Solomon Islands, and Bislama in Vanuatu, what is sometimes known by the cover term "Melanesian Pidgin" is the first language of perhaps half a million people and the second language of perhaps three million. The three national varieties are, to some extent at least, mutually intelligible, though there are phonological, grammatical and lexical differences between them.

English has official status in all the countries dealt with in this article, nearly always alongside at least one other language, as shown in Table 2 above. In Polynesia both English and the national language in each country share official status. In Melanesian countries there is often more than one other official language besides English, though constitutions do not always explicitly state this. In Vanuatu, a former condominium of France and Great Britain, English and French both have official status alongside the national language, Bislama.

3. Phonology

English is mainly used as a second language in the South Pacific, and the phonology of a speaker’s first language often has some effect on the way he or she pronounces English. At the same time, people from different parts of the South Pacific have been exposed to different dialects of English: New Zealand English is perhaps the major such variety in Polynesia, Australian English is the dominant variety in Papua New Guinea, with the other parts of the region being exposed to a mixture of British, Australian, American and New Zealand English. The constant movement of Polynesians to and from New Zealand is also a factor, as is the level of education of speakers.

Most of the languages of this region have the five-vowel system /i e a o u/, and many have no central vowels other than /a/, even phonetically. For many speakers, therefore, contrast between tense and lax vowels (/i/ and /I/, /u/ and /U/, /e/ and /æ/, /o/ and /o/) is often not made; English unstressed /æ/ is very often not distinguished from /a/; and English /ʌ/ is often indistinguishable from a mid front vowel. Many Polynesians who have worked or were educated in New Zealand, however, have incorporated New Zealand vowels into their speech patterns.

As far as consonants are concerned, however, differences between the languages spoken in this region are sufficiently great that it is difficult to make any Pacific-wide generalisations (see Lynch 1998: 75-91).

Polynesian languages have very small consonant inventories: of all the languages in Polynesia, Tongan has the most consonants, with twelve – /p t k f v s h m n N l/. No Polynesian language contrasts voiced and voiceless
stops, and there are few contrasts between voiced and voiceless fricatives. They have only one liquid (some having /l/ and others /ɾ/), and they lack certain fricatives which occur in English, like /t̂ d̂ ẑ ŝ ẑ/. Thus in the English spoken by many Polynesians, there is often no contrast between [p] and [b], [t] and [d], [k] and [g], [f] and [T], [v] and [D], and [s] and [z], /ʃ/ or /ʒ/.

It is more difficult to generalise about the large number of languages in Melanesia. Most of these do show a contrast between voiced and voiceless stops, though in many the voiced stops are prenasalised, and sometimes English voiced stops are pronounced with prenasalisation. Again, the phonemes /T/ and /D/ are rare, but unlike in Polynesia where they are often "replaced" by /l/ and /ɾ/ in spoken English, in Melanesia they are usually "replaced" by /ɾ/ and /d̂/: [dis tiN] ‘this thing’ (cf. [vis fiN] in at least some parts of Polynesia).

One of the most notable features of the English spoken by the majority of native speakers of Fiji Hindi is the realization of the alveolar stops /t/ and /d/ as the Hindi retroflex stops /ʈ/ and /ɖ/. Many speakers have no contrast between /w/ and /v/, with both phonetic realizations being interchangeable. Contrast between /s/ and /ʃ/ is also often not made. Clusters of /s/ + consonant are often preceded by the prothetic vowel /i/, as in /iskul/ ‘school’ or /fuliskaps/ ‘foolscaps’.

Although there are South Pacific languages with closed syllables and consonant clusters, probably the majority allow open syllables only, and very few allow final syllables to be closed by more than one consonant. This is particularly noticeable with the frequent loss of the past tense suffixes -/d/ and -/t/ after consonant-final verbs in spoken English: a combination of various factors thus sees words like ‘turn’, ‘turned’, ‘tend’ and ‘ten’ pronounced identically, as /ten/, or ‘this’ and ‘these’ pronounced identically, as /dis/ or /vis/, by many South Pacific Islanders. In addition, almost all South Pacific languages have regular penultimate stress. These factors, on top of what we have already described about consonant and vowel systems, mean that many South Pacific Islanders have considerable difficulty in approximating to the pronunciation of mother-tongue speakers, and that their pronunciation is often difficult for speakers of some other varieties of English to understand.

4. Vocabulary

As elsewhere in the world, South Pacific varieties of English differ lexically from other varieties, in a number of ways. Here we will briefly discuss (i) the incorporation of words or phrases from indigenous languages, (ii) hybrid forms, combining both indigenous and local elements (as either a word or a phrase), (iii) calques upon one or more indigenous languages, and (iv) the use of brand names as generic terms.

The first of these – the incorporation of words and phrases from indigenous languages – is perhaps the most obvious to the outsider, and it also marks differences between different varieties of South Pacific English. A very brief selection of items follow. These are in very wide use in English as it is spoken, by both South Pacific Islanders and native English-speaking expatriates, in individual countries of the region, and usually refer to items or concepts specific to the social, cultural or ecological environment.

| Table 4. Selected borrowed words in South Pacific English |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Word | Meaning | Region | Immediate source |

...
Most of these forms are fully adapted to the morphology and syntax of English. Thus the following would be a perfectly acceptable sentence in Papua New Guinea English:

‘My tambus had mumued a pig and put the leftovers in their bilums.’ (= ‘My in-laws had roasted a pig in an earth-oven and put the leftovers in their string-bags.’ – all italicised words from Tok Pisin.)

‘He choroed all my sulus.’ (= ‘He stole all my lavalavas/sarongs.’ – choro from Hindi and sulu from Fijian.)

Many other words from Pacific (especially Polynesian) languages are, of course, now part of English as it is spoken in other parts of the world: hula, kava, lei, tabu/taboo, tapa, tattoo, taro and ukulele are examples.

Hybrid forms are those which combine a word from an indigenous language with an English derivational affix (to form a new word) or with an English word (forming a phrase). Some examples are given in Table 5.
A calque is an expression which is translated literally from an expression in a foreign language, such as ‘marriage of convenience’ in English, which is a direct word-for-word translation of the French phrase mariage de convenance. Some examples of calques in South Pacific English based on expressions in indigenous languages are given in Table 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>go finish</td>
<td>leave the country permanently</td>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Melanesian Pidgin: go pinis/finis (go completive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>something</td>
<td>something of no importance</td>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Tok Pisin samting nating (thing unimportant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nothing</td>
<td>go secretly in search of sexual partner</td>
<td>Solom Is.</td>
<td>Pijin kripim (transitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creep (someone)</td>
<td>completely drunk</td>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>Bislama: fuldrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full drunk</td>
<td>to take one’s leave (of those remaining)</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Fijian: liu ‘lead, precede, go before’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take the lead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Greetings and leave-takings are often calqued on those of Pacific languages. The initial greeting (often simply ‘hello’) is typically followed by ‘where (are) you going?’ or ‘where (are) you coming from?’, rather than ‘how are you?’. Similarly, interlocutors indicate their intention to leave at least by saying ‘OK’, sometimes followed by ‘I’m going now’ or ‘I’m going this way’, if the interlocutors are going separate ways, or by ‘I’ll take the lead’ or ‘I’ll go first’, said by the person leaving first if they are eventually going in the same direction.

There are also cases of brand names being used as generic terms (in the same way as terms like ‘kleenex’, ‘biro’ or ‘hoover’ are used in other varieties of English). Some of these are listed in Table 7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5. Syntax

We will use the term "acrolectal South Pacific English" to describe those varieties spoken and written by educated South Pacific Islanders who are fluent in English, and the terms "mesolectal" and "basilectal South Pacific English" to describe those varieties spoken by South Pacific Islanders with less education, or by people who are not fluent in English and who use it on a less regular basis.

#### 5.1 Acrolectal South Pacific English

It is possible to speak of a single educated South Pacific English in terms of grammatical structure, although there are phonological and lexical differences between the various countries. In general, the morphosyntax of educated South Pacific English approximates that of the metropolitan varieties spoken within the region (Australian, New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, British and American). There are, however, a number of features of South Pacific English which are common throughout all or most of the region which differ from those of the metropolitan varieties. Among them are the following:

a. Frequent omission of past tense/past participial suffixes (as a result of final consonant cluster simplification discussed in §3 above):

   - ‘This office is close from 12 to 1.’
   - ‘I am very concern about this problem.’
   - ‘They should have lock the door.’
   - ‘The meeting which was suppose to be held last Friday is now defer till next week.’
   
   (On the other hand, there are hypercorrections like ‘a matured person’ and ‘a secured job’.)

b. Use of non-count nouns as count nouns:

   - ‘She had to go and have a surgery.’
   - ‘We need more furnitures in this office.’
   - ‘All the machineries are old-fashioned.’
   - ‘Some of the committees didn’t attend the meeting.’
   - ‘He went to buy some more stationeries.’

c. Singular noun following ‘one of’:

   - ‘One of my friend will bring it.’
   - ‘She told one of my boys’ teacher.’
   - ‘Vanuatu is one of the nicest country I have been to.’

d. Overt pronominal trace after relativisation:

   - ‘Where is the book which you were reading it yesterday?’
   - ‘Give me those vegetables which you were cutting them up.’

e. A distinctive use of prepositions in certain contexts:

   - ‘I read about it on the newspaper this morning.’
   - ‘We should discuss about this problem.’
‘I can’t cope up with this any longer.’
‘To my opinion …’
‘Taxis, in America they call them as cabs.’

f. A generalised question-tag, varying in different countries between ‘isn’t it?’, ‘eh?’, and ‘or?’:

‘Did he come or?’
‘You should do it like this, isn’t it?’

5.2 Mesolectal and basilectal South Pacific English

The written English of speakers of mesolectal and basilectal varieties of South Pacific English can, in many cases, be characterised as containing numerous errors as well as consistent departures from metropolitan norms. Their spoken English often differs quite significantly from country to country, and also to some extent according to their level of education. For that reason, it is difficult to make general statements about the region as a whole, and so to illustrate these levels of English, we will look at just one country – Fiji.

Fiji is the only country of the region where English has a substantial role as a lingua franca (but see §10.1), primarily between Fijians and Indo-Fijians but also with the smaller groups of speakers of other languages. As elsewhere, Fiji English is influenced by the first languages of its speakers, mainly Fijian and Fiji Hindi. The combined influence of an indigenous language and an imported one, each belonging to a different family, makes Fiji English the most distinctive variety in the region – indeed perhaps unique. It is probably also the best studied variety, although published research to date is still limited (Kelly 1975, Siegel 1989, 1991, Tent and Mugler 1996).

Because of its more varied uses than elsewhere in the South Pacific – from official language to lingua franca – English in Fiji probably also has the greatest continuum of acrolectal to basilectal varieties, with some speakers clearly being multi-lectal. But with diverse first languages influencing the phonology, syntax, vocabulary and semantics of English, it is questionable whether there is such a thing as a homogeneous "Fiji English", rather than a number of related sociolects (see Siegel 1991). It is worth noting that within Fiji, the term "Fiji English" tends to refer only to the basilectal end of the continuum, perhaps because only that lect is recognised as distinctive. We will use "Fiji English" here to refer to the entire continuum, however.

Fiji English has a common core of Fijian and Hindi borrowings (see §4) and these two languages each have an influence on the phonology of the English of their native speakers (see §3). A number of features are common to other varieties of so-called New Englishes or to other varieties of English in the South Pacific (e.g. invariant verb forms, copula deletion, lack of overt plural marking, non-count nouns as count nouns). Perhaps one phonological feature common to all varieties of Fiji English, including the acrolect, is deletion of /y/ in words like annual, education, regular etc. (Tent and Mugler 1996:256).

There are also a number of grammatical features, some of which are most common in the basilect. Perhaps the most distinctive are listed below (examples are from Kelly 1975, Siegel 1989, and Tent and Mugler 1996):

a. verbal particles as verbs:

‘You want me to on the alarm?’
‘I been come down and off the light and do the washing up.’

b. been as a pre-verbal past tense marker:

‘I been study all week.’
‘He been swear at me.’

c. full as an intensifying adverb:
'He was full dancing in front of everyone!'

d. **gang** as a plural marker, especially with pronouns:

   'We’re gonna be like those *gang*.'

   'Us *gang* own this store... you *gang* don’t belong here!'


e. **fella** as a third-person pronoun with [+ human, + male] referent (= 'guy', 'bloke', 'chap' in other varieties; in the basilect, *fella* can also refer to a female):

   'Fella can fight!'

f. **the thing** as a third-person pronoun with [- human] referent, rather than Standard English 'it':

   'I bought a Fiji Times but left the *thing* on the bus.'


g. first person dual pronoun:

   'Us two going to the movies.'

h. **zero definite determiner:**

   'The money in grog [kava] keep wheels of economy rolling.'

i. **one** as an indefinite determiner:

   'One Indian man come to the door just now.'

j. subject pronoun and base form of the verb for imperative:

   'Come, we go.'

k. repetition of **go** to mark continuing action, often with the Fijian particle (/Na/), a general intensifier:

   '... go go *ga* ...' = '... on and on, and then ...'

The distribution of these and other grammatical features across the lects has not been clearly established, however. Neither is it always clear whether a feature really is prevalent among basilectal and mesolectal speakers of Fiji English. Feature (a) (**to on, to off**) is probably more common than (d) (**gang**), for instance, but whether one can say that (d) is basilectal while (a) is mesolectal is unclear. Similarly, (h) seems more prevalent among Indo-Fijians and (g) among Fijians, but without a large scale empirical study, any conclusion would be hasty. Such a long overdue study is currently underway (Tent, in preparation) and should give us a much better picture of English in Fiji.

### 6. Semantics

In this section on semantics, we look at a number of areas in which English words have different meanings in the South Pacific than they do in (most) other varieties of English.

Perhaps a good place to start is with kin terms. There is no single kinship system which is dominant across the South Pacific, but in all South Pacific societies there are systems which can be described very generally as ‘clan-based’ and in which the extended family plays a vital role. For many South Pacific English speakers, then, the following terms would differ from their metropolitan equivalents in the following ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grandfather</td>
<td>any senior male of the same clan in grandfather’s generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grandmother</td>
<td>any senior woman in grandmother’s generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td>father + his brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>mother + her sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncle</td>
<td>mother’s brothers, father’s sisters’ husbands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
aunty [usually not 'aunt']
father's sisters, mother's brothers' wives

brother
brother + father's brothers’ (and sometimes mother's sisters’) male children

sister
sister + father's brothers’ (and sometimes mother's sisters’) female children

In at least some parts of the South Pacific, the terms ‘cousin-brother’ and ‘cousin-sister’ are used. These differ from the term ‘cousin’ (a) in being sex-specific and (b) in excluding the children of one’s father’s brothers (and, in some societies, those of one’s mother’s sisters as well). Interestingly, terms for in-laws – especially brother-in-law – are often borrowed from local languages: tambu in PNG (from Tok Pisin), tawi in Vanuatu (from Bislama), and tavale in Fiji (from Fijian).

A second semantic area concerns kava-drinking in Vanuatu. Below are some words which have specific meanings in this domain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>drunk</td>
<td>affected by kava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kick</td>
<td>(of kava) to have a sudden or delayed effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plastic</td>
<td>a plastic bottle which one takes to a nakamal to get take-away kava: ‘Go to Ronnie’s [nakamal] and bring back a plastic for us.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shell</td>
<td>a bowl of kava – usually glass or porcelain in urban nakamals (rarely an actual coconut shell)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is also a large number of words which have additional, or different, meanings in all or some South Pacific countries from other varieties of English. In the list below, a + sign at the beginning of the second column indicates that the word has the usual meaning(s) plus the additional meaning given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word/Phrase</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>baby-sitter</td>
<td>+ someone who looks after children while the parents are at work – often a young relative of one of the parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink</td>
<td>+ eat wet or sloppy foods (like watermelon, mangoes, ice-cream, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fair fight</td>
<td>to fight one-on-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plastic</td>
<td>+ plastic bag, plastic bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>+ some time: ‘I’ll see you sometimes tomorrow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spoil</td>
<td>+ 1. damage someone’s reputation: ‘they were spoiling her and saying bad things about her’. 2. cause someone an inconvenience: ‘while he was working they came along and spoiled him’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Media use of English

Television was introduced to the region only in the last decade, and the cost of producing local programmes in countries with small populations accounts for the overwhelming domination of English, since most programmes are imported. The Cook Islands and Niue get New Zealand television directly, while the other countries that have television (all but Tokelau and Solomon Islands) also import programmes in various proportions from the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Britain. Vanuatu also imports many programmes from France.

Satellite television is available to some people in some countries. This is virtually exclusively in English. Video stores are common in many South Pacific towns; again, most films for rent are in English (though in Vanuatu
English also has an important share of the print media. In most Polynesian countries there is a rough balance between English and the national language in the major newspapers. Tonga, for instance, has three weekly papers, one in English, one in Tongan, and one in both languages. There is also a bilingual monthly. But more specialised publications, such as various church newspapers, are mostly in Tongan, with no more than 20% in English.

English has a greater share in Fiji, which has two dailies and half a dozen monthly magazines in English as against one Hindi and two Fijian weeklies. In the other Melanesian countries, English and Pidgin tend to share space, sometimes in the same newspaper. The Vanuatu Weekly/Hebdomadaire has French, English and Bislama sections, roughly in equal proportions. Papua New Guinea has two national English-language dailies and one weekly, but also one national Tok Pisin weekly; some provincial governments produce newspapers/newsletters as well, usually in Tok Pisin and/or a predominant vernacular. English dominates in Solomon Islands, however, because of the low prestige of Pijin.

Although English is also present on radio, this is where South Pacific languages are best represented. In some countries, different stations broadcast in different languages, while in others, air time on a single station is shared between English and the local language(s), including, in Melanesia, Pidgin. In Samoa, for instance, the AM station broadcasts mainly in Samoan and one FM station mostly in English. There is also a religious channel based in American Samoa, which broadcasts mainly American gospel music in English. The two local radio stations in Vanuatu use a mixture of the three official languages, with Bislama predominating. In Papua New Guinea, national radio uses mostly English (with short news bulletins in Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu), but provincial radio stations use very little English, concentrating on languages widely known in the particular province concerned.

The electronic media are developing very fast in the South Pacific, with several newspapers, such as the Tonga Chronicle, the Vanuatu Weekly/Hebdomadaire and Papua New Guinea’s three major newspapers now publishing electronic editions. A number of magazines and radio and television stations also have websites. Nearly all of this is in English so far, but there are plans to have Wantok Niuspepa, the weekly Tok Pisin newspaper in PNG, on line soon, and other news sites in South Pacific languages may follow.

8. Literature in English: oral and written

The South Pacific has a rich oral tradition in its many indigenous languages, a multifarious tradition where performance is central and which ranges from story telling to epic poetry and genealogies, oratory, songs, and drama. Literacy, introduced by missionaries in the Nineteenth Century, spread fairly quickly and many South Pacific languages – though far from all, given their very large number – were soon written. But most literature in English about the South Pacific was for a long time written by outsiders (among them Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson, Pierre Loti, Jack London, Somerset Maugham and James Michener), with outsiders’ points of view, so that places and people were by turns romanticised, demonised, or simply marginalised.

Except for a few early works, such as Miss Ulysses of Puka Puka an autobiographical story by the Cook Islander Florence (‘Johnny’) Frisbie in 1948, literature in English by South Pacific Islanders did not emerge until the 1960s. In 1960, perhaps the first novel by South Pacific Island writers was published, Makutu, by the Cook Islanders Tom and Lydia Davis. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the first works of a number of writers: short stories by Fiji’s Raymond Pillai and Subramani and Tonga’s ‘Epeli Hau’ofa; poems by Konai Helu Thaman, of Tonga, and Fiji’s Pio Manoa (who also often writes in Fijian); and short stories, poems and, in 1973, the novel Sons for the Return Home, by the Samoan Albert Wendt, of all South Pacific writers perhaps the best known outside the region.

But it was the establishment of the two regional universities, the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in 1966 and the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 1968, which provided a focus and a forum for writers and other artists and encouraged the development and publication of creative writing, through courses, workshops, regional conferences and the establishment of literary journals.

At UPNG Ulli Beier ran creative writing courses, launched the Papua Pocket Poets series and set up the country’s first literary magazine, Kovave, in which appeared the work of John Kasaipwalova, Kumalau Tawali, Apisai Enos and Kama Kerpi, among others. Albert Maori Kiki’s autobiography Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime was published in 1968, and the first Papua New Guinean novel, The Crocodile, by Vincent Eri, came out in 1970. A National Theatre Company was also established.

At USP the South Pacific Arts Society was created in 1973 and started publishing poems and stories in the magazine Pacific Islands Monthly. The next year the Society set up its own Mana Publications, and in 1976 it started publishing the journal Mana. Early publications included collections of poetry by Konai Helu Thaman of Tonga, Sano Malifa and Momoe von Reiche, both of Samoa, and Makiuti Tongia of the Cook Islands, as well as anthologies of modern poetry from Fiji, Samoa, the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). Plays by Jo Nacola and Vilsoni Tausie Hereniko also appeared. In 1980 Raymond Pillai’s collection of short stories, The
The Institute of Pacific Studies at the USP has encouraged writing by South Pacific Islanders and has published, over the years, an impressive collection of autobiographies, stories and poems, as well as works in sociology, anthropology, science, history and other academic disciplines, based on research in the region. Writing – both in English and indigenous languages – continues to be encouraged in the University’s member countries, through workshops, public readings and local journals.

As in other former colonies, the new literature in the South Pacific is in part an effort to make sense of the shock of European contact and the colonial experience and to explore ways of forging an identity out of tradition and modernity. This implies a recognition of the ever evolving nature and inherent flexibility of culture as well as an exploration of ways in which both indigenous and imported genres – and the English language itself – can be plumbed to fashion new forms and express local realities and imaginings. But experience, including the colonial experience, has varied across the region, and the new literature in English reflects this rich diversity, as it encompasses the political and the personal, the local and the universal.

Some of the pioneers of South Pacific literature in English turned to other pursuits in the late 1970s and 1980s – Vincent Eri and Rabbie Namaliu, for example, becoming respectively Governor-General and Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea – but others continued to write, sometimes turning to new genres. The last decade has seen, in particular, a number of longer works of fiction. Tongan anthropologist turned satirist Epeli Hau‘ofa, whose popular Tales of the Tikongs had appeared in 1973, followed this with the novel Kisses in the Nederends in 1987, while Fiji’s Satendra Nandan went from poetry and short stories to the semi-autobiographical novel The Wounded Sea (1991).

Notable among the new writers and among those who have made the English language stretch and bend to their will are Fiji’s Sudesh Mishra, with several collections of poems, among which are Rahu (1997) and Tandava (1992); he combines classical Indian poetic forms with an English peppered with Hindi and Fijian words. Playwright and director Larry Thomas, whose latest play, The Anniversary Present, was staged in May 1998, captures the words and rhythms and creative power of the basilectal “Fiji English” many of his marginalised characters speak: the young, the unemployed, disempowered women and men.

South Pacific literature is no longer dependent on its initial ties with the institutions which were so instrumental in encouraging its development, though the two regional universities are still a focus for many writers and facilitate the publication of much of the work produced in the region. Since its beginnings in the late 1960s, many new collections have appeared, as well as a new anthology (Wendt 1995). There, many of the older writers – Kauraka Kauraka of the Cook Islands, Ruperake Petaia of Samoa, John Saunana and Celo Kulagoe of Solomon Islands, Grace Molisa of Vanuatu, and Nora Vagi Brash and Ignatius Klage of Papua New Guinea – share space with new voices, like Joseph Veramo of Fiji, John Pule of Niue, and Steven Edmund Winduo and Loujaya Kouza from PNG. The late 1980s and 1990s also saw a number of works of literary criticism, by Subramani, Satendra Nandan, and Sudesh Mishra, in particular - a mark, perhaps, of the coming of age of South Pacific literature. Some of the most recent work is by the Niuean artist and writer John Pule, who writes both poetry and prose and often combines the two, and the Samoan Sia Figiel, who won the Commonwealth Prize for best first book for the Asia-Pacific region in 1997 with the novel Where We Once Belonged.

Meanwhile, the Vanuatu-based Wan Smolbag community theatre group, created in the late 1980s, writes and performs plays in both English and Bislama about such subjects as malaria and AIDS prevention, hurricane preparedness and domestic violence. In recent years it has started touring the region and producing educational plays on video for the South Pacific. In Fiji’s small but healthy music scene, many singers sing in English and a small number of songwriters write in English.

9. Missionary contacts, education policies and publications

9.1 Missionary contacts

In general terms, missionary contacts have not had any dramatic effect on the English language or its use in the South Pacific. In most parts of the South Pacific, Christian missionaries preferred to use a local language rather than English for proselytisation, on the grounds that this was more effective in reaching the hearts and minds of the people. Even in the linguistically diverse areas of the western Pacific, missionaries tended to use a single local language as a mission lingua franca among people who spoke different (but fairly closely related) languages. Church schools were often in vernacular, with English introduced only in later years, and then only in some countries. Indeed, some theological colleges and seminaries in at least some parts of the South Pacific still use a local language or Melanesian Pidgin (i.e. Tok Pisin, Pijin or Bislama, depending on the country) as a major medium of instruction.
9.2 Education: Official policy

Although English is the predominant official medium of instruction in all the education systems of the region, there are important differences between Polynesia and Melanesia. In Polynesia, where each country has essentially one South Pacific language, this language is recognised as a medium of instruction alongside English, both in primary and (to a lesser extent) in secondary schools. English is generally introduced as a subject early, often in the first or second year of primary school, through rhymes, songs and numbers. It is then gradually used as a medium of instruction, generally starting in the fourth year, and is studied as a subject throughout the education systems of the region.

In most of Melanesia (except New Caledonia), English is the sole recognised medium of instruction (along with French in some of Vanuatu’s schools), while the many indigenous languages have virtually no official place (although this situation is beginning to change in Papua New Guinea, and the first steps in this direction are being taken in Vanuatu). In Fiji, which often has characteristics midway between those of Polynesia and Melanesia, Fijian and Hindi are mediums of instruction for the first three years, but are entirely replaced by English afterwards.

The use of English as official medium of instruction is the result of various factors. It is, of course, the language inherited from the colonial past (along with French in Vanuatu). As in many other parts of the world, the colonial language survived Independence both by force of habit and because it enjoyed advantages in the formal education system, itself a foreign institution introduced by Western powers. The major factor was that South Pacific languages were not written until European contact and many, in Melanesia, still are not. In new nations with dozens or even hundreds of languages, English provided an easy, single answer to educational planners. In those multilingual nations, English, while ideologically and pedagogically far from an ideal choice, enabled planners to avoid the challenge of having to select one or at best a few indigenous languages and risk making speakers of all other languages unhappy; while negative attitudes towards Melanesian Pidgin, the only widespread and geo-linguistically neutral language, precluded its selection. The status of English as an “international” language, itself a product of colonialism, contributes to its acceptability in education as in other official domains; while the necessity for or desire of many students to undertake tertiary education in some country other than their own (either within or outside the South Pacific) reinforces this.

With very few exceptions indeed, English is the only official medium of instruction in post-secondary education. Many such tertiary institutions are "regional", either by their very nature (like the University of the South Pacific, which is owned and managed by the governments of twelve Pacific states), or as a matter of practice (with many national institutions taking in significant numbers of students from other countries). Many such institutions also have on their staff teachers from metropolitan countries or from countries outside the Pacific region. For these reasons, as well as because most South Pacific languages have not developed technical terminology in most fields of scientific endeavour, English remains the teaching medium.

Finally, a word about pre-schools. Some pre-schools in Melanesian countries are taking a pro-active role in introducing initial literacy in the vernacular before a child attends primary school, where English is usually the medium of instruction. This is particularly true of rural areas. Urban pre-schools, on the other hand, tend to see one of their roles as introducing children to English as preparation for primary school.

9.3 Education: Policy and practice

Policy and practice, however, differ greatly in nearly all the classrooms of the South Pacific, especially at the primary level, and indigenous languages are used much more widely than official policy suggests. This is particularly true in the essentially monolingual countries of Polynesia, as well as in many of Fiji’s schools which are run on ethnic lines, with some made up of Fijian speakers and others of Hindi speakers. The relative lack of exposure of children to English leads many teachers to use their pupils’ first language alongside English in all subjects, and even in secondary schools. A study of Samoa’s junior secondary schools, for example, found that both English and Samoan were used in all subjects, with Samoan predominating overall to the tune of 59% of class time. Samoan was used alongside English even in English classes, while English was also used some of the time in the Samoan and Manual Arts classes, where the official medium is Samoan (Lo Bianco 1990:45-6).

In Melanesia, multilingualism prevents the use of indigenous languages in all but the smallest local primary schools. But beyond that level, it is the lingua franca, Melanesian Pidgin, which tends to be used beside English – as is attested by periodic reminders to teachers from officials from Ministries of Education that such use is forbidden. Thus in Vanuatu, for example, Bislama is often used by teachers alongside English even though, ironically, this constitutionally declared national language is officially banned from the education system (Lynch 1996).

All of this is somewhat ironical, since popular belief has it that South Pacific languages are unsuitable as mediums
of instruction, in particular for science and technical subjects, where a lack of specialised vocabulary is seen as an insurmountable hindrance. Yet teachers resort to their students’ mother-tongue for these “hard” subjects too, making use of paraphrases and borrowings when technical vocabulary is not available – just as they often do in British or Australian classrooms! In fact, it tends to be when concepts are particularly difficult that teachers are most tempted to get the idea across in the language that students understand best.

Nonetheless, the pressure from parents, who see English as the only route to “good” (essentially white collar) jobs, the fact that the education systems throughout the region are exam-driven and that subjects are examinable in English, and the current overwhelming image of English world-wide, ensures that it will continue to have an important place in education in the foreseeable future.

10. Current trends

10.1 English as a lingua franca

Although English is often referred to as a “second language” in the region, this label is only partially accurate and can be misleading. English is in fact a third or fourth language for many Melanesians. Due to both urbanisation and the fact that many Melanesian language-communities are quite small, children in Melanesia often grow up learning both their mother’s and their father’s languages at the same time – as “first languages”. Melanesian Pidgin is often acquired next, even though children may be exposed to English in school earlier. In Polynesia, English is a second language only in the chronological sense of being learned after the national language, and in the region as a whole, the restricted functions for which it is used means that the average South Pacific Islander is exposed to far less English than is an immigrant in a predominantly English-speaking country. To many South Pacific Islanders English is therefore more like a foreign language than a second language in the usual sense of the term.

On the other hand, English is a first language for a small minority of people in the South Pacific, particularly in the Cook Islands and Niue, which have close ties with New Zealand. The two countries are self-governing nations in free association with New Zealand, and Cook Islanders and Niueans have dual citizenship. They can move freely between their home country and New Zealand and many do travel back and forth. Fiji also has a small population of native speakers of English, particularly among the European and Part-European communities and in many families where parents have different first languages.

So although English is used as a lingua franca in the South Pacific, this is more the case at regional than at national level. In the countries of Polynesia, nearly everyone speaks the national language, and English is used as a lingua franca only with foreigners. In Melanesia the lingua franca is Melanesian Pidgin, both within each country and between people from different countries. So Solomons Islanders from different parts of the country communicate with each other in Pijin, and they can also speak Pijin with people from Vanuatu (or Papua New Guinea), who will answer in Bislama (or Tok Pisin), since these three varieties are mutually intelligible.

English has an important place as a lingua franca in Fiji, particularly between native speakers of Fijian and of Fiji Hindi, who make up by far the largest population groups and are in roughly equal numbers. Not all cross-ethnic communication takes place in English, however, since many Fiji Indians speak Fijian and many Fijians speak Fiji Hindi. This is so particularly in areas where the two groups live and work side by side: a recent sociolinguistic survey found that, in up to 20% of cases, Fijian and Indo-Fijian informants in the capital used Fijian or Fiji Hindi to communicate with an interlocutor of the other ethnic group (Mugler and Tent 1998). To some extent, English also functions as a lingua franca in PNG between people from the south (the former colony of Papua, where Hiri Motu is the main lingua franca) and those from the north (the former Trust Territory of New Guinea, where Tok Pisin predominates); however, Hiri Motu seems to be losing ground fast to Tok Pisin, which has become very much a national lingua franca.

Because of the small size of nearly all the countries of the South Pacific, there is a great deal of regional contact and cooperation, and English is the working language of nearly all regional organisations. It is among the highly educated elite in this regional context that the role of English as a lingua franca is the most important.

10.2 Official status vs. actual use

In most countries of the region, English is used much less than its status as official language may suggest. Even in government offices, for example, the indigenous language or languages – including Pidgin in Melanesia – often dominate in verbal interaction about day to day work. Indigenous languages are also used for many “high” traditional – and some non-traditional – functions (e.g. welcome ceremonies, official openings), and they dominate in daily interaction outside of work. The domain where English is the most important is the school system (but see §9.3 above) and in turn occupation and level of education (which are closely correlated) are the major factors determining the amount of English an individual uses regularly. Thus only a relatively small number of highly educated people make predominant use of English on a daily basis.
10.3 English in the French territories

In the French territories, English is the most important foreign language and is studied as a subject in secondary schools, as it is in the education system in France, which the territories broadly follow. The pre-eminence of English in the region and, for all but French Polynesia, the proximity of Australia and New Zealand, contribute to its importance. A number of French-educated South Pacific Islanders try to improve their high-school English through exchange schemes with these two countries, and a few even choose to switch to English-medium tertiary institutions, in part because pursuing higher education in distant France is costly and also because knowing English as well as French makes them more employable, particularly in business and in regional organisations.

11. The future

It is clear that English will continue to play a dominant role in all of the countries we have discussed. In the South Pacific, the issue is not what will happen to English, but what will happen to vernaculars. On the one hand there are the prophets of doom, like Dixon (1991), who feels that virtually all Pacific languages will become extinct by the end of the Twenty-First Century because of the dominance of English; or like Mühlhäusler (1996), who believes that most Pacific languages have lost their identity and are becoming syntactic replicas of English with a Pacific lexical overlay. On the other hand, linguists such as Crowley (1995) argue that, despite the small number of speakers of most South Pacific languages, these will nevertheless continue to be viable, at least for the next couple of generations, and that currently members of the community continue to retain traditional links and transmit their language and culture to the next generation.

Fears have recently been expressed that Cook Islands Māori is being used less and less in the Cook Islands and will disappear unless special measures are taken. According to a recent study, Māori has less than half the air time on radio; it is used in only a few advertisements on television; out of three newspapers only the daily carries articles in Māori and this perhaps only once a week; parliamentary debates are conducted in English; and even casual conversations among Cook Islanders are often in English, particularly in Rarotonga (Syme-Buchanan 1998:27-8).

The case of Cook Islands Māori shows that it is not so much the number of speakers which seems crucial to the continued viability of indigenous languages in the South Pacific as the amount of contact with countries of the region where English is the predominant language, through migration, back-migration and regular travel. Similar fears have been expressed about Niue, which has a similar relationship with New Zealand and has even suffered a net loss of population in recent years.

Of more than academic interest is the future development of Melanesian Pidgin in relation to English. At present, there is little evidence of the development of a post-creole continuum, in which varieties of an English-based creole blur into varieties of English (as in Jamaica, for example): that is, bilingual speakers of Melanesian Pidgin and English keep these languages quite separate (even though at times they "mix them up", or code-switch), and there is no speech-variety which could be classified at one and the same time as acrolectal Pidgin and "deviant" English. It is our view that this situation is likely to continue, at least for the next couple of generations: that is, that (i) as with vernaculars, Melanesian Pidgin is unlikely to lose ground (or even die out) in favour of English, but (ii) a post-creole continuum is also unlikely to develop.

One might expect the role of English to expand in the French territories in the next century, for the reasons outlined in §10.3 above. At the same time, however, it is difficult to assess what ground might be gained at the expense of English by languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Bahasa Indonesia as Asian commercial and political interests expand into the Pacific.

12. Bibliography


Additional references


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Abbreviations

k.o. kind of

PNG Papua New Guinea

UPNG University of Papua New Guinea

USP University of the South Pacific
The South Pacific is a vast and blue place, covering 11 million square miles stretching from the top of Australia to the Hawaiian Islands. Celebrated by artists and writers, from Paul Gauguin to James Michener, these thousands of tiny coral and volcanic-stone dots are home to fascinating peoples and cultures. Lesser-known than neighboring Tahiti, these 15 islands, named for English explorer Captain James Cook and run as a self-governing nation with ties to New Zealand, are home to 19,000 people renowned for their drumming and dancing. Tourists generally visit the main island of Rarotonga and small lagoon-caressed Aitutaki. Samoa. This group of nine islands was the first in the Pacific to gain independence from western occupation. The second stage dropped into the South Pacific Ocean shortly afterwards. There were no apparent launch problems during the entire flight of the H-IIB rocket. By 10 November she was en route to the Marshalls, towing to Pearl Harbor before continuing on to Ebon Atoll. The cargo ship operated in the South Pacific Ocean for the next year. It was discovered in the year 1791, and has been since occasionally visited by English and American whalers, and a few other ships, for the purpose of procuring water and a supply of vegetable productions, with which it abounds. Cited from The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction, Vol. 20, No. 579. Fiji is an island nation in the South Pacific Ocean.