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## EDITORIAL

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# Special Issue: 'Language and Translation in the Pacific'

Language in the Pacific is central to education, governments, health and social care industries, policy-making and justice. For many people in the Pacific region, language is taonga, a treasure, bestowing mana on its empowered speakers. Language has been central to cultural and national renaissances, a stimulus to carry on the fight for independence from the colonial yoke, a way to affirm ethnicity, diversity and social and legal rights. Living in translation, or in the impossibility of it, has become an integral part of the life of many inhabitants of the Pacific, constantly engaged in the processes of linguistic mediation, (re)presentation, or (mis)representation and adaptation both in professional and everyday lives. The discursive dimension of linguistic and translation practices is particularly significant in the postcolonial reality of the Pacific, whereby language in translation can provide access and insight to constructions of gendered, collective and national identities. Once a tool of the colonizer to represent and contain the colonized, translation has become a key

instrument in the liberation and re-presentation of Pacific identities, where it can also emerge as a political act through which individuals can affirm or reject authority, power and status.

This special issue unites four contributions that grasp key issues informing linguistic inquiry across the Pacific, taking in countries from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Japan to Tonga and the Solomon Islands. Within these nations, sign languages aid people with disabilities in their active participation in the fabric of society. Yet, unlike New Zealand, a country in which sign language officially became a national language in April 2006, in many Pacific nations deaf children and adults live on the margins as they lack proper access to communication and education via sign languages. In their extensive report, Rachel McKee, Angela Murray and Jacqui Iseli provide an overview of sign-language users in six different Pacific nations – Fiji, PNG, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Timor Leste and Kiribati. The authors aim to raise awareness regarding the difficulties these groups encounter, and around the struggle for sign languages as tools of empowerment for the marginalized and the disabled, where language education emerges as a fundamental human right.

Yet, language education is not just a fundamental human right, as mastering two or more languages and translating between them is a tool for collective and individual success. Within this purview, Telesia Kalavite's article offers an insight into bilingualism – Tongan and English – not as a problematic experience in the process of identity construction, but rather as a path to professional achievement. Kalavite focuses on the practice of translation carried out through the application of *Tā-Vā* (Time-Space) Theory of Reality. Through her article, *Tā-Vā* not only bestows on translation a specific Pacific character, but it also constitutes and informs language relations and encounters in the pursuit of knowledge.

Elsewhere, knowledge can be contained and restricted if translation is not enabled and this, for instance, can lead to contrasting positions on the anthropological and ethnographic realities of the Pacific. This is the case with a number of Japanese ethnographies of Melanesia that remain un-translated, which Rodolfo Maggio discusses in his article. For Maggio, the translation of Japanese ethnographies would contribute to the anthropological study of the Pacific offering an advantage to scholars in the field and a culturally and qualitatively different approach than the one provided by anglophone anthropology alone. Paweł Kornacki's article, which opens this issue, also explores translation in Melanesia to look at the ways in which two salient Tok Pisin words – *wantok* ('friend, same language speaker') and *lain* ('group, family, clan') – can best exemplify key cultural concepts in PNG. Language in this article emerges as an expression of specific cultural conceptualizations emanating from rural Tok Pisin-speaking communities. Paweł follows the usage of such words and concepts through to electronic media, demonstrating how it is possible to track an evolving language and culture of the Pacific. It is with these articles that this special issue aims to spark further debate and discussion around the developing roles that languages play in the Pacific both in the present and the future.

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