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## PHONEMIC EXPANSION IN RENNELLESE<sup>1</sup>

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THE POLYNESIAN LANGUAGES, and indeed the East Malayo-Polynesian languages, are noted for phonemic loss rather than for phonemic addition. According to a recent statement by Grace,<sup>2</sup> for example, 15 Proto-Malayo-Polynesian consonant phonemes became 6 Proto-East-Malayo-Polynesian phonemes.

Phonemic expansion in languages may result from the development of a contrast in a feature of articulation, as voicing of fricatives in Middle English, or the aspiration of voiced stops in the Indic languages. A comparable increment has been noted in Kapingamarangi,<sup>3</sup> with the development of a contrast in aspiration and voicing of stops and liquids respectively. I have noted similar contrasts in Pileni, and Milner has described what appears to be a similar acquisition of phonemic status by the component of aspiration in the Ellice Islands.<sup>4</sup> In Kapingamarangi there was no correspondence within the Malayo-Polynesian family. The evidence indicated a Kapingamarangi splitting of earlier Polynesian phonemes; the words with the new phonemes were tried and true Polynesian words.

Another type of phonemic expansion is by the addition of a phoneme from another language, as the voiced lamino-domal spirant in "azure" borrowed from French.

One might have thought that similar increment would have occurred in Polynesia as a part of acculturation. In Hawaii, in particular, the native Hawaiians were submerged by an influx of foreigners, and probably all Hawaiian speakers today are bilingual. Hawaiian hospitality extended to foreign morphemes, and the language was engulfed with English loan words. Many of these were concerned with Christianity, and the Protestant missionaries introduced the English letters *b, d, t, f, g, s, z* and *r*, and apparently they themselves pronounced these sounds in their Hawaiian. (I used to hear the Reverend Judd say *tausani* and *mare* for thousand and marry.) Ordinarily devout and amenable to missionary precept, immediately literate and impressed by the mana of the written word, the Hawaiians

<sup>1</sup> Field-work on Rennell Island in 1957 and 1958 was made possible by a grant from the Tri-Institutional Pacific Program; grateful acknowledgement for this aid is made herewith. At the Science Congress constructive suggestions were made by A. Capell, Ann Chowning, and Katharine Luomala, whose interest is appreciated. The manuscript was read critically by Mildred M. Knowlton and Edgar Knowlton, Jr.

<sup>2</sup> Grace 1961:363.

<sup>3</sup> Elbert 1948:39.

<sup>4</sup> Milner 1958:368-375.

nevertheless pronounced *b* and *f* as *p*, *r* as *l*, and *d*, *t*, *g*, *s*, and *z*, as *k*. And they still do. And now my name is spelled Kamuela in the face of the sanctity of the Book of Samuela. And if there is a theory of phoneme fatigue (courtesy to Zipf), the Hawaiians never wearied of their minuscule consonant inventory of eight. (In songs *s* is sometimes introduced along with English words, yodels, and steel guitars, but these may be considered extra-systematic embellishments.)

One of the languages of the Polynesian outliers, that of Rennell and Bellona, is probably unique among the Polynesian languages for which we have detailed information, in its acceptance of two completely foreign and non-European phonemes. These are a voiced velar fricative that is probably similar to the sound known elsewhere in the Pacific as the "Melanesian *g*", and a voiced palatalized dental /*l*/ that has allophones that suggest *d*, and *th* in *then*. These sounds are written /*gh*/ and /*l*/.

Some 340 words (in addition to names of places and people) have been noted as containing these phonemes. This is not an exhaustive list, but probably includes most of the words used in ordinary conversation. In this paper they will be called *gh/l* words. Such words are noteworthy for aberrances in phonemic shape, formation of derivatives, and lexical domains.

1. Shapes. The phonemic shapes of a hundred basic words in Rennellese and 200 randomly-selected monomorphemic *gh/l* words were tabulated, with the following percentages of occurrence of the most common shapes. (The basic words were a modification of the Swadesh list.)

	Basic words	/gh/ words	/l/ words
CVCV	38	5	22.5
CVCVCV	14	14.5	11
CVV	13	2.5	2.5
More than 6 phonemes	8	24.5	17

Fewer *gh/l* words have the CVCV or CVV shapes than have basic words, and more have more than six phonemes. /*gh*/ words are considerably more aberrant in this respect than /*l*/ words.

A survey was made of the frequency of occurrence of the phonemes of the 100 basic words, 100 /*gh*/ words, and 100 /*l*/ words, the latter two randomly selected. The figures below are percentages (/b/ is a bilabial fricative, /*g*/ is a prenasalized velar stop, /' / a glottal stop):

	Basic words	/gh/ words	/l/ words
p	0.7	2.9	2.5
m	3.7	1.7	1.4
b	1.6	4.6	5.5
t	5.5	1.7	0.0
n	3.4	1.7	1.1
s	1.1	1.6	0.0
l	0.5	4.2	20.0
k	5.0	0.8	3.4
g	8.0	1.3	3.7

	Basic words	/gh/ words	/l/ words
ng	2.0	0.0	1.4
gh	0.0	25.6	6.8
'	5.5	0.2	0.4
h	6.2	0.0	0.0
i	8.0	13.0	10.0
e	7.3	2.4	3.0
a	21.0	22.7	18.4
o	7.5	9.4	11.1
u	12.8	6.2	10.7
	<u>99.8</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>99.4</u>

Aberrant features include the complete lack of /gh/ in the basic list and the nearly complete lack of /l/; the complete lack of /h/ in both the other lists and the nearly complete lack of /'/; the lack of /ng/ and /t/ in the /gh/ and /l/ lists respectively.

The average number of phonemes per word were 4.3, 6.3, and 5.6 for the three counts.

2. Formation of derivatives. A large class of bases in Rennellese have the privilege of occurring in juxtaposition with the bound affixes glossed as reciprocal/plurals (*he-...-aki*), causatives (*haka-*, *baa-*), passive/completives (*-'ia*), and nominalizers (*-nga*). Only a few *gh/l* words have been noted with these morphemes.

3. Lexical domains. Many of the *gh/l* words are highly specialized in meaning, as can be seen by studying the examples at the end of this article. Many of the flora, fauna, and artifacts involved are not found in Polynesia proper. In addition, some 35 place names with *gh/l* were noted on a map of Rennell prepared by the writer, or about 20 per cent of the names on the map.

Certain lexical areas are nearly void of *gh/l* words, including the original 215 Swadesh basic words (except *claw*, *lango*; clothing, *laoa*; dry, *mamala*; sew, *lapui*), pronouns, demonstratives, numerals, particles, kinship terms, names of gods and people, and poetics and rituals.

The old songs have almost no *gh/l* words. In three songs attributed to Kaitu'u, the discoverer of Rennell and Bellona whose line is traced back 23 generations, there are 51 verses, and only one *gh/l* word; this is Sanibaghi, a place name. This feeling that *gh/l* words are not suitable for poetics persisted throughout the centuries. In a 15-verse song attributed to Sa'obaa, who must have died in about 1940, there is one word with *gh/l* (*malubh*, to sprout).

Avoided in poetry, the *gh/l* words are common in conversation, and some of the words are constantly heard, such as terms for harvest or year (*ghapu*), to meet (*bilaabei*), and to wander (*lango*), as well as terms with less pleasant meanings, such as busy (*ghaulia*); fast (*ghali*); noisy (*logha*); time (*gholoba*); tired (*logho*) and buttocks (*tobigha*).

The *gh/l* words are probably not the only non-Polynesian parts of the Rennellese lexicon. It is just that they are immediately apparent.

A great many Rennellese words are unmistakably Polynesian and to the phoneme correspond with words found elsewhere. There is little assimilation and dissimilation, such as is found in Tongan. There can be no thought that the *gh/l* words are of Polynesian origin. Were they dreamed up by the Rennellese? None of them are kodaks or breakfast foods and there is no Madison Avenue on Rennell Island.

Perhaps the Rennellese have the answer to the question. Most Rennellese, of course, have no idea that these words are any "different" from any other portion of the lexicon. Their rejection by poets is not verbalized. Many Rennellese have been to Guadalcanal, and have met speakers of Tikopian, Sikaiana, and Ontong Javanese. They can get along in essentials, but usually find Melanesian pidgin a more satisfactory means of communication. Even with this sporadic contact, few Rennellese probably have discovered that this portion of their daily vocabulary is to the rest of us exotic.

Rennellese traditions, however, may provide a clue. They tell that Rennell and Bellona Islands were settled by Kaitu'u and his followers, who came from an island called 'Ubea, and who stopped at many places on their way to Rennell, including an island called Hutuna.

Kaitu'u found people living on Rennell whom he called the *hiti*. *Hiti* is a good Polynesian term. It may be related to the names for Fiji and Tahiti. In Hawaiian *hikina* means east. Kaitu'u and his people did not get along well with the *hiti*. Kaitu'u's uncle Togo was a dove snarer, but was stingy and gave the *hiti* 10 birds to his 100. The *hiti* in revenge killed Togo. When Kaitu'u heard of this, he began to kill and eat the *hiti*, but in his first two forays there were survivors; in the third encounter Kaitu'u thought he had devoured the last one.

But the *hiti* had a sub rosa existence after their extermination, as witnessed by a proliferation of stories about contacts of *hiti* and Rennellese. We are not told what language the *hiti* spoke, but in one story a *hiti* mispronounces Rennellese. The *hiti* were famous for beautiful gardens and clever fishing. They were small and staged sudden disappearances. They may have had little impact on the spiritual life of the Rennellese, but like Saxons in England, they may have forced their conquerors to learn dozens of work words, as well as terms for busy, tired, noisy, fast, and time, a legacy not always noble.

Is it too much to suggest, as Wamba did, a mating of two strata in the language, but instead of referring to swine and pork, to talk of coconuts? The nut is *polo*, the tree is *niu*, but parts of coconuts are nearly always *niu*, as fronds (*gau niu*), sheath ('*ugi niu*), husk (*poghi niu*), and cloth (*gunu niu*), and kinds of coconuts are variously styled *niu* plus the colour red (*uga*), black ('*ugi*), and green ('*ui*). A coconut water bottle is *niu bai*, coconuts tied together by their husks are *niu hakasani*, and green drinking nuts are *niu tamatama*.

Are there, indeed, two strata in the language, both in constant and general use, but one with fewer and longer words; one used for certain flora and fauna and work, another embedded in grammatical matrix and basic vocabulary; one disproportionality common in place names but almost absent in names of ancestors and religion and song; one Polynesian, and the other non Polynesian and perhaps an acquisition, or

substratum, or the legacy of the *hiti*? And did the *hiti* speak a language bereft (or nearly so) of *h*, *ng*, *t*, and the glottal stop?

A difficulty with the *hiti* theory was pointed out by A. Capell at the Tenth Pacific Science Congress. The words with /l/ must have come into Rennellese *after* the shift of the common Polynesian /l/ to /g/ in Rennellese. Rennellese /l/ and /g/ are never confused and occur in many of the same words. This makes it hard to accept a *hiti* /l/ unless (1) the Rennellese had already made the /l/ and /g/ shift before reaching Rennell, or (2) the present phoneme pronounced /l/ was in *hiti* time pronounced so differently as not to be identified with the Polynesian /l/. There can, furthermore, be no certainty that the two exotic phonemes came into the language at the same time. The more obvious aberrances of /gh/ words would suggest a later entry into the language.

Ann Chowning at the Science Congress stated that she had reconstructed \**ghai* as Proto-Melanesian mango. She mentioned that Dempwolff had reconstructed Derris as \**tuba*, which might suggest Rennellese *luba*, especially if the initial sound were once a *d*-. Katharine Luomala suggested that Rennellese *lai* (blanket) and *paghoanikagi* (shark) were not unlike Gilbertese *rai* (mat covering for an oven) and *bakoa* (shark). This led to the discovery that Marshallese and Trukese words for shark are *balco* and *poko*.

Examination of works by Bingham, Capell, Codrington, Elbert, Fox, Gabelentz, Ivens, Leenhardt, Ray, and others failed to provide other clues.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps readers of this article will have suggestions.

In earlier days students were rather quick to posit strata in Polynesia; then followed a conservative reaction. Even a cautious student of the history of Rennell, however, might suggest such a hypothesis here.

SOME WORDS FROM RENNELL AND BELLONA CONTAINING /GH/ AND /L/  
(Bellonese variants follow in parentheses; meanings are glosses.)

BIRDS: *baghigho*, cardinal honey eater; *ghaapilu*, starling; *ghaapilughae*, little starling; *ghagha*, white-eye; *ghamanaghi* (*ghabanaghi*), gray duck; *ghinei*, pigmy parrot; *ghisua*, song parrot; *ghou*, black bittern; *ligho*, white-collared kingfisher; *ligobai*, yellow-eyed

<sup>5</sup> After this article was in galley proof Bruce Biggs kindly pointed out to me the similarity of Fijian *mamaca* and Rennellese *mamala*, both meaning 'dry'. Fijian /c/ is pronounced about like *th* in 'there'. Its reflexes are /h/ in Tongan, and zero in Rennellese and Samoan (Fij. *cama*, outrigger float; *uca*, rain; *moce*, sleep), or /h/ in Tongan and /s/ in Samoan and Rennellese (Fij. *coka*, pierce; *curu*, go through; *vucu*, hit). 'Dry' is *maha* in Tongan and *masa* in Rennellese and Samoan. This would indicate that Rennellese *mamala* may be a later borrowing from Fijian or other language, and constitutes additional evidence for later entry of an *l*-word in Rennellese, perhaps as *th* or *d*.

Biggs also called my attention to *igha-* in names of fishes, which may also be a late introduction, as Rennellese has the word *ika*. Tongan *have* suggests Rennellese *labe*, both meaning 'break'.

graybird; *lokeloke*, fantail warbler; *maghighape*, *maghughape* (*mangighape*), Rennell fantail; *suasuanighai* (*susunighai*), sandpiper; *tagaighali*, legendary bird; *taghoa*, white ibis; *tangitangi biilage*, an unidentified bird.

BODY PARTS: *ghaghalaghi*, stomach; *ghogheghoghe* (*ngoghengoghe*), anus; *ghoghughoghu* (*ngoghungoghu*), intestines; *langoaa gima*, fingernail; *lango mata*, eyelid; *liga*, coccyx; *tobigha*, buttocks.

FAUNA (other than fish and mollusks): *bolu*, wood borer; *ghomiti*, spider; *gouboughoghi* (*gouboungoghi*), a land snake; *lakulaku*, horse-shoe bat; *langa*, flying fox; *logologo*, a lizard; *lugilugi*, sheath-tailed bat; *puli*, fruit bat; *ugubeeluna*, sea snake; *wngaghali*, grasshopper.

FISH: *baghaghoa* (*baghangoa*); *ghapaika*; *ghoghoghogho*; *ighaaitighi*; *ighabogha* (*ighabonga*), small parrot fish; *kalao*; *lakogha*; *liakumu*; *liamela*; *lioga*, a large eel; *lubi*; *lugu*; *malamega*; *paghabu*, a lake goby; *paghoanikagi*, a shark.

FLORA (other than "trees" and Gnetum): *aghaagha*, a vine; *buli*, base of fronds; *gabaghaghi* (*gabangaghi*), a banana; *ghaasigho*, a vine; *ghaighi* (*ghaingi*), a vine; *ghape*, a vine; *ghasughui*, a flower, perhaps an orchid; *ghighosaghi*; *ghoghhipii*, a banana; *ghoghpagho* (*ghongopagho*), a wild yam; *gholi*, lake moss; *kalogu*, log filled with ants; *laghoghe*, a vine; *lagi*, buttress at base of tree trunk; *laka*, *lakaa me'a*, flower; *loghologho*, weedy; *loka*, arrowroot; *luba*, Derris; *magaghai*, a vine; *manughaghe* (*manungaghe*), a tuber; *poghoghi niu* (*pongoghi niu*), coconut husk; *polo*, coconut (the nut, not the tree); *pulo*, vine stem.

Words concerning GNETUM GNEMON, *gemugi*: *ghaisanga*, heating stones for cooking *gemugi*; *ghasegha*, *gemugi* fruit; *ghatogha*, stage of ripening; *lala*, seed; *lapa*, religious offering of; *lapugha*, to blossom.

MATERIAL CULTURE: *aga lighali*, passages at sides of houses; *ali*, shell scoop; *baagha*, European beads; *baghu*, coarse mat of baghu leaves; *beeghai*, *bogoghai*, climbing poles; *bugho*, net; *bulusae*, razor handle; *ghaghalobo*, bracelet, armlet; *ghapaghapa*, small mat; *ghau*, fishhook; *ghinama*, axe type; *ghinighini*, small basket; *ghoghabalo* (*ngughabalo*), war club; *hakapulonga*, tattooing design; *kilakila*, axe type; *lagaghi*, vine about waist or feet of tree climber; *lai*, blanket; *lakunga*, gunwale pole; *laoa*, cloth, lavalava, calico; *lia*, midship thwart of canoe; *liga*, stick for fire plow, lime for betel; *lingo*, armlet; *lipa*, weir, coconut-leaf mat; *lipo* (*ghupo*), tattooing design; *loghuloghu*, canoe thwarts; *lokena*, tapa scarf; *lungata*, coconut-leaf basket; *mala*, spear end; *malibebe*, old mat; *malikope*, mat; *mali'ugunga*, basket; *malughubei*, faggot; *paghogha* (*pangogha*), row of stones, as besides a grave; *tagaghaghi*, war club (?).

MOLLUSKS: *balibali*, trochus; *ghaghighasa* (*ghangighasa*), limpet; *ghagho*, shell, as for inlay; *ghaghumu*, crab; *ghapighaghi*, young nautilus; *ghoghumu*, crab; *ghumu*, tridacna; *laginga*, tridacna; *lango*, shell, general name; *polupolu*, land shell; *tamalabe*, trochus, *tiaghagha* (*tianagaha*), an edible shell; *ugubeluna*, nautilus.

TREES: *aloba*, Ficus, used for tapa; *baghu*, a palm, used for mats; *boighai*, with edible red fruits; *ghabigangi*; *ghaghagha*; *ghaghimaga*, avocado (?); *ghai*, like mango; *ghaighaghea* (*ngaighaghea*); *ghaimega*; *ghaapoli*; *mabuli*, Ficus, used for tapa; *mananigahapu*; *pughaghe* (*pungaghe*).

Words with pejorative connotations: 26.

Words describing physical world: 18.

Work or activity words: 40.

Miscellaneous. 119.

Total: 340.

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