



Old languages in new academic spaces: emergent pedagogy for tertiary programmes in Pacific languages

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers an appropriate pedagogy for indigenous language programmes at tertiary level in a context in which a former colonial language has become the default as both medium of instruction and subject of academic study. This pedagogy is guided by an overarching commitment to decolonisation of the academic space, is grounded in the sociolinguistic realities of each specific context, and remains flexible enough to accommodate the complexities that are inevitable when a language is made welcome for the first time in a new domain. A recent expansion in the number of languages offered for study at the University of the South Pacific serves as the backdrop to this discussion.

KEYWORDS

South Pacific; indigenous languages; higher education

New space for old languages

The University of the South Pacific (USP) turned 50 years old in 2018. Celebrations were held at campuses across its 12 member countries – Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu – highlighting the immense cultural, linguistic and geographic diversity of the institution. As the university marked its half centenary, the School of Language, Arts and Media was also celebrating an addition to the university's curriculum offerings: new majors in Cook Islands Māori, Tongan and Niuafu'ou, Vagahau Niue, and Vanuatu Language Studies, to complement those that had existed since the early 2000s in Fijian and Hindi. A further new programme, which will not be discussed here, is a minor in Rotuman, which focuses on raising the proficiency of students who have limited or passive knowledge of the language. The programmes of focus in this paper are not about enhancing proficiency, but about enabling fluent speakers to study their own languages as serious academic subjects at tertiary level for the first time, being taught and assessed entirely through those languages. Many graduates will go on to teach their language in their national school systems, and this is the first opportunity that many of them have had to learn about their language at a level beyond school.

As we note in a collaborative account of our journey (Crocombe et al. [under review](#)), these languages 'have always been here but we could not hear them. We could not see them'. Our success has been due to a coming together of communities within our member countries, university staff both at the regional campuses and at the administrative headquarters in Fiji, academics from the Pacific diaspora, and the high-level support of member country governments, most of whom are committed enough to the initiative that they are willing to support it financially. There is a great swell of optimism at the current time, and the mood is spreading right across our vast region, with recent groundwork starting in the Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu, and queries starting to come in from diaspora communities in Australia and New Zealand. The voyage has been literal, virtual and metaphorical, as we have travelled between campuses for face-to-face meetings and

teaching, connected virtually through teleconferencing and e-learning platforms, and each has found our own way to contribute.

In this paper, I discuss the complex process of curriculum development from my perspective as mediator between those who run the new language programmes at our different campuses and those who sit in the administrative headquarters of the institution making judgments about the 'quality' and 'financial viability' of our offerings. My role as the coordinator for linguistics and languages was to demonstrate at the outset that our programmes would conform to institutional requirements and expectations, without really knowing exactly what would happen in practice once the classrooms in each country opened their doors and let their languages in. I retrace the steps through which the initiative was planned on paper, how it came alive in the classrooms, and how a pedagogy is starting to emerge from which we can now start to theorise. I thus foreground the practical account of how we are starting to teach Pacific languages in our university curriculum, before making connections to theoretical perspectives in the second half of the paper. This structure recognises pedagogy as a process rather than a fixed product.

Programme structure

A Bachelor of Arts degree at USP consists of 24 courses, each of 7.5 credit points, which can be completed full-time over three years. Most students complete a double major in two different disciplines, with each major comprising between six and eight courses. A further four courses are compulsory service courses, and the remainder are electives. [Table 1](#) outlines the courses within each major of the new Pacific language programmes. Courses with an LN code come from the general linguistics programme, offered at all campuses through the medium of English.

[Table 1](#) shows that there is a certain amount of commonality across the four new programmes, but some variation to suit each context's needs. One obvious source of difference is the number of languages covered by each major.

The Cook Islands is home to two indigenous languages, Cook Islands Māori, which is spoken by approximately 13,000 speakers throughout the majority of the group (and which exhibits a certain amount of dialectal variation between the varieties spoken on each main island) and Pukapukan, spoken in the northernmost islands by approximately 700 (Eberhard, Simons and Fennig 2019). These languages fall in different branches of the Central-Eastern Oceanic family, and are mutually unintelligible. When we introduced our new programme, we made the decision to focus on the

Table 1. Courses in the new programmes.

Cook Islands Māori	Tongan and Niufo'ou	Vagahau Niue	Vanuatu Language Studies
CM111 Cook Islands Māori 1	TG111 Tongan and Niufo'ou 1	NU111 Vagahau Niue 1 NU131 Taoga Niue	VA111 Bislama: The National Language of Vanuatu VA112 The Languages of Vanuatu
LN118 The Languages of the Pacific	LN118 The Languages of the Pacific	LN118 The Languages of the Pacific	
CM211 Cook Islands Māori 2	TG211 Tongan and Niufo'ou 2	NU211 Vagahau Niue 2	VA211 Bislama in Contemporary Times
CM212 The Teaching of Cook Islands Māori	TG212 The Teaching of Tongan and Niufo'ou	NU212 The Teaching of Vagahau Niue	VA212 The Teaching of Vanuatu Languages
CM311 Cook Islands Māori Texts and Translation	TG311 Tongan and Niufo'ou Texts and Translation	NU311 Vagahau Niue Translation and Interpreting	VA311 Texts and Translation in Vanuatu Languages
	TG321 Tongan and Niufo'ou Literature		VA312 Topics in Vanuatu Languages
CM331 Cook Islands Māori Epistemology, Values, Ethics	TG331 Tongan and Niufo'ou Epistemology, Values, Ethics 1 further linguistics course	NU331 Niue in its Contemporary Context 1 further linguistics course	2 further courses from French or linguistics

former language only in the first instance. However, now that the programme is established, the intention is to offer a Pukapukan version too. Tonga presents a similar linguistic picture, with two indigenous languages, again from different branches of the Central-Eastern Oceanic family: Tongan, spoken by 104,000 throughout the country, and Niufo'ou, spoken by approximately 1000, mainly on the island of the same name (Eberhard, Simons and Fennig 2019). Learning from the Cook Islands programme, we decided in this case to develop a single programme that focuses on both languages of Tonga together. Niue is, sociolinguistically, less complex, with only one indigenous language, Vagahau Niue. The complexity comes from the fact that the majority of its speakers live outside the home country, with only approximately 1300 speakers in Niue (out of a total population of 1600) and close to 6000 elsewhere, mainly in New Zealand (op. cit.). In stark contrast, Vanuatu, with a population of less than 300,000, is home to approximately 138 distinct indigenous languages at the last count (François et al. 2015), the majority being from the Southern Oceanic group, with the addition of Bislama, an English-lexified expanded pidgin that serves as lingua franca, national language, and co-official language.

In each of Niue, Tonga and the Cook Islands, English is also widely spoken and serves as a *de facto* official language, having been established due to historical relationships with Britain and, later, New Zealand (either as formal colonies, in the case of the Cook Islands and Niue, or under a 'Treaty of Friendship', in the case of Tonga). Official policy is for the national language to be used as the medium of instruction for the first few years of school, with a transition to the use of English beginning during mid to late primary. Throughout secondary school in all three countries, English is officially the sole medium of instruction, with the national language taught only as a subject. In Vanuatu, both English and French serve as official languages, alongside Bislama, due to a complex colonial period as a dual anglo-French condominium. Approximately two thirds of schools are now designated 'Anglophone', while the remaining third are 'francophone', and it is not uncommon for some children of each family to be enrolled in each system. Current education policy is for children to begin their education using the vernacular (either an indigenous language or Bislama) as the medium of instruction, before a transition to either English or French from mid primary. Both former colonial languages (but no other languages of Vanuatu) are taught as subjects throughout primary and secondary. By the time students from all four countries enter USP, they have therefore had limited or, in some cases, no experience of using their own first language as medium of instruction or assessment, and some students have never seen their own languages even as subjects on the timetable.

The first course in each major (111) is designed to introduce the key phonological, orthographic, morphosyntactic and lexical elements of the language, and generally make the case for treating the language as a serious subject of study. It also sets the historical scene, discussing the changing roles and status of the language in different domains. As part of the course, students should have the chance to analyse pre-existing audio or written texts in the language (for example, recordings of oral histories or traditional myths), before creating their own versions in new media, which can be accessed by other users of the language via online video channels and links. In the case of Vanuatu, coverage is split over two courses: VA111 focuses solely on the national language, Bislama, while VA112 presents a linguistic overview of the indigenous languages spoken throughout the group.

The first course at the 200-level of each programme (211) aims to extend this study to issues surrounding the further development of the language in contemporary contexts, considering how new terminology is developed, and how the language can be used in oral and written contexts where English may have come to seem like the default option. An outcome from the course is that students will create a body of new written texts in their language about contemporary topics such as climate change, anti-corruption, and sustainable fishing.

The other course at 200-level (212) focuses on the teaching and educational use of the language in the national school system. It covers appropriate pedagogy for situations in which the language may be being learnt as a second language, as well as those in which it is being studied as a first language, within a general context of educational bilingualism. As part of their assessment activities, students

will produce new educational materials that can be used to teach the language and to teach content across the curriculum through this language, such as vocabulary building activities.

At 300-level, the first course (311) will cover translation between the language of study and English, providing practical training in the skills of translation, as well producing new translations of texts that are currently only available in English for possible publication. In the case of the Vagahau Niue programme, a decision has been made to focus on simultaneous interpreting as well as the translation of written texts, given the need for interpreters in situations such as the land courts.

Other courses in the programmes cover aspects such as literature, orature, culture, identity and epistemology. For example, an early course on the Vagahau Niue programme covers a broad overview of *taoga Niue* (Niue culture), while the final course delves into the question of what it means to be 'from Niue' in the contemporary context in which far more people who identify as being Niuean are actually born and raised in New Zealand. Meanwhile, the final Cook Islands course covers ways of knowing and being as a Cook Islander, conducting research guided by indigenous frameworks. The Tongan and Niufo'ou programme includes a similar 300-level course on epistemology, values and ethics, but also includes a literature course – the first opportunity that any Pacific Islanders have had to study an entire degree level literature course that focuses solely on literary texts in their own language. Given the linguistic diversity of Vanuatu, the final course on their major is reserved either for a specific project topic to be chosen each year, or for individual students to conduct independent project work on their own languages. Inclusion of such topics pushes the boundaries of our university's curriculum and challenges us all to reconsider what is important, and what is possible, within a truly Pacific higher education.

Breathing life into the programme structure

The previous section describes the new language majors as they are represented on paper. This is the programme structure that was developed in collaboration with the USP campus and local language committee in each country, and that was subsequently endorsed by the various institutional committees. We did not naively start out with a one-dimensional curriculum map and expect our programme to simply roll out in the way expected. However, we knew that, before we could really engage too much with the details of practice, our biggest hurdle was going to be penetrating the stubborn wall of monolingualism around the institution in order to get programme approval from the top levels of our university. Putting forward a clear table of course codes, learning outcomes and assessment items, described in language that administrators can handle, was key to us moving forward. The more interesting part of the journey would start once the power shifted back to the campuses, enabling the standardised template to come to life in very different ways.

At the time of writing, the first Cook Islands cohort of 22 students have completed CM111 and CM211 as summer schools which run during the January breaks, enabling schoolteachers from across the country to congregate on Rarotonga for an intensive period of study. The timing has also allowed us to draw on the expertise of Dr Sally Akevai Nicholas, an academic based in Auckland, who has been able to fly to Rarotonga during her own teaching break to run the courses. The very practical challenges of offering a face-to-face course at a time and location convenient for our students and teaching staff were simply the first steps in disrupting the status quo of 'university business as usual' in which we are so used to centralised timetabling decisions that tend to be driven by room booking constraints and minimum enrolment numbers. Since we cannot possibly find the minimum 100 students required for the university to deem a course 'viable', we are unable to hire academic staff on a full-time contract, and rely on the goodwill and spirit of the extended community of speakers of the language, who have graciously stepped forward to take on part-time contracts that fit around their schedules.

The Cook Islands programme really came alive, however, once the classes started. We had mapped out courses that aimed to cover the structural aspects of the language, while also ambitiously hoping

that the cohort could produce some new Māori texts of their own for use by the community. By the end of CM111, there was a YouTube channel populated by Māori animated cartoons (Nicholas 2018), and, by the end of CM211, there was an e-portfolio established by each student showcasing their oral arguments, written essays and a series of language learning resources created using online tools such as *Quizlet* and *Memrise* (Nicholas 2019). The creativity and sheer volume of resources that the students managed to produce within each of the four-week summer schools is incredible, and is a testament to the collaborative, hands-on learning environment that was established in the class. They have formed a supportive community of learning that has enabled the passion for the language and culture to come alive in truly unexpected ways. The positivity from within the cohort has also radiated out to such an extent that we now need to manage the logistics of commencing a second cohort at the Rarotonga campus before the first has completed, while possibly also starting a third cohort up in Pukapuka.

Beginning one year later, the first Tonga cohort of 19 students have recently completed TG111, and are currently registered in TG211. These courses run during the regular semester schedule, enabling two courses to be delivered during the main academic year, and a third to be completed as a summer school. This arrangement was made because we had in-country academic expertise on which we could draw, and because the first cohort was picked from those already resident on the main island of Tongatapu. However, at the very last minute, illness left us with a staffing crisis, reminding us how fragile our resourcing arrangements are. We were lucky, once again, to be able to lean on the goodwill of an Auckland-based academic, Dr Melenaite Taumoeolau. In order to accommodate her schedule, the Tonga campus managed to offer TG111 as a blended course, combining some intensive periods of face-to-face teaching in Tonga with online components completed remotely once Melenaite was back in Auckland. TG211 is being offered in a similar manner. Flexibility has been absolutely key in ensuring that the programme could still go ahead as planned.

I met Melenaite in Auckland just before she flew to Tonga for the first block of teaching. She was concerned that she would not have time to translate all the written material that she wanted to use (such as published articles in English) into Tongan before the course started. One of our aims on the programmes has been to create a learning and assessment environment that enables the language of study to be used as much as possible. This seems a necessary step in reclaiming academic space for indigenous languages, and resisting the normalisation of English as the default language of higher education. However, Melenaite and I had some lengthy discussions about the extent to which English ought to be excluded outright from that space. We discussed the value of instilling a healthy attitude towards multilingualism and multiliteracy, recognising that pitting one language against another was likely to end up favouring the languages of wider communication such as English, thus doing more harm than good to the indigenous languages. We were both glad that this issue would not delay the course preparation, but also knew that this was a bigger question that we would return to many times as we moved forward.

In the course itself, I knew that producing YouTube videos and populating quiz apps would be ambitious, particularly in the Niuafu'ou language, since the students and staff were far less familiar with this language. However, surprises were in store of a slightly different kind. On the very first day of class, I was sitting at my desk 750 kilometres away in Suva, Fiji, when a Facebook notification told me that my colleague from the Tonga Campus was posting live. And there was the TG111 class singing an emotional song in the Niuafu'ou language, led by two fluent speakers in the group, with the historic moment instantly transformed and transported in a new digital medium.

The first Niue cohort have completed NU111, and are currently registered in NU131. They are able to run on a similar schedule to the Tongan and Niuafu'ou programme, drawing on local staffing expertise. Niue holds one of our smallest USP campuses, and there were only 13 students enrolled at the university across any programme during 2018. We were therefore delighted to have 12 students enrolling for the first time at the start of 2019 in the new Vagahau Niue programme. Not only was this a healthy number, the class roll included the Minister of Education, who attended class each week, submitted all assignments and did very well on the final exam! An outcome that

we knew would be important for our programmes was a resonance with the extended community beyond the classroom walls, and we had thought hard about how our activities would reach outwards into the community. Indeed, the Director of Education wrote to say:

We are so proud of the quality of work produced not just in the students' assessments but also when they now preach in church or deliver speeches on behalf of their departments in the community. A lot of people have noticed the difference and that is an indirect way of promoting the Vagahau Niue.

However, we had not given as much thought to the question of which elements of the community would be coming *into* our classrooms, so the presence of such an influential public figure was an endorsement beyond our expectations.

With so many people of Niue residing outside the country, thoughts have quickly turned to how we can cater to the diaspora population. At USP, we have a long history as a provider of distance and flexible learning, initially through print mode delivery, supplemented by a satellite tutorial system, and more recently expanding with the use of a range of online and blended models. An online offering of our Pacific language programmes is therefore the logical next step, but we will have to temper our enthusiasm once more so that we will meet our institutional requirements before making a radical new change. More importantly, we will need to ensure that we are indeed able to provide a high-quality programme in fully online mode so that we do not rush before we are able to offer something worthwhile. As we move to a new phase, we once again have to mediate between following our hearts in the direction that the community wants to move and putting institutional checks and balances in place to moderate what we do, where and when.

Another element that has emerged from the Niue programme is the *obedient resistance* to standardised paperwork. We comply with requirements so thoroughly that we end up transforming them ever so slightly, thus undoing the very standardisation they are there to ensure. The first example of this is the course outline template that USP requires all courses to use. We already provide translations of these in the languages concerned, rather than using the English versions, but it was nice to see that the Niue team had also replaced the required generic graduate outcome of 'Pacific consciousness' with the localised variant 'Niue consciousness'. They did not reject the institutional requirements, and in fact engaged with them enough to transform them slightly in ways that made more sense, thereby subtly reinterpreting what it means to meet USP's outcomes. Secondly, when the NU111 exam paper was sent to our School moderation meeting, staff in Suva were intrigued to see multiple choice answers listed as (a), (e), (i), (o), (u), rather than (a), (b), (c), (d), (e). Given that all exam papers are expected to conform to a standardised font and page layout (for clarity), this felt like a very small act of anti-standardist defiance of the anglocentric norms of our institution while, in reality, being the most logical lettering system given that the five vowels come first in the Vagahau Niue alphabet.

The final programme, in Vanuatu Language Studies, has not yet been brought to life. Although there has been much interest and discussion on social media, we had no students registering for VA111 in its first semester, and there was an insufficient number of registrations in VA112 in the following semester to enable it to run. On paper, this programme is easy for us to develop and teach, because our Pacific Languages Unit has been based at our Vanuatu campus since 1983, and we even have materials from an earlier incarnation of VA111 which was taught briefly in the 1980s. There is also a clear community need for the programme, since the Vanuatu Ministry of Education launched a new medium-of-instruction policy in 2012, mandating that all children should begin their formal education through the home language (either an indigenous language or Bislama). Given the immense linguistic diversity in Vanuatu, a huge amount of technical work is needed to refine orthographies, create literacy and numeracy kits in multiple languages, produce a new body of written texts for a range of educational and recreational purposes, and retrain teachers. Much of this work is currently being undertaken by linguists from overseas who have conducted fieldwork in Vanuatu and who have long-standing relationships with the communities in which they are now

being asked to work. Local capacity building is sorely needed, and graduates from our Vanuatu Language Studies programme would be well placed to work in this field.

However, this is a very different narrative from the way our programmes have emerged in the Cook Islands, Tonga and Niue. It is a technicist approach, which is resonant with early models of language policy and planning that developed in response to 'language problems' in the era of new nation building from the 1960s onwards (Ricento 2000). It is an approach that assumes that the work that has previously been carried out by overseas linguists can be continued by ni-Vanuatu as soon as they have been trained to do so. It is not an approach that starts from an urge to see the languages of Vanuatu inside USP's curriculum; nor from a feeling of outrage that the only way to get a 'piece of paper' from a degree-awarding institution is to leave your own languages at the door; nor from a determination to do things differently. Another key difference may be that the multiplicity of languages covered by the programme provides less of a common linguistic cause than the other three programmes. The sociolinguistic context in Vanuatu is so complex that sentiments regarding the domination of Bislama over the indigenous languages, negative attitudes towards Bislama as a language in its own right, and the perceived inequalities faced by those educated in the French-medium system (Crowley 2005; Lynch 1996) may all be preventing such a common linguistic cause taking root. Without this cause, there is also no high-level backing from within the government, and thus no financial support to enable the courses to run with low numbers.

At the time of writing, we are therefore buoyed up by many of the new developments, while still holding our breath and juggling each new constraint as it arises. If this section of the paper has appeared disjointed, this is not unintentional. While there are common threads running through the narrative, and it is undoubtedly a voyage of togetherness, each programme has come to life (or struggled to breathe) in very different ways. It is only at this point in our journey that we are able to step back and observe the pedagogy that is emerging in context out of the space that we have created.

An emergent pedagogy for teaching Pacific languages at a Pacific university

USP's success has been driven by a commitment to disrupting the existing order of the academic space, rather than simply aiming to create academic programmes as ends in themselves. Whether through the introduction of topics that would not normally find space in a university curriculum, or through the use of languages that are not usually welcomed as media of instruction, or through the adaptation of processes that are supposed to be 'standardised', our programmes have inserted themselves in the institution in quite noticeable ways, despite ostensibly reaching relatively small numbers of students. This overarching spirit is recognised as part of the drive towards 'decolonising higher education' (Fa'avae 2019; Smith 2012; Smith et al. 2016; Thaman 2003), 'de-alienating the academy' (Antia and Dyers 2019), fostering a 'culturally responsive pedagogy of relations' (Bishop et al. 2007) and, more specifically in the case of the region in which this article is set, 'reclaiming indigenous Oceanic perspectives, knowledge, and wisdom that have been devalued or suppressed because they were or are not considered important or worthwhile' (Thaman 2003: 2). This commitment must be ongoing, and it must run deeper than the implementation of a specific programme. A commitment to decolonisation is more than a discourse, or rhetorical stance, or a call to action. It is the constant chipping away at institutional structures in order to create new spaces in the academy in which specific institutional changes such as the introduction of new programmes can happen. It is an 'indigenous theory of change to underpin and give coherence to any strategies for transforming the academy' (Smith and Smith 2018: 4).

Medium of instruction provides one obvious tool with which to disrupt. Where a language such as English has been used as the only sanctioned medium of academic discussion, speakers of other languages have been both alienated by the way their learning space is framed and disadvantaged by the additional challenge of having to engage through a second language (Prah 2005). New programmes in the tertiary curriculum that use languages other than English for learning and

assessment purposes present tangible and refreshing opportunities to do something different. They also create safe havens in which to pause, draw breath, and open up new conversations about what academia ought to look like, without the pressure of others listening in. At the same time, they present opportunities to work out how to deal with the former colonial language, given that globalisation 'has made the borders of the nation state porous and reinserted the importance of English language' (Canagarajah 2005: 196). A pedagogy for an indigenous language programme is one that recognises the interrelationship between that language and others of wider communication, rather than pits one against the other.

The 'postcolonial puzzle' (Lin and Martin 2005: 5) of the renewed desire for English in former colonial contexts is by no means the only dilemma. There is a constant tension between disrupting the norms of academia and needing to conform to those norms in order to redefine the academic space in ways that will be legitimated by all, without going so far as to 'institutionalise away from its indigenous communities and contexts' the indigenous knowledge that is so critical to disruption (Smith et al. 2016: 131). The institutional bodies that decide whether a new programme can be introduced need to be convinced in terms that they understand. We are accustomed now to a higher education landscape that is evaluated by an attempt to align learning outcomes with learning and assessment activities. However, as Coronel-Molina and McCarty (2011: 369) note, not all outcomes can be evaluated through objective, quantitative measures. The pedagogy of a new language programme must be understood in the context of language policy and planning, such that broader goals of building research capacity and linguistic expertise, developing linguistic terminology, creating new bodies of oral and written texts, or reversing trends of language shift must be considered during the evaluation process.

Learning and assessment tasks should be designed with these broader objectives in mind, but with the understanding that they cannot be treated as ends in themselves. For example, an assignment might test students' ability to develop a list of new technical terms in a particular domain, justifying the choices that they make, and perhaps seeking feedback from community members. It would be beyond the reach of the assignment to evaluate whether those terms become used in that domain in the world beyond the classroom, but there will be plenty of people who will be evaluating the 'quality' of the programme on outcomes that may only become apparent later on. Moreover, less tangible, but potentially further-reaching, outcomes such as a change in the status of the language being studied compared to another language such as English, or a lessening of the inequality perpetuated by a system in which speakers of one particular language have become minoritised, cannot be used by an institution to evaluate an academic programme.

A clear understanding of the wider sociolinguistic situation in which the language(s) of study are used must form both the backdrop and the centrepiece of matters of curriculum and pedagogy, as phenomena such as language shift, endangerment and minoritisation must become topics of study within the programme at the same time as informing the way the programme is implemented. For example, students need the chance to learn about the loss or marginalisation of their own language, but the assignments and learning activities should also create opportunities for activism and engagement. A programme for an indigenous language that remains within the walls of a university is thus unlikely to meet the true goals that were behind its establishment in the first place. There is a constant flow of participation and collaboration between registered students whose names appear on the class roll and all other actors, past and present, in that sociolinguistic context. Even national borders are crossed, as speakers travel between multiple lives and locations, perhaps needing to relocate partway through their studies. The pedagogy that emerges must be far more inclusive and mobile than universities typically imagine.

A programme must also appeal to the students themselves, demonstrating that it is worth them enrolling. From the point of view of a languages department at USP, we want to disrupt the monolingualising norms of our institution, but this agenda may not be shared by all our students. More importantly, a student who does share the vision is not obliged to enrol in the programme! A

student who believes passionately in the value of being able to study their own language, through their own language, may still personally prefer to study physics or sociology, and perhaps be content to do so through English. We have to be careful that we do not inadvertently suggest that students who do not wish to take the new opportunity are somehow trapped in the old colonial mind set, brainwashed by their English-dominant schooling experiences. While wanting to do something radical and disruptive, we also have to treat our programmes in exactly the same way as all the others for many purposes. Students need a reason to enrol, and scholarship providers need a reason to sponsor them to study. While these considerations may seem the antithesis of core tenets of a move to decolonise the academic space, we do have to engage with questions such as what a graduate from our programmes will do next. Will they have learnt new skills that an employer will value? If such a question appears too neoliberal, will they have developed a sense of being that will enable them to fulfil whatever aspirations they had when they decided to enrol at a university in the first place?

The 'quality' of a tertiary programme in an indigenous language is hard to determine, and hard to evaluate, for both the students and the institution. However, by combining a commitment to decolonisation with a commitment to a rigorous and valuable academic programme, the discipline of linguistics itself can also be fruitfully interrogated. Key questions such as what a language is, how many there are in the world, and where the boundaries lie between them, are anything but neutral, and it is not uncommon for linguists and speakers to disagree on fundamental definitions and classifications (Mühlhäusler 2005, in Martí et al. 2005: 78). Taieb (2016: 72) sees attempts by the academy to standardise indigenous languages as the 'implementation and reproduction of power systems in sterile, decontextualised environments', ultimately becoming 'a means of control over land and natural resources', while Prah (2005) laments the opposite problem that perceptions of difference between mutually intelligible varieties have been perpetuated by national borders drawn by the colonisers along arbitrary lines. Calls to 'disinvent' the very notion of a language (Makoni and Pennycook 2007) could potentially speak right to the heart of an appropriate pedagogy for a new tertiary programme in an indigenous language. The challenge is to contest the colonial view of discrete, bounded languages, particularly loosening the boundaries around certain 'high' or 'standard' or 'pure' varieties of a language (for example by encouraging assignments to be written in different dialects, and by using class discussions to challenge purist ideologies about language change), while still putting forward a sufficient image of a language that will command the respect and credibility required for admission to the hallowed spaces reserved for formal education.

In summary, the pedagogy that we see emerging for our new language programmes is driven by an overarching commitment to disrupting and redefining the norms of what is institutionally possible. It is grounded in the sociolinguistic context in which the language is used, and it is flexible enough to accommodate the practicalities of mundane matters such as staffing and resourcing. But it is not fixed, and its strength is in its ability to keep reshaping in response to experience and confidence. It is reminiscent of what Kumaravadivelu (2001: 538) has referred to as a postmethod pedagogy: 'a three-dimensional system consisting of three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility'. Kumaravadivelu takes a very broad definition of 'pedagogy', incorporating 'not only issues pertaining to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures, but also a wide range of historical, political, and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education'.

It is well known that 'strategies for decolonising the academy are often subverted or co-opted by other reform agenda that may seek, as examples, greater efficiencies, more innovation, or international education' (Smith and Smith 2018: 9). However, by committing ourselves to the development of a pedagogy that is flexible enough to work for our purposes, we show that we can keep chipping away at problematic structures, seeking out further spaces for those who are ready to occupy them, and then stepping back to allow new things to develop within them.

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I would like to acknowledge the many colleagues and community members who have made it possible for us to introduce the new language programmes discussed in this paper. It is a story that began long before I arrived at the University of the South Pacific, and the version that I present here is merely my own account – based mainly on filling in frustrating amounts of paperwork and steering that paperwork through a chain of committee meetings.

Disclosure statement

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