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EDUCATION AND ACCULTURATION ON MALAITA: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF INTRAETHNIC AND INTERETHNIC AFFINITIES

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Abstract

One of the central issues in educational anthropology is the changing nature of intraethnic and interethnic conflict and relationships. Conventional modernization theory suggests that the acculturation process will tend to diminish traditional allegiances and affinities. There are, however, indications that the opposite may occur. This essay reports on research into this issue undertaken on Malaita, in the Solomon Islands. The research method was sociometric and involved examination of the ethnic identity and affinities of individuals within the Malaitan language-groups, namely, the AreAre, Baegu, Baelelea, Dorio, Fataleka, Kwai Island, Kwaio, Kwara'ae, Langalanga, Lau, Sa'a and To'abaita language-groups. From this, I draw some conclusions on the acculturation process on Malaita, as well as what individuals in mass societies might learn from such language-group societies.

[This Abstract was written by the article author, although did not appear in the published article].

Article

The study of ethnicity and ethnic relations continues to play a dominant role in the social sciences this decade, and this is no more so than in the nascent anthropological field of educational anthropology (Dynneson, 1984). Recent study has emphasized the scope of the field to include more general and diffuse cultural issues, such as the nature of groups, and, significantly, the nature of interethnic and intraethnic conflict and relationships (Schensul, 1985). Undoubtedly the single most important dictum of educational anthropology is that the field is concerned centrally with the notion of cultural transmission (Comitas and Dolgin, 1978). If we define culture as shared understanding or understandings (Swartz, 1982), then the sense of belonging to a group, or ethnicity (Van den Berghe, 1967:10), must be central to what is involved in cultural transmission. The process of intergenerational cultural transmission we can designate enculturation and the process of intersocietal cultural transmission we can designate acculturation (Singleton, 1971). One of the important issues for any developing region is the extent to which the process of acculturation tends to overpower the process of enculturation, and the extent to which the people of any region still maintain a traditional sense of group identity. This then is the thrust of what is examined within this study, assessing the effects of education and

acculturation on Malaita, within the Solomon Islands, and specifically contrasting the interethnic and intraethnic affinities within the different language-groups of Malaita.

The choice of the research locale was determined very much by my own access as a former teacher within the region, at the Su'u National Secondary School. However the **[74/75]** language-groups of Malaita also provide a useful instance of where no one language-group is numerically predominant. Malaita itself is the largest and most populous of the Solomon Islands, with a population of some 72,000. There has been much ethnographic research on each of the language-groups within Malaita. However to date the relationships between the different language-groups have been somewhat neglected. My own access to the Su'u National Secondary School on Malaita also provided access to a cross-section of the population, where all of the language-groups were represented. The index of language- group affinity selected was that of positive sentiment preference, with a questionnaire administered to a total of 250 students from the various Malaitan language-groups. In the questionnaire each student identified his or her own language-group, and each student was also asked to list the initial of his or her best friends. The number of friends was not specified, and in each case the student was asked to indicate the language-group to which the particular friend belonged.

This sociometric method of identifying group allegiances and group cleavages is one which has been common to research on ethnicity (Criswell, 1937; Jennings, 1973; and Weimann, 1983). It is important to note that the concentration upon friendship preferences oriented the research towards personal and individual rather than sociocultural links. Again, the key point is that culture is a matter of understanding and perception. Therefore we were interested in the way individuals understood themselves and understood their relationship to others, rather than the way those same individuals actually interacted with others. In one sense what was being revealed was the personal network of each individual, and the way that network consisted of individuals from his or her own language- group. One of the key elements within the analysis of sociometric data is that of heterophilia and homophilia of choice (Mayntz, Hom, and Hoebner, 1969: 130-133), and this was very much the case within this study. Homophilia can be defined as the extent to which individuals within a group hold a preference for relationships with individuals from the same group, and heterophilia can be defined as the extent to which individuals within a group are prepared to form relationships with individuals from outside their own group. In this research the homophilia of friendship choices corresponded to intraethnic affinity, and the heterophilia of friendship choices corresponded to interethnic affinity. Individuals from the various language-groups tended to exhibit varying degrees of affinity with individuals from both their own and other language-groups, and comparison of the various degrees of homophilia and heterophilia of choice within each language-group made it possible to test various hypotheses on the acculturation process.

The central hypothesis concerned whether the acculturation process tends to engender a diminution of the traditional language-group identity. On Malaita both indentured labour and missionization have historically encouraged such a diminution (Boutilier, 1979). The process of acculturation and modernization must mean that individuals from any one language-group will tend to have more social and business contacts with individuals from outside their own language-group. Therefore one would logically expect language-group affinity or identity to be less powerful with the more

acculturated language-groups than those less acculturated. However there are a number of writers who have suggested that [75/76] the opposite can occur, that with modernization and acculturation there is an opposite reinforcing of the traditional ethnic identity. Wallace (1956:265-268) writes of the revitalization of a culture; Barth (1969: 15,16) writes of boundary maintenance; Rothshild (1981:3) writes of the politicizing and nationalizing within the modernization process; and Berger and Keilner (1981:133) write of the process of counter-modernization. The research provided an opportunity to test whether traditional affinities are indeed re-inforced by the modernization process.

One initial problem was the identification of the language-groups. What made this problematic is the situation that some language-groups are more similar than others, and are sometimes categorized ethnographically in macro-groups called clusters. There are also minor subgroups within at least some of the language-groups. The resolution of the problem was relatively simple, inasmuch as the language-group designations were taken from the student responses themselves. The language-groups as identified by the students are indicated in Table 1. The important point about the research was that the objective was the understanding and understandings of individuals themselves towards their own language-groups and towards other language-groups. Therefore how such individuals themselves designated the language-groups was of most significance, rather than any classification by other individuals.

TABLE 1
Identification of Language-groups by Respondents

AreAre
Baegu
Baelelea
Dorio
Fataleka
Kwai Island
Kwaio
Kwara'ae
Langalanga
Lau
Sa'a
To'abaita
N Choices = 905
N respondents = 250

The research was a cross-sectional one, and therefore a key element was also a means of comparison of the results from each language-group. For this purpose a number of bipolar acculturation scales were generated, using current demographic information, and with **[76/77]** each language-group ranked according to the degree of acculturation. Tables 2 to 4 indicate the acculturation rank order through the degree of outmigration for each language-group, the gender imbalance in the migrant population for each language-group, and the degree of participation in formal education at the Su'u School for each language-group. It should be mentioned that gender imbalance was a significant index inasmuch as familiarity with employment outside Malaita tends to

encourage Malaitan male workers to take wives and families with them. Thus a predominantly male workforce does tend to indicate a people less familiar with expatriate life.

It should be noted that the participation rates for the Dorio and AreAre language-groups are higher than that which would be otherwise expected, due to the geographical [text continues after Tables below]

TABLE 2
Acculturation Rank Order by Outmigration

Language-group	Percentage Expatriate
Lau	29%
Langalanga	27%
Fataleka	23%
To'abaita	21%
Kwara'ae	21%
Baelelae	20%
Baegu	19%
Sa'a	14%
AreAre	13%
Kwaio	09%
Dorio	05%

TABLE 3
Gender Imbalance in Expatriate Populations

Language-group	Percentage Male
Langalanga	53%
Lau	60%
Baelelae	62%
To'abaita	63%
Kwara'ae	63%
Dorio	66%
Fataleka	67%
Baegu	72%
Sa'a	72%
AreAre	72%
Kwaio	86%

[77/78]

TABLE 4
Acculturation Rank Order by Participation in Secondary Education

Language-group	Comparative Participation Rate
Kwai Islanders	4.0
Sa'a	2.0
Langalanga	1.7
Dorio	1.6
AreAre	1.4
To'abaita	1.25
Kwara'ae	1.0

Fataleka	0.8
Baelelea	0.5
Lau	0.4
Baegu	0.3

N = 250
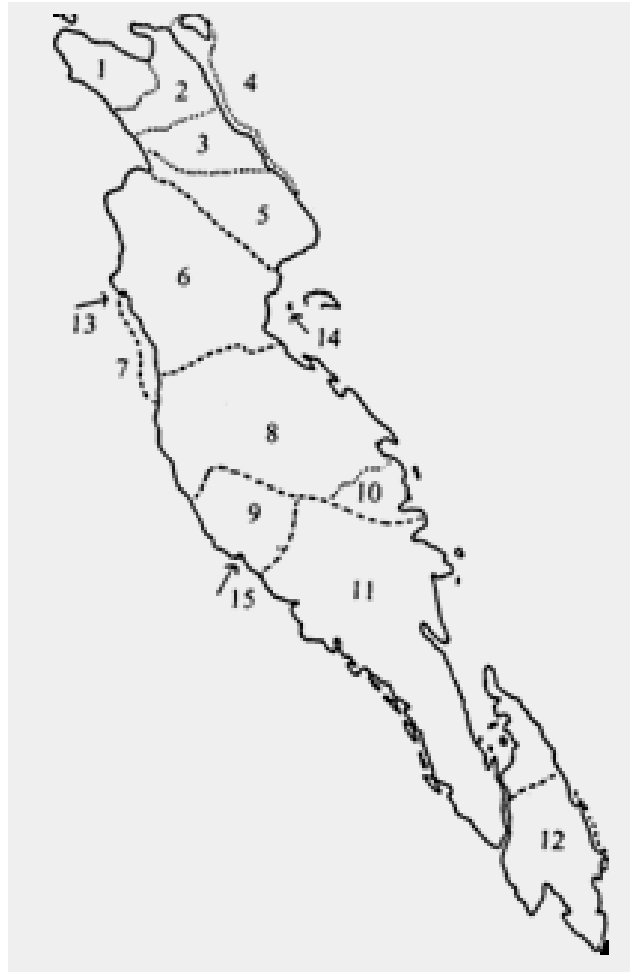1 = arithmetic mean of the Malaitan participation at the Su'u School

proximity of these language-groups to the Su'u School; and the participation for the Lau language-group is lower than that which would be otherwise expected due to the special involvement of this group in education in Honiara. Ultimately, acculturation must be recognized itself as an idea, and thus any attempt at quantification of acculturation must remain also problematical. However the above rank orderings did make it possible to ascribe a high, medium or low level of acculturation for each particular language-group. This information on the language-groups was confirmed through the history of culture-contact on Malaita. Contact through both indentured labour and missions occurred initially with the northern and artificial-island language-groups. Those language-groups in the centre and mid-south of Malaita tended to remain more isolated from European contact. The acculturation profile for the individual language-groups was also confirmed through a similar bi-polar scale generated from medical ethnography on Malaita (Damon, 1974). Finally, from the research questionnaires it was possible to analyse the responses, and to generate a level of homophilia and heterophilia of choice for each language-group. The rank order of the degree of homophilia for the language-groups is indicated in Table *5*. The results were significant, as can be seen through the comparison of the Tables. It can be summarized that individuals of the less acculturated language-groups tended to exhibit a greater degree of bomophilia than the Malaitan mean. Conversely, individuals of the more acculturated language-groups tended to exhibit a greater degree of heterophilia of choice than the Malaitan mean.

It is possible then to draw a number of conclusions regarding education and acculturation on the island of Malaita. In terms of ethnicity there is evidence of a continuing diminution of the traditional intraethnic affinities with progressive acculturation, and a corresponding increase in the interethnic affinities with progressive acculturation. There is no evidence of a stronger sense of language-group affinity amongst those individuals of the **[78/79]** [text continues after Table below]

TABLE 5
Homophilia in Personal Friendship Preferences

Language Group	Degree of Homophilia
Dorio	75%
AreAre	71%
Sa'a	49%
Fataleka	46%
Baegu	40%
Kwara'ae	38%
Lau	34%
Kwaio	27%
To'abaita	27%
Langalanga	22%
Kwai Islanders	20%

Balelae   not available
Malaitan Mean   43%
N choices = 905
N respondents = 250

groups most modernized and most acculturated. Of course, what this ultimately signifies for the language-groups themselves is not certain. However, perhaps the most remarkable overall factor is that the language-groups do continue to exist, maintaining local languages and traditions, despite the overwhelming presence of the modern technological culture of the late twentieth century. Such language-groups do provide a powerful sense of identity and belonging to individual members, a sense of identity and belonging which invariably impacts powerfully upon ethnographic outsiders, and from which individuals within mass societies have much to learn. If educational anthropology and ethnography can do no more than assist in explaining such forces of identity and belonging in the future, then such research will continue to serve a valuable role.

LINGUISTIC MAP OF MALAITA

Language-Group
1.   To'abaita
2.   Baelelea
3.   Baegu
4.   Lau
5.   Fataleka
6.   Kwara'ae
7.   Langalanga
8.   Kwaio
9.   Kwarekwareo (Dorio)
10.   Kwaikwaio
11.   AreAre
12.   Sa'a

Locations
13.   Auki
14.   Kwai Island
15.   Su'u School

Source: R.M.Keesing (1975)

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