

Further thoughts on the terms *hanau eepe* and *hanau momoko*, and why they should mean 'long ears' and 'short ears': Reply to Emily Mulloy

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Mrs Mulloy claimed that the word 'ears' does not appear in Emily Ross Mulloy's article on the meanings of the terms *hanau eepe* and *hanau momoko* (*RNJ* 7:71-72) may well have been greeted with murmurs of approval by those who already agreed with her. But it would have failed to convince the unconverted that those terms should not be translated as 'long ears' and 'short ears' respectively, as they have been for many years. Mrs Mulloy claimed that the word 'ears' does not appear in either expression and that the definitions of them that Father Sebastian Englert (1970:93) recorded should be accepted. Englert defined *hanau eepe* as 'fat or heavy set people' and *hanau momoko* as 'thin, slender people'. Mrs Mulloy said Englert was a highly skilled linguist with a knowledge of more than a dozen languages. She implied that if he said that such and such was so, then it was so.

I do not question that Englert was a most knowledgeable man on Easter Island's language and culture. Nor do I doubt that the definitions of *hanau eepe* and *hanau momoko* that he recorded in 1935-36 (Englert 1938:33; 1964:81-87), when he was still a newcomer to Easter Island and its language, faithfully reflect what his informants then told him. However, because his definitions contradict what others recorded during the previous 60 years (Heyerdahl 1961:33-38), there is good reason to believe, *a priori*, that the two terms might not now mean what they did originally.

The two terms relate to a period of Easter Island history at least two and a half centuries before Englert first went there. As Englert (1970:88) himself relates, his most trusted informant on the people known as *Hanau Eepe* and *Hanau Momoko* was Arturo Teao, a leper. Teao was born in about 1895 (Drapkin 1935:300). By 1918, he was already confined to the leprosarium (Bienvenido 1921:73). So the first question to be asked is whether Teao is likely to have had more correct information about the *Hanau Eepe* and *Hanau Momoko* than his compatriots of the 1880s when William J. Thomson (1891:528-32) first recorded traditions about descendants of Hotu Matu'a exterminating the 'long ears' or members of a 'long-eared race'. Likewise, could Teao have been better informed than his countrymen who, in 1914-15, told Katherine Scoresby Routledge (1919:280) that *Hanau Ep*, (sic) did mean 'Long Ears' and that *Hanau Momoku* (sic) meant 'Short Ears'?

According to Mrs Routledge (1919:167), the memories of the older Easter Islanders on matters of local history were 'sometimes shaky' even in her time. So by Englert's time, a generation later, might not Teao and his contemporaries have become confused about the meanings of the terms in question? In any case, ethnographic and archaeological evidence does not support the notion that Easter Island was ever inhabited by fat, heavy-set people. Also, Englert's

definition of *hanau momoko* is not in accord with universal laws on the partial reduplication of words such as *moko*. Yet again, Rapanui *eepe* is precisely what *epe* 'earlobe' would become if it were partially reduplicated. So if *hanau eepe* did originally mean 'long ears', then *hanau momoko* - by exclusion and regardless of its literal meaning - would have signified 'short ears', just as the term 'non-Easter Islander' signifies an Australian such as myself without using the word 'Australian'.

That words can undergo enormous changes of meaning in a short time will be evident to any English-speaker who considers the once-common phrase 'the gay nineties' and the now-common one 'the gay community'. That people constantly try to change language is evident from two articles in the very same issue of *RNJ* as Mrs Mulloy's. On p.69, Grant McCall, an apostle of genderless language, expresses his unease with the word 'men' as a term for 'men and women', and says 'let us immediately say human beings'. On p.73, Steven Roger Fischer, utterly convinced that the Easter Islanders have never been anything but Polynesians, wants to abolish the name that Roggeveen gave their island more than 270 years ago. 'It is my firm conviction', he says, 'that it's high time we finally discard[ed] Isla de Pascua, Easter Island, Ile de Pâques, and all the rest of these Roggeveen legacies once and for all. And it is time we agreed among ourselves whether we want Polynesian Rapanui or Chilean Rapa Nui as the name of the island'.

Changing the meanings of words either deliberately or through ignorance and getting rid of words whose connotations we don't like are all ways of rewriting history, as every reader of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will know. Hence, if we are genuinely interested in uncovering the Easter Island past, we will be wary of dubious dictionary definitions and of those who seek to tell us how we should think by changing our vocabulary. For Mrs Mulloy to have been convincing in the case of *hanau eepe* and *hanau momoko*, she should have tried to demonstrate that the pre-Englert definitions of those terms really were erroneous. This can be attempted through the techniques of comparative linguistics. The meanings of the three individual words in the two expressions must first be established in the other Polynesian languages (if they have them) and then compared with the present and former Rapanui definitions. An attempt must also be made to determine whether the forms of the words themselves provide any clues as to what they were originally intended to convey.

Mrs Mulloy, in fact, went some of the way towards doing this. She said that *hanau* (with its other forms, *fanau* and *'anau*) is common to all or most Polynesian languages and that it invariably means 'birth, to give birth'. By extension,

the word has also come to mean offspring, descent group, family group, descendants, family, race and people. As the meanings of Rapanui *hanau* coincide with those of other Polynesian languages, that particular word presents no problems in this inquiry. It should be noted, however, that Rapanui *poreko* also means 'birth, to give birth', etc., and that this is a word that other Polynesian languages do not have.

On the Rapanui word *momoko*, Mrs Mulloy said - seemingly correctly - that it is related to *moko* 'lizard', a word which 'also occurs widely in Polynesian languages'. She added that complete or partial reduplication is common in those languages and that it usually has the effect of 'forming a plural, showing repetitive action, or simply emphasizing the term employed'. According to Englert, *momoko* means 'something shaped like a lizard' and, by extension, 'anything with a pointed, slender shape'.



Ko te kura hihi at Hanga Ho'onu, La Perouse Bay, is one of the best-constructed and best-preserved of Easter Island's tupa. The men in the photograph are Rafael Haoa and the late Jose Fati. Photo: Robert Langdon 1985

As the formation of plurals, repetitive action and emphasis seem to have nothing to do with being shaped like a lizard, or vice versa, Englert's definition of *momoko* seems suspect on linguistic grounds and calls for further discussion. So, too, do Mrs Mulloy's statements and non-statements about *epe* and *eepe*. On the one hand, she failed to mention that *epe* 'earlobe' is unknown in all other Polynesian languages, which naturally raises the question of how it and such word as *poreko* came to be in Rapanui. On the other hand, Mrs Mulloy is surely wrong in asserting that *epe* does not occur in the Rapanui expression that allegedly means 'long ears'. If *momoko* is the partially reduplicated form of *moko* 'lizard', then *eepe* should equally be the partially reduplicated form of *epe* 'earlobe'.

Partial reduplication occurs in all languages. The linguist Edward Sapir (1912:79) states that it is used with 'self-evident symbolism' to indicate such concepts as 'distribution, plurality, repetition, customary activity, increase of size, added intensity and continuance'. In Sapir's terms, the symbolism of *eepe* is instantly self-evident: an *eepe* is obviously a bigger or longer earlobe than an *epe*. Thus, *hanau eepe* would have meant 'the long-eared people' or 'long ears' - the noun *epe* having been used in an adjectival sense and reduplicated. According to Englert (1938:23), *epe roroa* equally describes an enlarged ear or ears. But here the noun remains constant and a true adjective, *roa* 'long', is reduplicated.

How, then, could *momoko* have instantly symbolized some quality of the people called *Hanau Momoko*? The answer, surely, is not that they were 'skinny little lizards', as Mrs Mulloy suggested, but that their skins had repetitive marks on them like lizards' skins. In other words, the *hanau momoko* were heavily tattooed: they were 'the tattooed people'. Two pieces of evidence substantiate this idea: (1) in New Zealand *Maori*, *moko* means both 'lizard' and 'tattooing on the face or body' (Williams 1971:207); and (2) many Easter Islanders, at the time of European contact, were, indeed, heavily tattooed.

George Forster (1777, I:557, 561, 564), one of Captain Cook's companions on his visit to Easter Island in 1774, was among the many early visitors who remarked on the islanders' heavily tattooed skins. He described between 100 and 150 people he saw at Hangaroa as 'prodigiously punctured on every part of the body, the face in particular'. Two other islanders were said to be tattooed as in the Society Islands, Tonga and New Zealand, but much more extensively, while another man's legs were 'punctured in compartments' in a manner that Forster had not previously seen. The three last-named men were said specifically to have had elongated earlobes that hung down to their shoulders.

If all Easter Islanders had once had elongated earlobes as well as extensive tattooing, then *Hanau Eepe* could not have meant 'long-eared people' and *Hanau Momoko* could not have meant 'tattooed people'. This, however, was evidently not the case. Long ears, originally, were the distinguishing features of the people who built the massive, anthropomorphic *moai*, which are neither fat nor heavy-set but frequently have long ears. Extensive tattooing was the distinguishing feature of the Polynesians under Hotu Matu'a

whose arrival on the island in late prehistoric times brought its megalithic culture to an abrupt end and led, later, to the toppling of the *moai*.

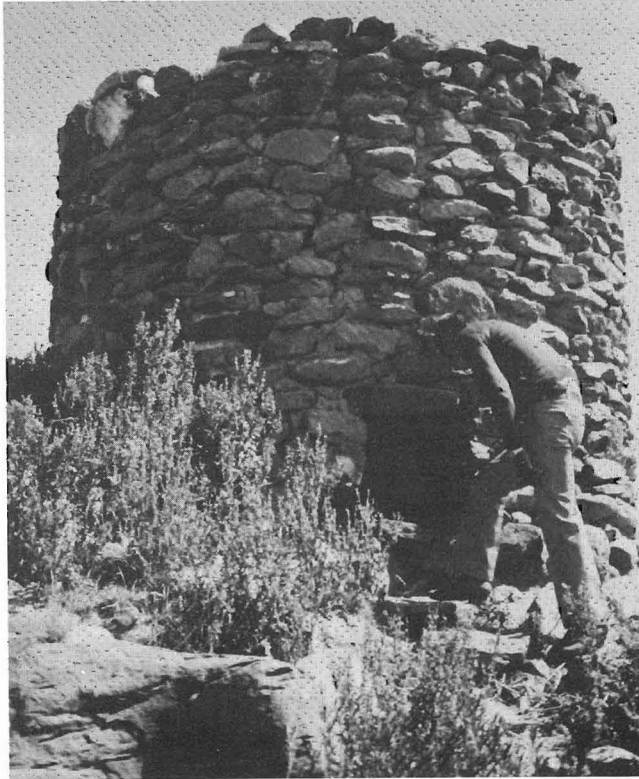
In 1886, Thomson (1891:528-32) recorded a tradition that, many years after the arrival of Hotu Matu'a, when the island was about equally divided between his descendants and the 'long-eared race', the latter was utterly annihilated in a battle. This, however, is obviously an exaggerated victors' tale, for it is clear from the ethnographic record that the Long Ears were only defeated, not annihilated. After the battle, the people of the two groups intermarried and exchanged customs, as they had almost certainly done in earlier times. Englert himself (1970:93-94) seems to have been coming round to that conclusion when he wrote:

"A great battle between these two groups...resulted in the almost complete annihilation of the *Hanau Eepe*. Their custom of enlarging the earlobes was not lost, however. It was evidently taken over by the *Hanau Momoko* and survived into historic times... Another detail of the tradition which seems significant also comes out in the context of the previously mentioned battle. The *Hanau Eepe* appear to have spoken a language different from that of the people of Hotu Matu'a... It would seem reasonable that some influence from the language of the *Hanau Eepe* might have remained in modern speech, even though children commonly learn the language of their mothers. Perhaps some of the synonyms in use today may be so explained."

Fourteen years after Englert's death, the linguist Darrell Tryon and myself published the results of a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) comparative study of the Easter Island language against all other Polynesian languages (Langdon and Tryon 1983). This revealed that more than 60 Rapanui words, mainly concrete nouns such as *epe*, had no cognates in any other Polynesian language; that about a dozen other words were confined to Rapanui and the Marquesic languages; that 14 more were found only in Rapanui and the Tahitic languages; and that about two dozen others were confined to Rapanui and the Eastern Polynesian languages generally. We concluded from this that Easter Island was long inhabited by a non-Polynesian people, some of whom were occasionally drifted to the islands to the west where items from their vocabulary were borrowed into the local Polynesian languages and sometimes carried further afield. More words in the first and last of our

categories have been identified since the Langdon/Tryon study was published. One in the 'Rapanui only' category is *tupa* which helps to establish that Easter Island's stone builders were people of South American origin. It also demonstrates that lexicographers such as Englert are only as good as their best informants.

Englert did not include the word *tupa* in his first Rapanui-Spanish dictionary of 1938. But it does appear in the revised version published after his death (Englert 1978:273). The word is there defined as: 'ancient constructions of stone, in various parts of the coast, almost all in the shape of small, round towers, which served as shelters for fishermen'. In a historical sense, this definition is about as far from the mark as Englert's definitions of *hanau eepe* and *hanau momoko*.



A *chullpa* at Sillustani, Peru. Photo: Robert Langdon

Comparison of Easter Island's *tupa* with the structures called *chullpa* in the high Andes of the Lake Titicaca basin of South America leaves no doubt that they were the work of one and the same people. Like the *chullpa*, the *tupa* are built internally in the form of a corbelled arch, which means that the stones of the wall overlap each other to form a dome-like ceiling. Like the *chullpa*, the entrances to the *tupa* are so low that they can only be negotiated on hands and knees. Moreover, they have the same massive lintel stones over them. The structures in both places were evidently built with the aid of ramps that were intended to be removed afterwards, as there are examples in both places where the ramps are still in place. As I myself have seen human bones in some *tupa*, there is no doubt that their original purpose was the same as that of the *chullpa*: they were sacred places for the

display and veneration of the remains of the dead (Aldunarte et al, 1979; Van Den Berg 1985:44). Finally, the word *tupa* is obviously as near as Polynesian tongues could get to *chullpa*, a word that occurs in both the Aymara and Quechua languages of the Andes but was almost certainly borrowed into them from an earlier, now extinct, language such as Puquina (La Barre 1963:576; Torero 1972:56-64; Hyslop 1976:196).

The Andean *chullpa* were first built in about the 10th century AD (Hyslop 1976:91; 1977). So the Easter Island *tupa* must date to a later time. That they, the *moai* and many of Easter Island's other megalithic structures were ever built at all leaves little doubt that the island was already thickly populated when the Andean people arrived there and that the newcomers were able to harness the labor of their

predecessors for their own purposes. Those predecessors were apparently of American origin, too - immigrants from Ecuador, or thereabouts, who brought the sweet potato, gourd, manioc, pineapple, soapberry, capsicum, 26-chromosome cotton, chicken and other useful items to the island in the first millenium of the Christian era (Langdon 1988:334; 1993:31n).

But all that was long ago and people do not inherit the memories and traditions of those they supersede. So when Europeans began inquiring into the origins of Easter Island culture late last century, they were bound to get some silly answers. 'To ask [the Easter Islanders] for the history of the great works', Mrs Routledge (1919:165) wrote, 'is as successful as to try to get from an old woman selling bootlaces at Westminster the story of Cromwell or of the frock-coated worthies in Parliament Square'. Hence, when Englert asked what the *tupa* were built for, he was told the absurd story - as Routledge (1919:218) herself was - that they were for the use of fishermen. When he asked for the meanings of the terms *hanau eepe* and *hanau momoko*, he was given equally fanciful information - information that his informants could not possibly have acquired at first-hand.

The moral to this article is that if a definition in a Rapanui dictionary is open to doubt, one should do one's best to check it out. The meanings of Rapanui words did not float down the centuries in the ether, finally to be captured and 'correctly' recorded by 'highly skilled' linguists such as Englert. They came in the minds of highly fallible, ever-changeable Easter Island men: Rapanui human beings, as McCall and Fischer would now have us call them.

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