

## **On the Polynesian dialects / by George Bennett.**

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ON THE POLYNESIAN DIALECTS.

By GEORGE BENNETT, Esq., F.L.S., M.R.C.S., &c.



THE Polynesian languages are, with but few exceptions, soft and harmonious, and figurative in their construction. Blair observes,\* that "all languages are most figurative in the early state;" and that, in the beginnings of society, "language is then most barren; the stock of proper names which have been invented for things is small, and at the same time imagination exerts great influence over the conceptions of men, and their method of uttering them; so that, both from necessity and from choice, their speech will at that period abound in tropes. For the savage tribes of men are always much given to wonder and astonishment. Every new object surprises, terrifies, and makes a strong impression on their mind; they are governed by imagination and passion more than by reason, and of course their speech must be deeply tinged by their genius. In fact we find that this is the character of the American and the Indian languages; bold, picturesque, and metaphorical; full of strong allusions to sensible qualities, and to such objects as struck them most in their wild and solitary life. An Indian chief makes an harangue to his tribe in a style full of stronger metaphors than an European would use in an epic poem."

The languages of New Zealand, the Society and the Sandwich Islands, are radically the same; they are well adapted for colloquial purposes, nor are they less calculated for the harangues occasionally made by the chiefs, which, combined with their metaphorical expressions, produce an impressive effect on their auditors. The following example will illustrate the style among the Tahitian chiefs. After a missionary sermon, in which the people had been exhorted to contribute as formerly towards the Missionary Society, Otoore (a chief of secondary rank, but an intelligent and eloquent man) stood up, and thus replied to some remarks which he considered bore hard upon the people: "You are aware, my friends, that the *vi tree*† has its winter and its summer; at one season we behold it clad in its leaves and fruits, inviting the stranger to come under its shade, and to refresh himself; at another time, its branches are despoiled of their verdure and their fruits, and appear as the barren rock: thus it is with us; we have our season of plenty and our season of want; the season of plenty you have witnessed, and now you behold the season of want. Do not, however, despair, for although winter‡ follows summer, summer also follows winter." Another remark by the same chief was as follows: "You know the coco-nut tree, which grows on the sea-shore; it has fibrous roots, which being united hold it firm; they are its supports; the waves dash against it from season to season, one wave receding to give place to another; yet the tree stands firm: thus let it be with you, missionaries; be united like the fibrous roots of the coco-nut tree, and one will strengthen the other; whilst we beat at your roots, stand immovable (as you were accustomed to do when we opposed your religion): the storm will end in a calm, and the tree remain standing."

The language of the Fidgi Group is very soft, and is considered, among the Polynesian, as Italian is among the European languages. We find the *s* prevail in the Fidgian; the *gn* and *f* in the Tonga; the *th* and *sh* in the Rótuma; the *ack* in the language of the New Hebrides Group. The Tongatabu chiefs regard a knowledge of the Fidgian language as an accomplishment, and there is

\* Lectures on Rhetoric, 8vo. pp. 177, 178.

† *Spondias dulcis*; a tree indigenous to Tahiti, and one of the very few trees that are deciduous in that island.

‡ Literally, *tave*, 'season.'



much intercourse between the islands. From the frequent visits of the natives of Tongatabu to the Fidgis, the language of the latter will, no doubt, in some degree become corrupted by the introduction of several Tonga words. It will not be improbable, that on a close inquiry being made, other words will be found used at the Leeward Group of the Fidgis (where the Tonga natives have but little, if any, intercourse), instead of those now used at the Weather Group of the Fidgi Islands.

The Tahitian alphabet has been thus formed :

A, as in <i>mar</i> .	N, as in <i>nu</i> .
B,* as in English.	O, as in English.
D, as in English.	P, as in English.
E, as in the English <i>a</i> soft.	R, as in <i>ro</i> .
F, as in English.	T, as in English.
H, as <i>hay</i> aspirate.	U, as <i>cu</i> .
I, as in the French language.	V, as in English.
M, as in <i>mo</i> .	W,† as in <i>war</i> .

Specimens of the pronunciation of every Letter in the Alphabet, exemplified by Tahitian Words.

A, <i>marama</i> , moon.	O, <i>tao</i> , a spear.
B, <i>tubu</i> , to grow.	P, <i>pahu</i> , a drum.
D, <i>duna</i> , a species of eel.	R, <i>roro</i> , the brain.
E, <i>mea</i> , thing.	T, <i>tubu</i> , to grow.
F, <i>fara</i> , pine apple.	U, <i>upo</i> , the head.
H, <i>haeri</i> , to go.	V, <i>vai</i> , water.
I, <i>ioa</i> , name.	W, <i>owai</i> , name of a tree; the bark
M, <i>moo</i> , a lizard.	of which is fragrant, and used by
N, <i>fenua</i> , land.	the natives for scenting their oil.

The *ae* in the Tahitian language is pronounced as the English *ai*; the *ai* as the English *i*.

Formerly, among the Society Islands, the names of things were often liable to change: the following instances will show the causes of such changes.

*Fetu*, 'a star,' was changed to *fetia*, on account of the former word having the termination *tu* similar to the name of the king, which was Pomari or Tu; the change taking place when the resemblance was observed. Again, *marama*, 'the moon,' was changed to *awae*, in consequence of a chief's daughter (allied to the royal family) having been named Marama. *Ra*, 'the sun,' was changed to *mahana*, in consequence of a chief having been named Hotu ra. If a chief dies in great pain, some one of the family would be named Mai, ma, mae, signifying 'painful disease' (*mae*, 'disease;' *ma*, *mae*, 'painful'); and if there was a word applied to anything, having a termination similar to that name, it would be immediately altered. Numerous other instances might be adduced, but these will suffice to show how and wherefore these changes take place.

The laws were formerly so strict on this subject, that the attendants of the king or chiefs could kill those who used any of the words that had been forbidden or changed; but since they have adopted Christianity, the old words have been principally resumed, and are not now liable to change; but the number of words (arising from the former changes) applied to the same object, renders the language difficult to strangers.

\* The Tahitians have some difficulty in pronouncing the *b*; they pronounce it usually as *p*.

† The *w* is seldom used; the *v* being usually substituted.



The numerals in the Tahitian, Tonga, Fidgian, and New Zealand languages, are as follows :

	Tahitian.	Tonga.	Fidgian.	New Zealand.
one,	<i>tahi,</i>	<i>taha,</i>	<i>dua,</i>	<i>tahi.</i>
two,	<i>rua,</i>	<i>ua,</i>	<i>lua,</i>	<i>rua.</i>
three,	<i>toru,</i>	<i>tolu,</i>	<i>tolu,</i>	<i>toru.</i>
four,	<i>fa,</i>	<i>fa,</i>	<i>fa,</i>	<i>fa.</i>
five,	<i>rima,</i>	<i>lima,</i>	<i>lima,</i>	<i>rima.</i>
six,	<i>ono,</i>	<i>ono,</i>	<i>ono,</i>	<i>ono.</i>
seven,	<i>hitu,</i>	<i>fitu,</i>	<i>fitu,</i>	<i>hitu.</i>
eight,	<i>vau,</i>	<i>valu,</i>	<i>valu,</i>	<i>varu.</i>
nine,	<i>iva,</i>	<i>hiva,</i>	<i>diva,</i>	<i>iva.</i>
ten,	<i>ahuru,</i>	<i>hongofulu,</i>	<i>tini,</i>	<i>tekau or nahuru.</i>

In the Tahitian language, "twenty" is expressed by *rua ahuru*, or 'two tens.' In counting a number of articles, they use the word *ta,au*, signifying "a score:" in New Zealand, the score is expressed by *takau*.

Vocabulary of the Tahitian, New Zealand, Fidgian, and Tonga Languages.

English.	Tahitian.	New Zealand.	Fidgian.	Tonga.
sun,	<i>mahana or ra,</i>	<i>ra,</i>	<i>ŋingia,</i>	<i>la.</i> /s
moon,	<i>marama or awae,</i>	<i>marama,</i>	<i>vula,</i>	<i>mahina.</i>
star,	<i>fetia or fetu,</i>	<i>fetu,</i>	<i>kalo, kalo,</i>	<i>fetu.</i>
night,	<i>rui or po,</i>	<i>po,</i>	<i>bongi,</i>	<i>pouri.</i>
day,	<i>mahana,</i>	<i>eao,</i>	<i>ŋingia,</i>	<i>aho.</i> /s
morning,	<i>poipoi,</i>	<i>ata,</i>	<i>mataka,</i>	<i>bongi, bongi.</i>
light,	<i>eao,</i>	<i>eao,</i>	<i>lingia,</i>	<i>aho.</i>
noon,	<i>avatea,</i>	<i>avatea,</i>	<i>singialebu,</i>	<i>hoata.</i>
evening,	<i>ahiahi,</i>	<i>ahiahi,</i>	<i>kaeavi,</i>	<i>efiafi.</i>
come,	<i>haeremai,</i>	<i>haeremai,</i>	<i>lakomai,</i>	<i>hau.</i>
go,	<i>haere,</i>	<i>haere,</i>	<i>lako,</i>	<i>alu.</i>
man,	<i>taata,</i>	<i>tanaka,</i>	<i>tamata,</i>	<i>tangata.</i>
woman,	<i>vahine,</i>	<i>vahine,</i>	<i>leva,</i>	<i>ŋfine.</i>
children,	<i>temariü,</i>	<i>temariü,</i>	<i>ngone,</i>	<i>tamagiü.</i>
boy,	<i>temava,</i>	<i>temariü, tane,</i>	<i>ngone, tanange,</i>	<i>tamagiü, tangata.</i>
girl,	<i>temahine,</i>	<i>kotiro,</i>	<i>ngonealeva,</i>	<i>taahine.</i>
dark,	<i>poviri,</i>	<i>pouviri,</i>	<i>bongi,</i>	<i>pouri.</i>
sit,	<i>noho,</i>	<i>noho,</i>	<i>tiko,</i>	<i>nofo.</i>
stand,	<i>tia,</i>	<i>fatatika,</i>	<i>tutake,</i>	<i>tuu.</i>
eat,	<i>amu,</i>	<i>kai,*</i>	<i>kana,</i>	<i>kai.</i>
drink,	<i>inu,</i>	<i>inu,</i>	<i>nungu,</i>	<i>inu.</i>
good,	<i>maitai,</i>	<i>karpi or pai,</i>	<i>vinaka,</i>	<i>lelei.</i>
bad,	<i>ino,</i>	<i>kino,</i>	<i>ta,</i>	<i>kovi.</i>
house,	<i>fare,</i>	<i>fare,</i>	<i>vale,</i>	<i>fare.</i>
cloth,	<i>ahu,</i>	<i>kakahu,</i>	<i>sulu,</i>	<i>ngatu.</i>
water,	<i>pape,</i>	<i>vai,</i>	<i>vai,</i>	<i>vai.</i>
rain,	<i>eua,</i>	<i>eua,</i>	<i>uta,</i>	<i>uha.</i>
god,	<i>atua,</i>	<i>atua,</i>	<i>kalou,</i>	<i>otua.</i>
spirit,	<i>varua,</i>	<i>vairua,</i>	<i>kalou,</i>	<i>otua.</i>
pray,	<i>bure,</i>	<i>harakia,</i>	<i>solo,</i>	<i>lotu.</i>
laugh,	<i>ata,</i>	<i>kata,</i>	<i>nene,</i>	<i>kata.</i>
cry,	<i>oto,</i>	<i>tani,</i>	<i>tangi,</i>	<i>tani.</i>
trade,	<i>hoo,</i>	<i>hoko,</i>	<i>voli, voli,</i>	<i>fakutau.</i>

The language of the Island of Oetiroa, or Rurutu, does not differ from that of the Society Islands, excepting in a peculiar manner of pronunciation, which

\* The *k* and *g* are used in the New Zealand, but not in the Tahitian alphabet.

is similar also at Raivaoac, or High Island. The following are a few words differing in a slight degree from the Tahitan :

come,	<i>hanamai.</i>	man,	<i>tanaka.</i>
drink,	<i>unu.</i>	home,	<i>hare.</i>
good,	<i>rea.</i>		

LANGUAGE OF THE ISLAND OF RÔTUMA.

The language of this island is very harmonious and pleasing, particularly when spoken by the mild soft voices of the females. I have remarked that frequently in conversation they would drop the last letter of a word; for instance, *taha*, "one," they would frequently pronounce as if written *ta*; *hake*, "four," as if written *hak*; *ulu*, "breadfruit," as if written *ul*, &c.

The numerals are as follows :

one,	<i>taka.</i>	four,	<i>hake.</i>	seven,	<i>hihu.</i>	ten,	<i>siahuli.</i>
two,	<i>rua.</i>	five,	<i>lima.</i>	eight,	<i>volu.</i>	twenty,	<i>huali, siahuli.</i>
three,	<i>tolu.</i>	six,	<i>ono.</i>	nine,	<i>schiver.</i>	a hundred,	<i>tarou.</i>

VOCABULARY.

large,	<i>tieu.</i>	small,	<i>mea, mea.</i>	coco-nut,	<i>niu.</i>
go,	<i>lao.</i>	hog,	<i>buaka.</i>	butterfly,	<i>pépé.</i>
sun,	<i>astia.</i>	moon,	<i>huaildia.</i>	rain,	<i>wash.</i>
yes,	<i>ca,</i>	word of salutation,	<i>anoaia.*</i>	star,	<i>hihu</i>
no,	<i>inké.</i>	drink,	<i>imo.</i>	eat,	<i>até.</i>
fowl,	<i>moa.</i>	bad,	<i>recksia.</i>	good,	<i>lelei.</i>
very,	<i>bou.</i>	stop,	<i>tuu.</i>	you,	<i>ae.</i>
I,	<i>nou.</i>	him,	<i>hata.</i>	cloud,	<i>aongia.</i>
wind,	<i>leang.</i>	very strong,	<i>maoi bou.</i>	blood,	<i>tot.</i>
you are stingy,	<i>pöë, ha.</i>	white,	<i>fish.</i>	full,	<i>lho.</i>
man,	<i>ta.</i>	hungry,	<i>mash, mash.</i>	us,	<i>houa.</i>
woman,	<i>haina or hen.</i>	scissars,	<i>koukava.</i>		

*parora*, used as a bye-word, signifying 'in joke.'

right, true, correct, *taang.*

virgin,	<i>haina penshoroi.</i>	beads,	<i>papalangi.</i>
knife,	<i>shélé.</i>		

\* Similar to the *taorana* of Tahiti, or the *iodofa* of Tongatabu.

London, December 23d, 1831.

The language of the Island of Rotuma, or Rotuma, does not differ from that of the Society Islands, excepting in a few particular instances of pronunciation, which are not mentioned in the Tahitian dictionary.