

O LE SA'ILIGA O LE GAGANA FA'AAOGAINA I SE VAEGA O NOFOAGA O TAGATA SAMOA

A LANGUAGE USE SURVEY IN A SAMOAN SPEECH COMMUNITY

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O lenei pepa o lo'o au'ili'ili ai ni manatu na fa'avaeina mai i se ulua'i sa'iliga aloa'ia, na faia i le Gagana Samoa. Na fa'ataunu'uina lenei fuafuaga ia Mati le tausaga e 1993. Na 'avea ai aiga o tamaiti Samoa 'uma o lo'o a'oga i Chisnallwood Intermediate ma 'ogatotonu o lenei galuega. O le 'autu o lenei fa'amoemoe, o le fia mautinoa o le gagana o lo'o fa'aaogaina e tamaiti i o latou 'aiga ma i si nofoaga. Ia mafai ai e a'oga ma faia'oga ona fuafua ni auala talafeagai lelei e fesoasoani malosai ai i tamaiti o lo'o fa'aaogaina le Gagana Peretania o se latou gagana lona lua, ina ia solo lelei lo latou a'oa'oina mo lo latou lumana'i.

This paper reports the findings of a survey on language use in a Samoan speech community. The survey was conducted in March 1993 at Chisnallwood Intermediate School. The aim of the survey was to find out what language was being used by students at home and in other settings. It is hoped that the results of the survey will assist teachers in planning and implementing appropriate methodology to enable Samoan students who use English as their second language to achieve better outcomes at school.

INTRODUCTION

The 1992 Community Languages and ESOL Conference urged participants to conduct research on the languages used by NESB migrant communities because such research is very much needed to support professional languages policy making, both within institutions and government departments in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Such research would add to the growing body of knowledge we have about community language use. For instance, the work of Holmes, Roberts, Verivaki and 'Aipolo (1993) presents important findings from three language communities. Holmes et al. surveyed language maintenance and shift in the Tongan, Greek and Cantonese speech communities in Wellington. Here shift means a gradual changing from the use of the mother tongue of an ethnic minority to the use of the majority language.

The Wellington results show that the use of the first language in these communities has been steadily reducing over the generations and that the extent of shift depends on the date of arrival of that ethnic group in Aotearoa. That is, the Tongan speech community which arrived most recently, has maintained more of the first language in more situations. In general, the longer the community concerned has been here, the more the processes of shift are evident. At the same time, there is a more supportive and diverse environment for continuing first language maintenance than the authors might have predicted.

THE LOCAL CHRISTCHURCH SAMOAN COMMUNITY

Samoan people form the largest Pacific Island ethnic group in Christchurch. They are also the largest NESB group in the city. The community estimates that they number 8,000. People started to come from Samoa to Christchurch in the late 1940s. There were two main reasons for this migration. First, the migrants wished to earn money to support their fanau (family) in Samoa. Second, they hoped their children would benefit from the educational opportunities that they saw here. At that time it was difficult to obtain secondary education in Samoa unless the family had some Palagi (European) ancestry. Regardless of their level of education, most Samoan people in Christchurch have always worked in unskilled jobs such as cleaning and labouring. Those who were professionals at home could not be professionals here for some decades, for example there was no retraining course for Pacific Islands trained teachers in Christchurch until 1989.

METHOD

In response to the call at the 1992 conference, Rhona Thorpe, Co-ordinator, New Settlers and Multicultural Education (NSM), negotiated with Christchurch College of Education, to fund a language use survey in the local Christchurch Samoan community of Chisnallwood. A proposal was put forward to the local Samoan Ta'ita'i (leaders), their community and Chisnallwood Intermediate School. The staff of the school identified every Samoan family with children on its roll, a total of 18 families with 24 children.

The method used to survey the language use patterns was an anonymous questionnaire of 55 items put to each family at home by two bilingual interviewers. That Ta'ita'i chose the interviewers, who then prepared the items. (See Table 1 as a guide to the type and range of questions asked.) To prepare for taking the questionnaire into the homes, the school sent a letter of explanation in Samoan and English to each family saying that the purpose of the survey was to gather information to enable schools to work out strategies to assist Samoan students in achieving greater academic success. The parents were invited to a meeting with the Principal, the interviewers and the NSM Co-ordinator. Five families attended. Since they approved of the proposal, it was decided to explain this to the other families in a second letter.

The interviewers had trained and worked as teachers in both Samoa and Aotearoa/New Zealand thus they were able to visit the homes and interview in culturally appropriate ways. Both found that their mana or respect in the speech community enabled them to interview more successfully. Each interviewee was assured of anonymity. The interviewers visited nine households each and spoke to at least one parent in every case. Grandparents were present at three interviews. (Several grandparents still live in Samoa but visit Aotearoa every now and then.) The interviewers themselves recorded the responses and Samoan was the language used in all eighteen interviews. However, in two families there was one non-Samoan parent, a Maori and a Palagi. For them English was used as well. In nearly every household the children were present and sometimes they alone could answer the question, for example when the question related to use at school in the playground.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the responses of interviewees with different interlocutors, in different settings and for different purposes, in response to the question, What languages do you/ other members of the family use in the following situations?

Table 1 Language(s) used with different interlocutors, in different settings and for different purposes.

| | Samoan | English | Both | No Reply |
|--|--------|---------|------|----------|
| Within the Family | | | | |
| Grandparents to grandparents | 12 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Grandparents to parents | 14 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Grandparents to grandchildren | 12 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| Parents to grandparents | 14 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Parents to parents | 14 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Parents to children | 9 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| Children to grandparents | 10 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Children to parents | 6 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Children to children | 0 | 9* | 8 | 1 |
| Parents to their brothers, sisters and other extended family members | 12 | 3* | 3 | 0 |
| Parents to their nieces, nephews and other extended family members | 10 | 3* | 5 | 0 |
| Brothers, sisters and other extended family to parents | 11 | 2* | 4 | 0 |
| Nieces, nephews and other extended family to parents | 11 | 2* | 5 | 0 |

| | Samoan | English | Both | No Reply |
|--|--------|---------|------|----------|
| Children to cousins and other extended family to children | 4 | 5 | 9 | 0 |
| Cousins and other extended family to children | 5 | 6 | 7 | 0 |
| At Church | | | | |
| By minister or pastor | 9 | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| By congregation for Hymns | 7 | 2 | 9 | 0 |
| By congregation for Bible Readings | 9 | 2 | 7 | 0 |
| By congregation for Prayers | 9 | 2 | 7 | 0 |
| For Notices | 10 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| At Church Meetings | 10 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| At Sunday School | 9 | 2 | 6 | 1 |
| At Youth Group | 8 | 2* | 6 | 1 |
| In the community | | | | |
| At Meetings of representatives of the whole city community | 9 | 1* | 5 | 3 |
| At Weddings | 12 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| At Funerals | 11 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| At school in: | | | | |
| the classroom | 0 | 14* | 4 | 0 |
| the playground | 0 | 11 | 7 | 0 |
| At places of work | 0 | 6 | 12 | 0 |
| For fund-raising | 7 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| With travel agents | 0 | 10 | 8 | 0 |

| | Samoan | English | Both | No Reply |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------|------|----------|
| For entertainment with groups: | | | | |
| from Samoa | 12 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| from other parts of Aotearoa | 10 | 1* | 0 | 7 |
| church-based | 8 | 1 | 5 | 4 |
| school-based | 0 | 1 | 11 | 5 |
| At sport | | | | |
| within teams | 0 | 12 | 6 | 0 |
| with spectators | 5 | 1 | 12 | 0 |
| For shopping of all kinds: | | | | |
| Grandparents | 4 | 2 | 11 | 1 |
| Parents | 0 | 5 | 13 | 0 |
| Children | 0 | 15 | 2 | 0 |
| With Doctor or Public Health Nurse: | | | | |
| Grandparents | 1 | 4 | 13 | 0 |
| Parents | 0 | 15 | 3 | 0 |
| Children | 0 | 18 | 0 | |
| At the hospital etc.: | | | | |
| Grandparents | 2 | 3 | 13 | 0 |
| Parents | 0 | 11 | 6 | 0 |
| Children | 0 | 17 | 1 | 0 |
| In public transport: | | | | |
| Grandparents | 2 | 0 | 12 | 6 |
| Parents | 0 | 4 | 9 | 5 |
| Children | 0 | 11 | 2 | 5 |
| In Government Departments: | | | | |
| Employment Service | 0 | 7 | 8 | 0 |
| Housing Corporation | 0 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| Social Welfare | 0 | 9 | 7 | 2 |
| Justice | 0 | 10 | 5 | 3 |
| Police | 0 | 9 | 6 | 3 |
| Immigration Service | 0 | 6 | 8 | 4 |

* One family used English plus a language other than Samoan. For two families with one non-Samoan parent, some replies do not appear to have been allowed for that parent.

DISCUSSION

There are clear changes in the patterns of use of Samoan, across the generations. Language shift has been set in motion. The main findings in relation to language shift are discussed below.

In situations within the family, twelve families out of fifteen reported that the grandparents use only Samoan to each other. By contrast, none of the grandchildren use only Samoan to each other. Yet in ten families those same children use Samoan with their grandparents and four use both languages. Therefore it may be reasonable to assume that most children have developed or will develop, useful permanent spoken fluency. This appears to develop by 12 years old approximately (Collier, 1989). The persistence of the mana of the first language is such that a majority of families use Samoan at home in ten out of the fifteen situations.

The Church is a strong agent for cultural maintenance. All the families attend Church and Samoan is used in about half of the situations associated with Church. Three-quarters of the families (twelve out of sixteen) use only Samoan at weddings and the proportion is almost as high for funerals. A majority use Samoan in three other community social situations.

In the public situations where Palagi are usually in control, there is evidence of widespread pressure to switch to English (See Fishman, 1985). All the children use English in the classroom while only four families reported the use of Samoan. In seven cases, the children use Samoan and English in the playground. Everyone uses English in Government Departments and it is almost the same with health personnel. In both cases, the absence of Samoan personnel is likely to be a factor. In addition, there are no Samoan classes at Chisnallwood and no official interpreting service to support government departments and hospitals in Christchurch. At present, it is mostly bilingual family members who interpret but their alofa (love and respect) cannot make up for lack of formal training as interpreters. There is a large need for trained interpreters with only four families reporting that grandparents could use English alone with the Doctor or Public Health Nurse. The lack of government provision of official interpreting services is a clear message to NESB people that 'rewards' (Fishman, 1985) may not be available unless they use English.

The results suggest that rapid language shift is taking place in this Samoan speech community. It may be faster than in the Wellington study. One indicator of this for example is the fact that, although the Samoans arrived in Christchurch about twenty years after the Greeks went to Wellington, Greek church services are still all in Greek. Samoan services however are now half in English.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this research has been the speech community associated with an intermediate school. The main goal has been to gather information to enable the school to ensure better

learning in Samoan students. One important result is the fact that most of these twenty-four students in Chisnallwood Intermediate School have useful fluency in Samoan now. Given the pattern of shift and eventual loss established by research and the lack of Samoan tuition at school, it would seem that their proficiency in Samoan will be difficult to maintain and to pass on to their children.

Schools have a large role to play in language maintenance. Schools should encourage children with Samoan ancestry and their fanau to use Samoan language at home. Although, funding is limited, schools should endeavour to employ a Samoan bilingual liaison person, maybe in a shared capacity with other schools. The bilingual liaison person could help both parents and students. If trained as a teacher, they could also teach Samoan. Schools should be funded to provide effective ESOL support as academic skills in the second language can take as many as five to seven years from the time the child enters school (Collier, 1989). Every ethnic minority expects the maximum number of their young to succeed academically. An investment in children's academic future will bring many returns to society. This approach is strongly advocated by Skutnabb-Kangas, an international researcher who specialises in minority education in relation to human rights. Skutnabb-Kangas (1990) describes school programmes without quality tuition in both languages as "sink-or-swim" and "disastrous". In addition to English language development and Samoan language maintenance, Samoan children should be encouraged to be proud of their Samoan identity and culture.

Research such as this highlights the important and pressing need for a National Languages Policy as exists for instance in Australia. Such a policy would guide decisions as discussed above for schools, for government and for other agencies and institutions.

O lo'o fa'aalia i lenei pepa ni itu taua fa'atupu manatu i le 'au faitau, ina ia silafia ai le agaga autu ma le mafua'aga o lenei sa'iliga, fa'apei fo'i ona ta'ua i le amataga o lenei lava pepa. O isi o manatu e fa'apea. E ao i tamaiti Samoa 'uma ona fa'ataua, iloa ma fa'atuma la latou gagana muamua, o le'a fa'afaigofie ai fo'i ona a'oa'oina le latou gagana lona lua (Igilisi) aua le fa'alauteleina o lo latou iloa i A'oa'oga. Fa'apei ona molimau nisi o polofesa; o tamaiti 'uma o lo'o iloa lelei la latou gagana muamua, o i latou fo'i ia o lo'o faigofie ona fa'aofi le a'oa'oina o le Gagana lona lua. E ao i tamaiti ona mitamita e fa'aailoa atu o i latou o Samoa i le fa'atumauiina o a latou tu ma aganu'u. E pei o le ava ma fa'aaloalo i so'o se tagata matua, po'o so'o seisi fo'i. Fa'aailoa atu, e tele fo'i aoga taua o la latou gagana, tu ma aganu'u.

NOTES

1 The authors of this paper were also the interviewers. They acknowledge the assistance of Rhona Thorpe in its writing. She has just retired from Christchurch College of Education. The authors thank the College for the research grant which funded this study. They also thank Chisnallwood Intermediate.

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