Adult Education, Language Change, and Issues of Identity and Authenticity in Kwara'ae (Solomon Islands)

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Less endangered than other languages discussed in this issue, Kwara'ae provides a useful illustration of the early stages of language erosion and the importance of language to cultural survival. We argue that the foundation of a people's identity and cultural authenticity is their culturally shared indigenous epistemology, embodied in and expressed through their heritage language. We examine these points in nonformal adult education workshops aimed at rural villagers.

Solomon Islands in the southwest Pacific, remote from world population centers, may seem like an unlikely place to study the problems of indigenous languages threatened by modernization and Western-style education. Yet for several generations English has been the nation's official language, with Solomon Islands Pijin (SIP), an English-based creole, as the national (especially urban) lingua franca. Few if any literacy materials have been developed for the 60–70 indigenous Solomon languages (Dixon 1991). English and SIP are the languages of political power, social influence, and, increasingly, public contexts even in rural areas. As the independent nation of Solomon Islands is absorbed into a globalized socioeconomic and political system, the existence and importance of local languages are threatened.

On Malaita island, Kwara'ae—the indigenous language with the largest number of speakers in the Solomon Islands—would seem to be the local language with the best prospects for survival. From the perspective of Fishman's (1991:88) graded typology of threatened statuses for indigenous languages (see Henze and Davis this issue), Kwara'ae probably falls in stage 6, characterized by mainly oral language use in informal contexts by a demographically concentrated, intergenerational group of native speakers (Fishman 1991:92). The first language of children born in rural Kwara'ae villages, Kwara'ae is still the primary language of everyday life as in Kwara'ae squatter settlements on Guadalcanal.

In Kwara'ae the process of language erosion and the need for revitalization have not yet reached the critical stage of other language situations

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examined in this special issue. Because Kwara'ae is still rich in levels of social and historical meaning, however, it provides an excellent case for addressing the question, Why is language so important to people's identity, their sense of authenticity, and the survival of their culture?—a concern germane to all the articles in this issue. We will argue that language is central to a culture's indigenous epistemology (Gegeo 1994), that is, the cultural ways of thinking, creating and reformulating knowledge, that in turn are the basis for cultural identity and authenticity.

Second, the Kwara'ae case illustrates the early stages of language erosion and the subtle ways that educational processes undermine heritage languages. We examine one of many nonformal educational contexts we have observed over the past 20 years—a development workshop associated with modernization—that illustrates the devaluing of indigenous languages and cultural identity in an educational activity meant to enhance rural villagers' sense of efficacy and use of indigenous knowledge.

Our data come from two decades of ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of Kwara'ae language, culture, schooling, and rural development, including extensive analysis of oral discourse across generations in private and public settings (Gegeo 1994; Watson-Gegeo 1987; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996). Gunnar Olsson notes that "it is one thing to know the other language. Understanding how to live it is a different matter" (1991:77). The views presented here are based on not only careful sociolinguistic and anthropological analysis but also the inside knowledge of an indigenous scholar who is a member of the culture and language community discussed.

Indigenous Epistemology as Central to Cultural Identity and Authenticity

What constitutes cultural identity, and whether indigenous peoples' efforts to reestablish their cultural traditions are "authentic," has been much debated by anthropologists and others over the past decade (for an excellent critique, see Friedman 1992). Some anthropologists (e.g., Hanson 1989), for instance, claim that Pacific populations engaged in cultural revitalization (see Warner this issue; Wong this issue) are merely "constructing" inauthentic beliefs and practices because in many cases the "real" culture has been lost through colonialism and modernization. For their part, Pacific islanders are caught between two opposing discourses in Foucault's sense (Sarup 1989): the discourse of modernization and the discourse of traditional culture, or, in Melanesia, *kastom* ("custom"). Solomon Islanders, like other peoples around the Pacific, are seeking to work out for themselves issues of identity and cultural sovereignty.

Twenty years ago the classic cultural difference model of explanation for ethnic minority/Third World children and adults' problems with mainstream/Western institutions such as schools tended to treat all members of an ethnic community as uniformly sharing an undifferentiated

culture. Intracommunity differences and the complexity of emerging cultural patterns were essentially ignored (Foley 1991; Henze and Vanett 1993). The past decade has seen a rethinking of "culture" and "identity" by social scientists, the recognition of new identity processes in diaspora communities throughout the world, and, at the same time, a resurgence of interest in traditional languages and cultures among indigenous peoples.

One of the issues in the rethinking of culture is the relationship between language and culture. Some anthropologists argue that the loss of a language does not necessarily mean the loss of its associated culture. This argument is based on the contemporary realization that culture is constantly changing and is a multiplicity of voices and perspectives (e.g., Rosaldo 1989). The claim is made that the loss of an indigenous language is merely the loss of some of those voices and perspectives (Kulick 1994:9). We sense in this claim a conflation of two levels of meaning of the word *culture* that are recognized by cultural members—and certainly by the Kwara'ae with regard to their own culture(s). Diaspora scholar Stuart Hall (a British Jamaican indigenous scholar) argues that cultural identity involves two ways of thinking about oneself. First is that of "one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall 1991:223). Second is the identity produced by "the ruptures and discontinuities" that result in "critical points of deep and significant *difference*," especially those differences caused by the "traumatic character of 'the colonial experience' " as well as current processes of modernization and globalization (Hall 1991:223, emphasis in original).

For their part, the Kwara'ae have long acknowledged the constantly changing nature of culture and the multiplicity of values, perspectives, and ways of doing within their own culture and society. Their recognition of these points is reflected in how they use the term *culture*. *Falafala*, "culture," refers to the "one culture" notion, that is, the widely shared cultural practices and values in Kwara'ae ("our falafala"), much of which is sacred. *Falafala* is also used to refer to variation within this shared culture, that is, differing values, perspectives, preferences, and behaviors that vary with individuals, villages, or districts within Kwara'ae ("his or her falafala," "that village's falafala"), as well as the practices and beliefs of other cultural groups ("American falafala"). The term *falafala* also includes the notion that culture is always changing (*falafala rokisi'anga*, "the process of cultural change") and differs from one generation to another. Kwara'ae make a three-way distinction among ancient or traditional culture (*falafala 'ua'ua/na'ona'o*), culture as changing from generation to generation (*falafala rokisi*), and culture as introduced or imposed from the outside through Westernization and modernization (*falafala faolo/fi'i dao*). To the Kwara'ae, however, speaking a

language other than Kwara'ae is thinking another way, not the Kwara'ae way, and is not authentic Kwara'ae culture.

Similarly, in arguing for a strong link between language and culture, Hale states that language "embodies the intellectual wealth of the people who use it":

> A language and the intellectual productions of its speakers are often inseparable, in fact. Some forms of verbal art—verse, song, or chant—depend crucially on morphological and phonological, even syntactic, properties of the language in which it is formed. In such cases, the art could not exist without the language, quite literally. Even where the dependency is not so organic as this, an intellectual tradition may be so thoroughly a part of a people's linguistic ethnography as to be, in effect, inseparable from the language. [1992:3]

This intimate relationship between language and culture, called *languaculture* by Agar (1994), is described from an indigenous perspective by Arab anthropologist Kanaaneh as follows:

> Language is the means by which people perceive/experience themselves and the world and, thus, is the means by which they exist. It is the embodiment of the very axioms of existence. A non-Arabic-speaking person may learn the Arabic vocabulary and grammar, and may master them even better than most Arabs. Yet, he/she would not be able to grasp all the "waves" and "webs" of meaning. [It] is extremely difficult for the non-Western indigenous anthropologist to communicate his/her "implicit" knowledge to his/her Western colleagues: Some of this knowledge is very difficult to translate into English-anthropology, some simply resists articulation in writing. [1997:9–10]

In these passages Hale and Kanaaneh point to processes of thinking central to cultural identity that the current debate over the nature of culture has played down. Yet these thinking processes are often highly salient to indigenous and ethnic-minority individuals in their interactions with mainstream/dominant cultural institutions and are often commented on by them (as by the Kwara'ae) when trying to explain their interior sense of identity.

We argue that language is essential to identity, authenticity (including people's culturally grounded sense of authenticity), cultural survival, and people's learning and thinking processes because it encodes a cultural group's indigenous knowledge and, more important, its indigenous epistemology. Indigenous epistemology refers to a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating and reformulating knowledge (Gegeo 1994). More specifically, indigenous epistemology involves cultural models for thinking and acting and cultural ways of conceptualizing and constructing knowledge about the human and natural worlds (Holland and Quinn 1987).

Multilingual and bilingual speakers often report the sensation of becoming a different person with a different understanding of the world when they code switch from one language variety to another. This perception

is supported by research showing that these speakers respond differently to the same pictures when asked to respond in different languages and that the differential responses reflect the cultures associated, respectively, with those languages (Chaudhry 1991; Ervin-Tripp 1964a, 1964b). Such experiences and research results support the view that language and language use are essential to the processes involved in indigenous epistemology. Through their discourse practices people create, model, and express the ways of thinking and reasoning that, reflexively, shape how they perceive the world (see Gumperz 1982). Discourse practices work together with the lexicon of a language, which may be rich with concepts naming, expressing, and relating the fundamental cultural meanings that provide a foundation for cultural identity and thinking.

In summary, taken together, language and language use practices frame human experience in a culturally specific way. Another language and set of discourse practices is another cultural frame, and speakers' thinking, sense making, and presentation of self change with that reframing. An interior sense of person and an exterior presentation of self are manifestations of the speaker's epistemological grounding or footing in a culture.

Acquiring a new language opens up a new perspective on the world and can be liberating. However, if education itself changes identity (Lave and Wenger 1991), then education in another language when one's native or heritage language is prohibited is a far greater threat to identity. We believe that the role of indigenous epistemology in shaping thinking and linguistic skills is related to why research on bilingual education has shown that children who develop literacy and other cognitive skills in their first language before being required to learn in a second language do much better in school than children submerged in a second language (Collier 1992; Green 1998; Ramirez 1992; Willig 1985).

Language, Culture, and Identity in Kwara'ae: Competing Models

Like other Solomon Islanders, the Kwara'ae struggle between the two opposing discourses of traditional culture (kastom) and modernization (falafala faolo/fi'i dao). They value and regularly practice their tradition of "critical discussion or enlightened dialogue" *('inike'alana ala'anga)* in high rhetoric *(ala'anga lalifu)*, the formal and semantically complex register of the language used on all important occasions and for discussions of all significant sociocultural and political topics. High rhetoric includes a large, rich lexicon of abstract terms with subtle distinctions for discussing concepts of person, social behavior, the natural world, and society. "Critical discussion" takes place in small group, village, and area gatherings to explore and decide on important issues, facilitating the rethinking of culture and the continuing development of the Kwara'ae language. The forms of argumentation and reasoning used in this Kwara'ae indigenous epistemological practice are named and are taught to children in private *fa'amanata'anga* ("teaching," literally, "shaping

the mind") sessions that are regularly held by parents in most homes. (In contrast to the Gapun, reported in Kulick 1994:11, Kwara'ae parents see themselves as the main teachers for their children's learning of language and culture.) Effective participation in meetings focused on critical discussion requires high levels of fluency in high rhetoric and an intimate understanding of culture and indigenous epistemology.

Modernization theory, which underlies classic development models (Friedmann 1992), has as its central idea that so-called underdeveloped societies "must break free of 'traditional' institutional structures" to embrace Anglo-European values and social formations (Tollefson 1991:82). Modernization theorists would argue that it is precisely indigenous epistemology that must be given up by Third World countries in order for them to develop (for a counterargument, see Gegeo 1994).

The foregoing negative message is one of several from colonialism and modernization that undermine identity and language in Kwara'ae. Solomon Islands colonial history and experience with missionization and modernization parallel those of Hawai'i and Alaska as discussed elsewhere in this issue (see Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore, Warner, Wong). Western education was introduced in the 19th century; English is the language for all official purposes; and the poverty of rural areas, where 80 percent of the population lives, together with people's legitimate desires to improve their standard of living, makes success in school a high priority for children and their families. Elsewhere we have described, through detailed discourse analysis of reading lessons in five classrooms, some of the ways that teachers invalidate children's first language and culture (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1996). Most Kwara'ae children fail the national exams for secondary school and return to village life with low literacy skills and a sense of defeat. The sense of defeat often includes the feeling that their language and culture are inferior to those of the school that judged them inadequate.

About 95 percent of Solomon Islanders are Christian. Negative attitudes about local languages and cultures are prominent in the rapidly growing evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which attract members with the promise of aid toward education and economic development, the exciting emotionalism of their worship services, and the lack of hierarchy in the church (allowing any member to play any church role) (compare Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore this issue). Evangelical and Pentecostal churches emphasize speaking English and Pijin as a sign of salvation and modernization, and they imply that local languages are "backward." These doctrines undermine people's confidence in speaking their own language and create ambivalence about sharing deeper levels of linguistic and cultural knowledge with children. In a linguistic and discourse analysis of naturally occurring speech from members of several denominations (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1991), we showed that differential church sect membership correlates with fluency in

differing register levels of Kwara'ae and knowledge of important indigenous philosophical concepts.

Kulick (1994) found that the Gapun people of Papua New Guinea associate knowledge and social sensitivity with Tok Pisin and Christianity and associate negative qualities (egotism, stubbornness) with the vernacular language and traditional religion. In Kwara'ae, however, maturity *('a'ana'anga)* and dignity *('inoto'a'anga)* are ultimately associated with speaking fluent high-rhetoric Kwara'ae, and immaturity and lack of dignity are associated with poorly formed high rhetoric and choosing SIP over the vernacular. Everyone recognizes the usefulness of speaking SIP and some English to communicate with non-Kwara'ae and to function in district and national contexts (participate in the discourse of modernization). As the Kwara'ae see it, the issue is, rather, which language is most valued and most associated with the key qualities and behaviors that constitute people's deepest and most central identity. Thus, as Pentecostal and evangelical members enter middle age and want to participate in important cultural events that require high levels of linguistic and discourse skills, and as they begin to ask midlife questions about who they are in relation to others (see the discussion of *gwaunga'i*-hood below), many lament, "We have no dignity, we are *ngela'a*" (that is, "eternally childish" in the level of Kwara'ae they command, together with appropriate behaviors, because of focusing on SIP or English). They then strive to learn what they did not learn earlier about their indigenous language and culture. Recently, with the growth of the kastom movement, Pentecostal and evangelical members are increasingly joining the effort to revitalize culture and language, recognizing what they have lost over the past generation.

We turn now to an illustration of how some of the foregoing issues are played out in real events by examining the case of one of many adult education workshops we attended in Kwara'ae.

Adult Education in "Development" Workshops: Undermining Culture, Language, and Identity

The low levels of schooling among adults and the need for practical education toward development in rural villages have led both villagers and the government to look favorably on educational workshops for adults run by churches, international agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 1996). Development workshops promise rural villagers opportunities to gain development knowledge and literacy skills. Yet such educational ventures are rarely successful for either the sponsors or the villagers. Here we examine the role that issues of epistemology and language play in the failure of development workshops and how workshops undermine indigenous language, identity, and authenticity.

First, workshops are always taught in English or SIP, typically using the teacher-fronted classroom as pedagogical model. As Solomon Islander

workshop leaders themselves do not fully understand the material they are presenting, they must teach it as it was originally presented to them during their training. That includes using primarily English and SIP even when the workshop leader speaks Kwara'ae. Second, workshop materials always embody Anglo-European rather than indigenous cultural models and expectations, and local presenters are usually unprepared to transform the material into indigenous ways of thinking. Third, education and outside experience are status enhancing, so that those who achieve a little training often see themselves as superior to villagers and want to display their English or SIP skills. Through their training to be workshop leaders, they have already internalized the belief that English/SIP and Anglo-European/urban cultural practices are superior to local languages and cultures.

The workshop example we discuss here was held over two consecutive evenings (about eight hours total) and sponsored by an organization that is especially progressive and enlightened about the importance of culture and language and knowledgeable about the Solomons. Nevertheless, the workshop design was adapted from an overseas Anglo-European model by organizers who had worked in rural villages for many years. It was framed as "adult education," with the goal of teaching villagers how to think critically and talk effectively about their problems toward building community and supporting development. The workshop focused on health and sanitation, lifestyle, community problem solving and values, and income generation. Through the workshop experience, villagers' sense of efficacy and indigenous knowledge were supposed to be validated and enhanced. The stated underlying assumptions, however, were typical of modernization: that villagers did not discuss these issues among themselves, that their cultures and languages lacked the concepts that would make discussion critical and purposeful, and that their knowledge was extremely limited on such topics as how to plan ditches for run-off water or how to talk about community problems in meetings. Having worked in several villages over many years, we knew that all these assumptions were mistaken.

The workshop sessions were not organized around an indigenous meeting model, although the organizers thought they were. The presenters were young Kwara'ae men who had attended training workshops themselves, off-island in an urban area, and a young European man representing the sponsors. They brought with them charts and other visual supports (all in English) for the workshop. The most important chart was one involving "the good life," on which the concepts to be learned were arranged around a circle depicted as a wheel. From an Anglo-European epistemological point of view, the wheel has long been used as a metaphor or image for a set of interconnected ideas, the circle of the wheel indicating interdependence. As a tool, the wheel was a key invention in Western history, the basis for modern technology. None of the foregoing meanings are shared by the Kwara'ae, however, for whom

the wheel is an introduced concept. The chart thus had no epistemological associations for the villagers, who seemed not to respond to the workshop leaders' expectations that, in and of itself, the wheel structure would communicate to them something about the concepts arranged in a circle around the chart. A corresponding Kwara'ae model that would have worked well would be a village compound (as in "we are all *ta'i labata*," one village compound, referring to family, which is in turn closely related to Kwara'ae concepts of person [Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990]).

Among the English concepts the presenters attempted to explain in a mixture of English and SIP were identity, security, self-respect, self-reliance, solidarity, equity, participation, and the good life. Many have Kwara'ae equivalents, although the latter involve a different set of cultural beliefs, models, and underlying epistemology. We will discuss only two of these here.

The workshop leaders had difficulty explaining "security," an Anglo-European concept involving physical and emotional dimensions and often focusing on a state of being or a feeling (which is what the presenters emphasized). However, underlying the equivalent Kwara'ae concept is an action metaphor: security is a *process* and is about what a person *does* to meet needs, not a feeling. Security and independence are glossed by *talau'anga* ("standing on one's own"), *talasasiru'anga* ("doing things on one's own"), and related terms. *Tala-* refers to walking on one's own path *(tala)* and doing things for oneself and one's family; the things to be done are subsistence activities such as gardening (growing one's own food). These concepts, in turn, are based on a cultural model in which nature provides the resources, culture provides knowledge and skills, and one is to use these wisely in order to be on one's own while at the same time interdependent with others through sharing and exchange. Sharing within and across families is a part of the very definition of being on one's own, for a person is seen as a mosaic of many parts *(kula ki)*, a major *kula* or "part" of which is permanent and profound social connections to family (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990). The complexities of an indigenous perspective on "security" reveal the ways in which indigenous epistemology underlies key cultural values, for these values are the outcome of ways of locating, creating, and reformulating knowledge. Ironically, the cultural activity through which a great deal of the knowledge creation/reformulation process goes on—the ongoing philosophical discussions embodied in village meetings mentioned earlier—was precisely what the workshop planners assumed did not happen in village meetings.

The presenters and villagers never came to a common understanding of the meaning of *the good life*. Although educated urban Solomon Islanders understand the English phrase "the good life" as a good house and a job, those with less education interpret it as meaning "having a good time," especially going out and drinking beer. The workshop presenters listed material goods and survival needs as indicative of "the

good life." None of them (including the European) talked about other values historically associated with "the good life" in Western societies.

The Kwara'ae indigenous concept of a good life is embodied in *gwaumauri'anga*, "living at the head or pinnacle of life." *Gwaumauri'anga* refers to the ideal state of *ali'afu'anga*, "total completeness," in which individual and collective spiritual, psychological, and physical needs are met and the well-being of the community is promoted (Gegeo 1994:611, 614). The underlying image is of being grounded in Kwara'ae history, language, key values, and community (more than thirty high-rhetoric terms are offered by the Kwara'ae as attributes of gwaumauri'anga; see Gegeo 1994). For the Kwara'ae, gwaumauri'anga and its linguistically encoded attributes play an essential role in indigenous epistemology. All major activities—including rural development—must be firmly anchored *(labuto'o ana)* in gwaumauri'anga if they are to succeed and be of benefit. Gwaumauri'anga is thus a standard whereby actions, ideas, and decisions are judged, including reasoning about, debating the meaning of, or creating knowledge about culture and development. A person who achieves the state of gwaumauri'anga in his or her own life is a "complete person" *(ngwae ali'afu)*, an "importantly rooted person" *(ngwae lalifu)*, one who both respects and is respected *(fu'usi'inoto'oa)* and lives in peace and contentment. Ultimately such a person is recognized as "gwaunga'i," the title of "elder, important/respected/dignified/revered person" who has achieved "headness" *(gwaunga'i'anga)*. Gwaunga'i men and women are not only those whose lives exemplify Kwara'ae key cultural values and ethics but those who attain high levels of cultural and linguistic skills.[1] The title is conferred by consensus just after midlife on those who are seen to have achieved it, but the goal of achieving gwaumauri'anga and becoming gwaunga'i are pursued as a primary cultural life goal from the time one marries. Kwara'ae culture, Kwara'ae language, and achieving the life goal of gwaumauri'anga and gwaunga'i-hood are thus fundamentally joined in Kwara'ae. That joining is the center of "being Kwara'ae" from the standpoint of identity and authenticity. And it is why, ultimately, many evangelical and Pentecostal Christians reclaim high-rhetoric Kwara'ae and indigenous culture as they grow older.

The message that the villagers received from the workshop was that they had to change both their way of living and their language. The content of the workshop "lessons" in many ways was humiliating because villagers were being told that they were ignoring their problems and that they lacked the minimal characteristics (such as furniture in their houses and cement-slab toilets) of a proper contemporary life—with the implication that their poverty was no excuse. The framing of the workshop with an Anglo-European model of a "good life" and healthy functioning community, together with the medium of instruction being English, communicated the inadequacy of indigenous language and culture to support villagers in improving their lives. These messages were heard,

but not without resistance, in the form of indirect, often metaphorical responses, sarcastic interjections, and silence, all understandable to a cultural insider.

The workshop we attended was more than unsuccessful. It was actually harmful to the villagers' sense of identity, authenticity, and several of the values that the workshop was meant to encourage (such as self-respect). The European presenter interpreted villagers' lack of enthusiasm and seeming passivity as failure to think beyond the present. At the end of the meeting, he asked them (in SIP) if they knew what was going to happen in the year 2000 and did they think that they were ready for it. The villagers—who had already heard from Pentecostal relatives that the end of the world was to come in the year 2000—seemed shocked (especially because the workshop sponsors and presenters were not church related),[2] and they had no idea what to answer. After a long silence, the European scolded them for not thinking about the future. Speaking for the villagers, the chief said that they did not know what was going to happen, ending in an angry, despairing tone with "Maybe we should just die." He was responding not only to the European's overt challenge but also to the disaffirmation of Kwara'ae culture and language that the workshop represented.

For days afterward villagers analyzed the workshop among themselves, calling it "empty talk" *(ala'anga 'o'o)* and talking about the disrespect for them, their culture, and their language that it represented. However, the long-term impact of repeated experiences of this kind—which is what has happened in Kwara'ae since World War II—even when resisted, is a gradual erosion of confidence in identity and knowledge, especially under the pressure to change in order to (supposedly) overcome poverty.[3] The chief's response reflected this erosion, for one theme that emerges in conversations about development is "We are all just tired *[maruku]*": "tired" in reference to poverty, to the succession of failed development projects introduced or imposed from the outside, to always being told by outsiders that nothing they do is somehow "right," and to the struggle to keep their cultural identity and language against the social changes that participation in and pressure from national and international institutions bring about.

Conclusion

We have argued in this article that language is important to people's identity because language is central to a culture's indigenous epistemology, that is, to cultural ways of thinking and of creating and reformulating knowledge, which in turn are the basis of identity and authenticity. To argue thus is not to say that differences in ways of thinking in any sense limit ability or prevent biculturality and cross-cultural communication. It is rather to acknowledge that culture is more than behavior; it is also epistemology and language. Recently there has been recognition of the validity and importance of linguistic rights as fundamental human

rights (e.g., Coulombe 1993; Phillipson 1989; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1994). *Language rights* refers to "language-as-right" (the rights of linguistic minorities to use their language or language variety for certain purposes and contexts) and "right-to-language" (the equally important right of access to the dominant language[s] or language variety, the languages of societal power) (Akinnaso 1994:141). Taken together, these two senses of *language rights* if acted on would ensure a society and a world in which indigenous peoples and linguistic/cultural minorities enjoyed true agency in their evolving cultural identities and the larger society benefited from an enriching linguistic and cultural diversity without relinquishing communication.

For the Kwara'ae, the reversal that so many of those who pursue an urban or Westernized lifestyle (*tuamalafaka'anga*, "living in imitation of life brought by the ships," that is, "Westernization") undergo in late middle age with regard to turning back to Kwara'ae language and culture is often associated with disillusionment over how embracing modernization has failed to really change their economic circumstances or improve the quality of their lives. For those who have moved to urban areas, however, both failure in finding a job and retirement after years of working ultimately mean returning to Malaita and to the land. In this respect Solomon Islanders differ from many thousands of Polynesians and Micronesians who have joined the diaspora to urban centers in First and Second World countries. Very few Solomon Islanders migrate abroad. Most work in urban areas in the Solomons, and all eventually return home to their clan-held land. This pattern of "circular migration" (Chapman 1976; Prothero and Chapman 1985) is found elsewhere in the Third World but is particularly pronounced in the Solomons. Returnees talk about getting back to the land and their true identity, becoming traditional again, and participating in the critical discussions that require high levels of fluency in the high-rhetoric Kwara'ae through which culture and philosophy are rethought and renewed. So long as return migration continues, Kwara'ae culture and language will survive (as distinct from a nationalized, urban Solomons culture), always changing, as all cultures and languages change, but retaining the significant core—whatever that may be—that the Kwara'ae themselves recognize as authentically central to their identity and to their indigenous epistemology.

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Notes

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1. The nine key cultural values in Kwara'ae (on which there is strong consensus) are *alafe'anga* ("love in the family, kindness"), *aroaro'anga* ("peace, peaceful behavior"), *babato'o'anga* ("emotional stability"), *enoeno'anga* ("humility, delicacy, gentleness"), *fangale'a'anga* ("sharing"), *kwaigwale'e'anga* ("welcoming, comforting, hospitality"), *kwaima'anga* ("love, kindness, eros"), *kwaisare'e'anga* ("giving without expectation of return"), and *mamana'anga* ("truth, honesty, spiritual power") (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986, 1990).
2. The villagers in this example are Anglican Christians.
3. Rural development guided by modernization and based on Western epistemology has repeatedly failed in the Third World. Development generated by villagers themselves based on indigenous epistemology and local knowledge seems much more likely to succeed (see Gegeo 1994).

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