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Sikaiana Dictionary

Sikaiana

2020

2 Introduction to the Sikaiana Dictionary, updated 2020

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Sikaiana Dictionary

Introduction 2012

(Revised 2020)

The core of this dictionary was compiled in 1982 and 1983. It was based on my data collection on Sikaiana from October 1980 until July 1983. I meant to expand the dictionary and collected more entries and forms in a stay during 1987. I thought I would get back to work on it more but never did. I always thought of this dictionary as more than words and definitions but as holding the opportunity to be a source of cultural information. I also think that modern technology and software offer immense opportunities to integrate different types of ethnographic information and make that information accessible.

This dictionary started as a solid word list compiled by Dr. Pita (Peter) Sharples, at that time of the University of Auckland, in the late 1960s. I got a shoebox, started some cards and expanded Sharples's work. In compiling this dictionary, I worked with several Sikaiana people in checking the entries. I worked very closely with John Kilatu who went through the entries several times. Kilatu was born about 1920 (he is not certain about the date because there were no calendar years before missionaries established themselves on Sikaiana in 1929). He attended mission schools in the 1930s and eventually went to medical school in Fiji and became a doctor. He was fluent in English, Pijin, and Motu (the early lingua franca used by the Anglican missionaries in their schools when he was a student). Others read the dictionary, but no one as closely and often as Kilatu. I am greatly indebted to him. Others who helped include: Brown Saua, Moses Teui, Ralph Evesi, Joe Elota, Kate Tealona, James Vainipu, Robert Sisilo, Hilda Telaki, Mark Etua, John Tesinu, Johnson Siota, Edwin Huilani, Alfred Evesi, Joyce Teatuahai, Silas Tilikohu, and Christian Manakau. Illustrations were done by Henry Teloto, the son of John Kilatu, under Kilatu's supervision.

There are many others who contributed in various ways.

The sections on place names, personal names, and English terms were gathered in 1987 in Honiara, mainly working with Mark Etua and his wife, Maleva. I also collected more examples from Etua. Etua was a retired police administrator who had been to England. He was a fluent speaker of English. More terms and examples were collected from Robert Sisilo and Priscilla Taulupo in 1988-1990. Sisilo was representing the Solomon Islands to the United Nations. He is a college graduate and fluent in English. His wife, Taulupo has gone to high school, well-educated for a women of her era.

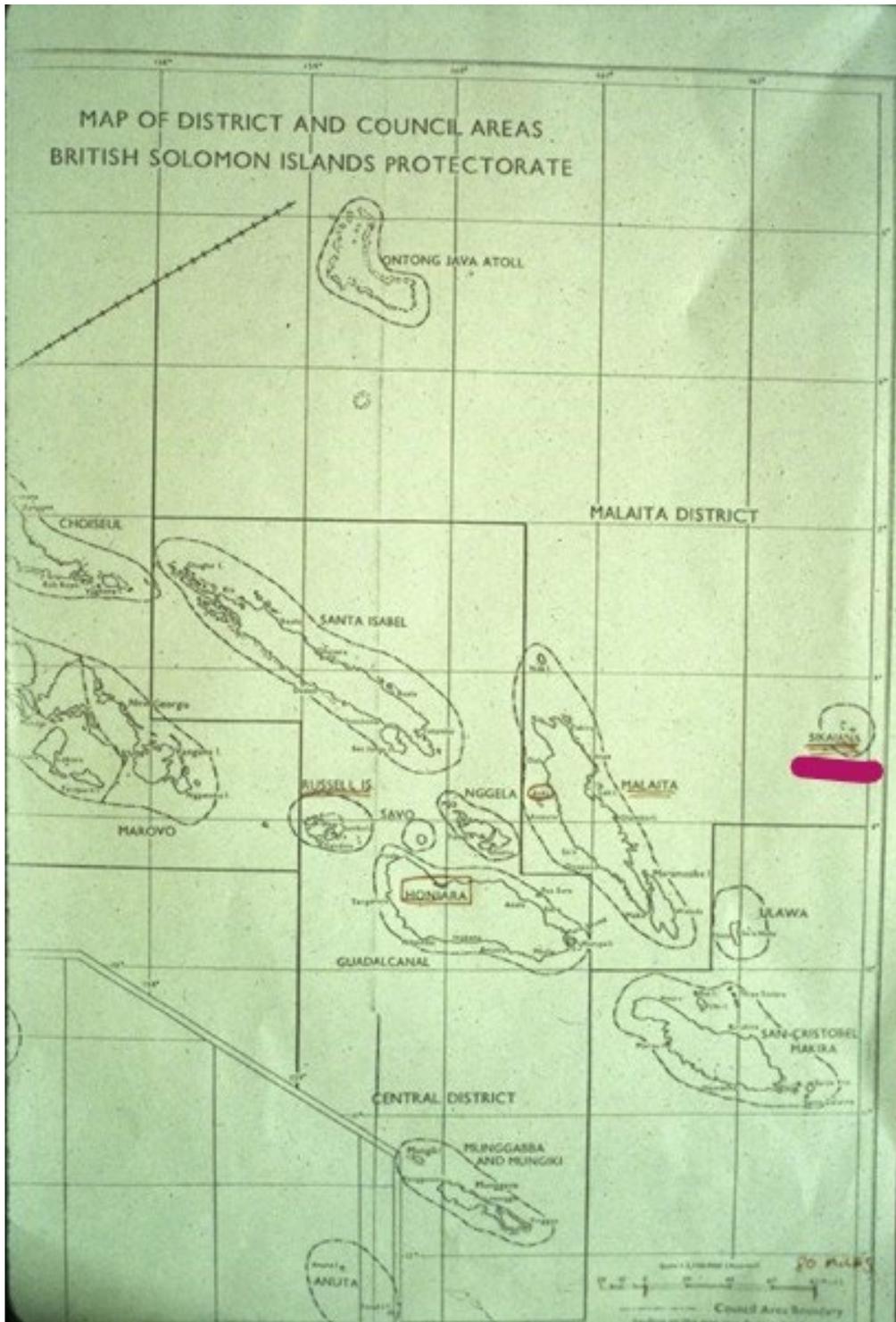
I have left the core of the dictionary as it was in 1983. I was closer to the language then and the entries were checked by John Kilatu. Re-reading the dictionary, I have some questions about transcriptions, especially forms with single vowels (*te* "the" might be better transcribed as *tee*, *lle* is probably better represented as *llee*). I also realize some linguists will question the grammatical analysis, especially the verbs categorized as "semi-transitive." Moreover, I suppose there are going to be questions about my analysis of a "passive" case rather than an ergative one. My present understanding is that there may be a few ergative-like usages in Sikaiana speech, but there are many constructions that are close to English passive constructions. In these and all matters, I have almost always left the dictionary as it was in 1983 because I was much closer to the language at that point.

In working out the structure of the dictionary and in analyzing the grammar, I am greatly indebted to Gary Simons and his wife Linda who were working for the Summer Institute of Linguistics in the Solomon Islands. Gary helped me analyze the grammar of the language and allowed me to use his computer system (as I recall he had 9-inch disks in 1983). Many of the categories in the classification of entries are the result of his suggestions. I am also grateful to Trevor Sofield who was the Australian High Commissioner and supported this project in numerous ways, including help in providing a grant from the South Pacific Cultural Fund. Anna Craven proof read an early version and provided helpful corrections. Of course, I accept full responsibility for any mistakes or improper descriptions.

Addendum 2020

In updating this material again in 2020, I have very little to add. I was much closer to the language in 2012 when I wrote the above paragraphs and much, much closer to the language in 1980-87 when I was compiling most of the dictionary. I think the only important thing to add is that I had the opportunity to meet with Robert Sisilo and Priscilla Taulupo between 2017-19 when Robert was again posted in New York to the United Nations. They told me that the language is no longer spoken in almost all conversations, both on Sikaiana and among Sikaiana people living elsewhere.

I compiled this dictionary in the hope that it would be an initial record of the language. I still hope that it will serve as a heritage site and encourage any speakers of the language to correct and expand it.



Solomon Islands

