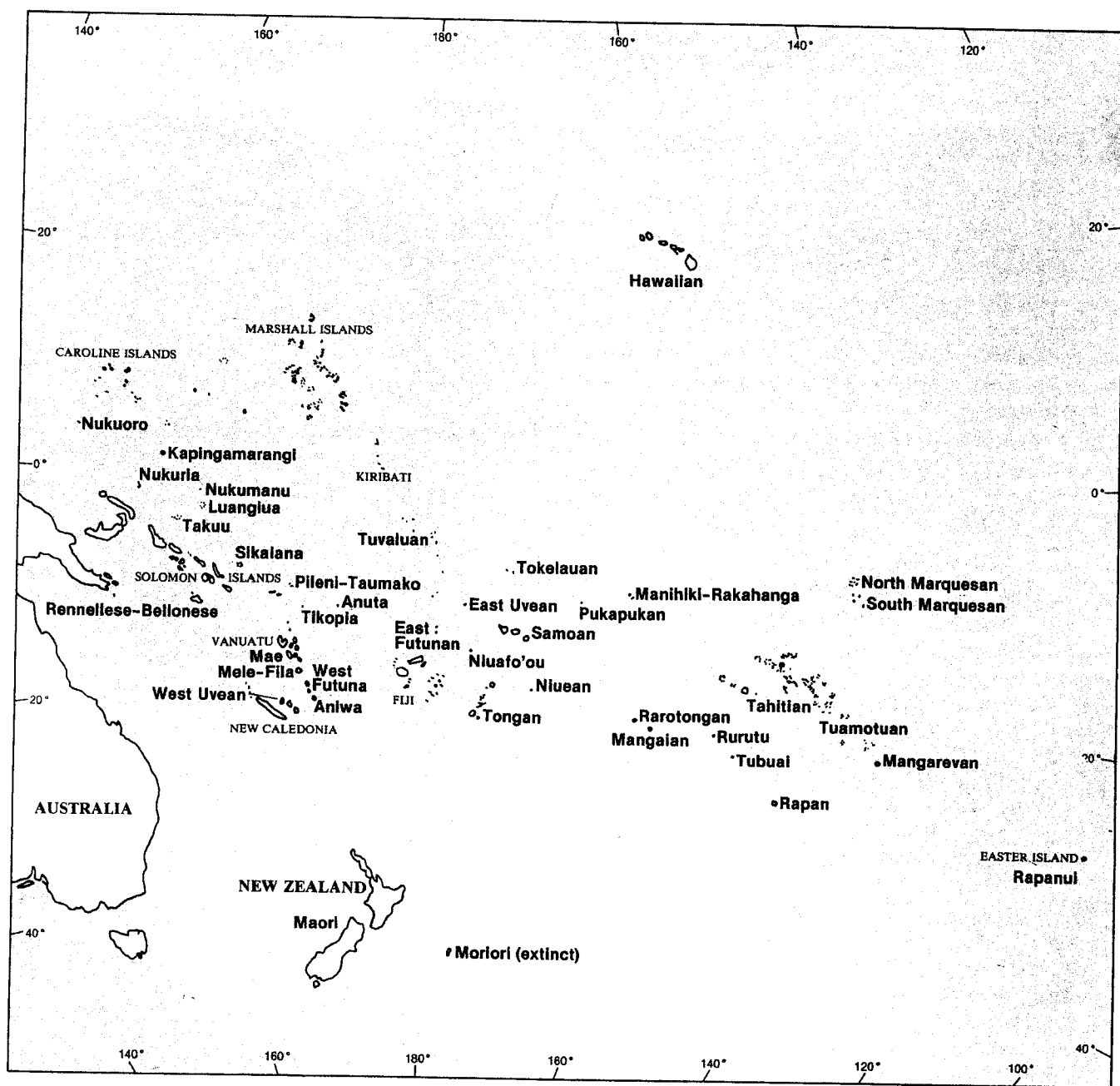


POLYNESIAN LANGUAGES form a well-defined subgroup of the Austronesian family [*q.v.*]. They are spoken by fewer than one million people in two areas of the Pacific: **TRIANGLE POLYNESIA**, with Hawaii, Easter Island, and New Zealand at its apexes; and **OUTLIER POLYNESIA**, comprising small enclaves in Micronesia and Melanesia. At first glance, Polynesian languages look so similar to one another in structure, particularly in phonology, that early investigators took them to be dialects of a single language. However, many structural differences among the less closely related languages of the subgroup hinder mutual intelligibility.

1. Composition. Most researchers agree that about thirty Polynesian languages can be identified. None is spoken by more than half a million people, and about half are spoken by a thousand people or fewer. The languages with the largest numbers of native speakers are Maori, Samoan, Tahitian, and Tongan. Although native speakers of Maori and Hawaiian suffered considerable attrition in the 19th century, most Polynesian languages are in no danger of extinction—despite increasing competition from French and English, the lingua francas of the area. For overall distribution, see Map 1. [*For names of Polynesian languages, see the Language List at the end of this article.*]

2. Wider relationships. The ancestral Proto-Polynesian language is believed to have been spoken about three thousand years ago in an area comprising Eastern Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Wallis Island, and Futuna Island. Pre-Polynesian, an early form of Proto-Polynesian, forms a subgroup with the language ancestral to the Eastern dialects of Fiji. This subgroup's closest relatives are the dialects of western Fiji and Rotuman.

On a more remote level, the Polynesian languages clearly belong to the Oceanic (Eastern Austronesian)

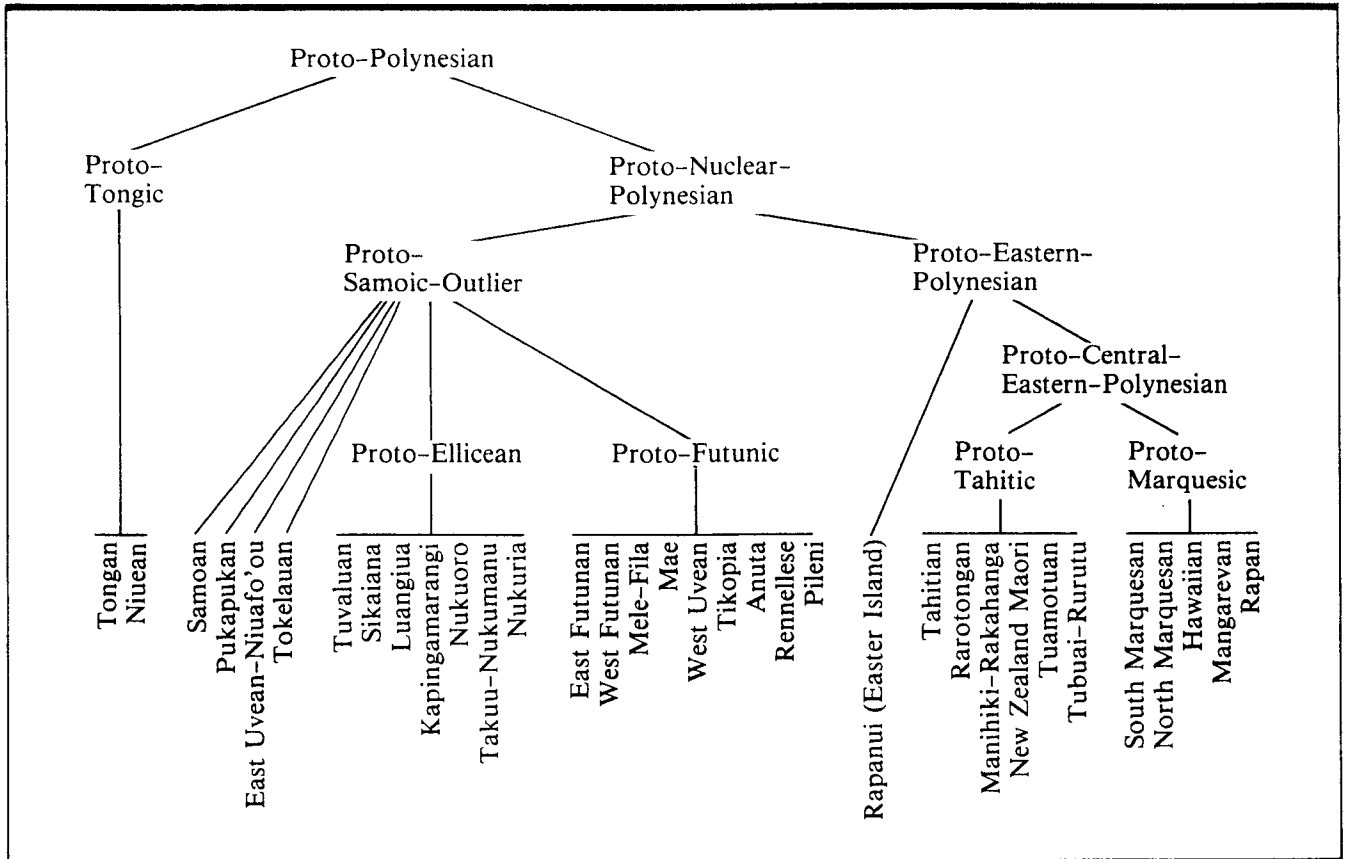


MAP 1. *Distribution of Polynesian Languages*

branch of the Austronesian family (Grace 1959). The history of the language ancestral to Proto-Polynesian, between the split of Oceanic and the development of Proto-Polynesian, is controversial. Polynesian languages, along with Fijian dialects and Rotuman, have affinities with the languages of North and Central Vanuatu (New Hebrides) and the South-East Solomon Islands. Pawley maintains that all the above languages form an

Eastern Oceanic subgroup, to which the Micronesian languages also belong—a hypothesis that is widely, though not universally, accepted.

3. Subgrouping. The internal relationships of Polynesian are shown in Figure 1. Within Polynesian, a clear split separates Tongic and Nuclear Polynesian languages. The Tongic subgroup includes only two languages, Tongan and Niuean; they are closely related to

FIGURE 1. *Internal Relationships of Polynesian*

one another, but differ from other Polynesian languages in significant ways, particularly in morphology.

All other Polynesian languages are members of the Nuclear Polynesian subgroup, which itself comprises a loosely knit Samoic-Outlier subgroup and a tightly knit Eastern Polynesian subgroup. The Samoic-Outlier subgroup includes Samoan, Tokelauan, East Uvean-Niufo'ou, Pukapukan, and two lower-order groups of languages—Futunic and Ellicean. The affiliation of Outlier languages to the Samoic-Outlier subgroup indicates that Outlier Polynesia was settled after the split of Proto-Polynesian by backward migrations that retraced the eastward path of the Pre-Polynesians (Bayard 1976). Samoic-Outlier is the least homogeneous subgroup.

The last subgroup, Eastern Polynesian, splits into two lower-order subgroups. One is represented by a single language, Rapanui (Easter Island); the other, Central Eastern Polynesian, includes all remaining languages. The latter form a homogeneous genetic unit, in which several low-order subgroups can be identified. These

languages are so similar to one another, despite the enormous distances that separate their speech communities, that they could be considered dialects of a single language on purely structural grounds.

4. Phonology. The Proto-Polynesian phoneme inventory includes four voiceless stops /p t k ʔ/, three nasals /m n ŋ/, three fricatives /f s h/, two liquids /r l/, one glide /w/, and five vowels /i e a o u/. Proto-Polynesian does not have the set of prenasalized oral stops characteristic of Proto-Oceanic (/mb nd/, etc.), but it innovated a phonemic contrast between short and geminate vowels. Phonotactic constraints preclude consonant clusters. Few phonological rules can be reconstructed for Proto-Polynesian, and modern languages have inherited this rather static phonological system.

All Polynesian languages have regular reflexes of the five vowels of Proto-Polynesian; however, none has inherited all the consonants. The contrast between /l/ and /r/, in particular, has been lost in most languages, as a result of /r/ being lost in Tongic (e.g. *fara 'pan-

danus' reflected as Tongan *faa*), and of the merger of the two phonemes in Nuclear Polynesian (both **fara* 'pandanus' and **fala* 'mat' become Samoan *fala*). Tongan, with eleven reflexes of the Proto-Polynesian consonant inventory, has the largest directly inherited consonant inventory of the subgroup. Hawaiian and Rurutu have two of the world's smallest phoneme inventories (thirteen and twelve, respectively).

In a number of Polynesian languages, the phonemic inventory has been expanded by the introduction of geminate consonants. These are the result of the loss of unstressed vowels between identical consonants, and are contrastive in most Outlier languages and in Tuvaluan. Several Outlier languages have also borrowed new phonemes from non-Polynesian languages. West Uvean has innovated a set of voiced stops, found only in morphemes of grammatical function and in words of high frequency. All languages of Triangle Polynesia have kept the strict phonotactic constraints of Proto-Polynesian; however, many Outliers have introduced consonant clusters through borrowing.

Primary stress in Tongic and many Samoic-Outlier languages falls on the penultimate syllable of a word. In certain Outlier languages, stress is word-final. In some Eastern Polynesian languages like Maori and Tahitian, stress assignment varies with the phonological structure of the word.

5. Morphology and syntax. Derivational morphology in Proto-Polynesian is limited to a few prefixes and suffixes, mostly associated with verbs. Thus the prefix **faka-*, which has reflexes in all Polynesian languages, indicates causativity, among other things; **fe-* marks reciprocity or collectivity; and **(Ca)ŋa* marks nominalization.

In Proto-Polynesian and in all daughter languages, inflectional morphology is minimal, and grammatical morphemes tend to be independent. Preverbal particles mark the verb for tense, aspect, and mood; articles mark the noun phrase for definiteness, specificity, and (in some languages) number; and case is marked with prepositional particles. Personal pronouns distinguish a clitic form, placed between the tense/aspect/mood marker and the verb, from an independent form; the former is used when the pronoun is a transitive subject, and the latter in all other contexts. Clitic pronouns are lost in Eastern Polynesian and some Samoic-Outlier languages. A four-way number distinction is made in the Pre-Polynesian pronoun paradigm—singular, dual, plural, and paucal;

but the distinction between paucal and plural disappears in Proto-Polynesian, although it reappears, perhaps through borrowing from non-Polynesian sources, in the Vanuatu Outliers. In Proto-Polynesian, subject/verb number agreement is marked by internal syllable reduplication or suppletion, and is limited to some intransitive verbs. Some Outlier languages have innovated rather complex systems of verbal agreement with both subject and object.

Proto-Polynesian negatives are 'raising' verbs, to which the negated clause is subordinated. Negatives have retained their verbal nature in some Polynesian languages, like Maori and Tongan; but they have become adverbs in other languages, where they sometimes retain verb-like properties.

In Proto-Polynesian and most daughter languages, a contrast between alienable and inalienable possession is marked. The edible/drinkable possessive class reconstructible for Pre-Polynesian merges with the inalienable class in Proto-Polynesian. The suffixed possessives used with kinship terms in Pre-Polynesian are also lost in Proto-Polynesian, although the 3sg. possessive suffix is fossilized with certain kin terms (e.g. **ʔahawa-na* 'spouse'). Some Futunic Outliers, however, retain these suffixed possessives.

The basic order of sentence constituents in most Polynesian languages is V[erb] S[ubject] O[bject]. Word order is relatively free in Tuvaluan, Rapanui, and some Outlier languages, where it is used to encode pragmatic structure. In other Outliers (Mele-Fila, Takuu, West Futuna, etc.), the basic word order has changed to SVO, probably from the influence of non-Polynesian languages. Noun phrases are frequently zero-pronominalized in Polynesian languages, whatever their grammatical function may be. Other syntactic units include prepositions, postposed adjectives, postposed relative clauses, postposed possessive phrases, and preposed articles.

Two major types of case systems are found. One, an ergative/absolute pattern, is found in Tongan, Niuean, Tuvaluan, Samoan, and most Outlier languages. In Tongan, for example, subjects of intransitive verbs are marked with zero for the absolute case, and subjects of transitive verbs with 'e for the ergative case:

- (1) 'Oku lele Ø e tamasi'i.
 PRES run ABS the boy
 'The boy is running.'

- (2) 'Oku ui 'e he tamasi'i e tangata.
 PRES call ERG the boy the man
 'The boy calls the man.'

The other system, found in Eastern Polynesian languages and some Outlier languages, follows a nominative/accusative pattern. Subjects are generally marked with zero, and direct objects with *ki* or *i*, as in Maori:

- (3) Ka haere Ø te wahine.
 NEUTRAL walk SUBJ the woman
 'The woman is walking.'
- (4) Ka kite te wahine i te tangata.
 NEUTRAL see the woman OBJ the man
 'The woman sees the man.'

In ergative/absolutive languages, verbs denoting emotions, sensory perception, and communication—or 'middle verbs'—take complements that are marked like direct objects in nominative/accusative languages; thus, in Tongan:

- (5) 'Oku sio e tamasi'i ki he tangata.
 PRES see the boy OBJ the man
 'The boy sees the man.'

Middle verbs, however, appear to be syntactically intransitive, despite their transitive meaning. At least one language, Pukapukan, has a split system in which all verbs can govern either case-marking system.

Where it is found, ergativity is essentially a morphological phenomenon; most syntactic rules refer to the categories of subject and direct object, rather than to ergative and absolutive. In the nominative/accusative languages, passives—which are very common in discourse—are formed by attaching a suffix of the form *-Cia* or *-a* to the verb (*C* is a lexically conditioned consonant), and by marking the agent with a cognate of the case marker used for the ergative case in ergative/absolutive languages. Compare the Maori example in 4 with its passive equivalent in 6:

- (6) Ka kite-a te tangata e te wahine.
 NEUTRAL see-PASS the man AGENT the woman
 'The man is seen by the woman.'

There has been considerable debate over the pattern to be reconstructed for Proto-Polynesian. One view,

presented by Chung 1978, reconstructs Proto-Polynesian as a nominative/accusative language; ergativity is said to have arisen in some languages through the reinterpretation of passive structures as transitive. Another view, stated by Clark 1976, maintains that Proto-Polynesian had an ergative case-marking system like those of Tongan and Samoan. In the late 1980s, the controversy was still unresolved.

Some of the more detailed descriptions of the syntax of Polynesian languages are a Tongan grammar (Churchward 1953), a description of Niuean syntax (Seiter 1979), and a grammar of Southern Tuvaluan (Besnier 1991).

6. Patterns of language use. Many Polynesian speech communities have vigorous traditions of formal oratory and ceremonial language, which play an important role in everyday life. The equally important traditional oral literature—which took the form of cosmological myths, genealogical recitations, and fables—is for the most part defunct today, although it was recorded by 19th-century missionaries. Since virtually all Polynesian-speaking communities have been converted to various forms of Christianity, traditional oratory has blended with imported genres like church sermons. In some contemporary Polynesian cultures such as Tonga and Tahiti, lively traditions of song and hymn composition exist.

Literacy was imported to Polynesian cultures in the 19th and 20th centuries; today, most Polynesians are literate in their own languages. Distinct written styles have emerged in contexts such as personal letters. Genealogies, traditional lore, and songs are frequently recorded in writing. Publishing activities in Polynesian languages are limited to a few newspapers in Tongan, Samoan, Tahitian, Hawaiian, and Maori.

Some Polynesian languages (Tongan, Samoan, East Uvean, and East Futunan) have special lexicons marked for the social status of the addressee. Traditionally, lexical taboo was practiced in Tahiti, the Tuamotus, New Zealand, and perhaps Samoa. This practice, in which the words that were part of a chief's name became taboo and were replaced by other words, explains in part why the vocabularies of Tahitian and Tuamotuan differ widely from those of other Polynesian languages.

The lexicons of Polynesian languages bear witness to language contacts in prehistoric times; thus East Uvean and Anutan have borrowed extensively from Tongan. Non-Polynesian languages which have exchanged lexical borrowings with Polynesian languages are Fijian and Rotuman (with Tongan), Gilbertese (with Tuvaluan and

some Outliers), and many Melanesian and Micronesian languages (with the Polynesian Outliers). More recently, all Polynesian languages have borrowed heavily from European languages, mostly English and French. In the more acculturated areas of Polynesia (Samoa, Tahiti, New Zealand, etc.), there is evidence that European languages have affected the structure of Polynesian languages in areas other than the lexicon, although the exact nature of these influences remains undocumented.

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LANGUAGE LIST

- Anuta**: spoken by the approximately 300 inhabitants of Anuta Island, Solomon Islands. May be dialectally related to Tikopia.
- Futunan, East**: 6,600 speakers reported in 1987, on Futuna Island, Wallis and Futuna. Different from Futuna-Aniwa (West Futuna) in Vanuatu. Speakers in New Caledonia are included in population figures for East Uvean.
- Futunan, West, and Aniwan**: 600 speakers reported in 1981, on Futuna and Aniwa islands, east of Tanna, Vanuatu. There are significant differences between the West Futunan and Aniwan dialects. Different from East Futunan.
- Hawaiian**: around 2,000 speakers reported in 1987 from an ethnic population of 220,000, in the state of Hawaii, USA,

mainly on the islands of Ni'ihau and Hawai'i. The language has official status in the state of Hawaii. Almost all speakers are bilingual in Hawaii Creole English or Standard English, or both.

- Kapingamarangi**: around 1,300 speakers reported in 1979, on Kapingamarangi Island, Caroline Islands, in Micronesia. A few hundred speakers have settled on Ponape.
- Luangiua**: around 1,100 speakers reported in 1981, on Luangiua Atoll, Solomon Islands. Also called Ontong Java. Perhaps the same language as Nukumanu and Takuu.
- Mae**: 200 speakers reported in 1981, on Emwae Island, Vanuatu. Also called Emae. Speakers are bilingual in North Efate.
- Mangarevan**: 1,600 speakers reported in 1987, in the Gambier Islands, French Polynesia. Some bilingualism in Tahitian.
- Manihiki-Rakahanga**: spoken by around 5,000 people, half in the northern Cook Islands, and half in New Zealand.
- Maori**: 100,000 speakers reported in 1987 from an ethnic group of 330,000, in the far northern part of the east coast, North Island, New Zealand. Until the 20th century, spoken throughout New Zealand in a number of regional dialects, some of which diverged quite radically from what has become the standard. Most or all speakers are now bilingual in English.
- Marquesan, North**: 3,400 or more speakers reported in 1981, in the northern Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia. Speakers have limited comprehension of Tahitian.
- Marquesan, South**: 2,100 or more speakers reported in 1981, in the southern Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia.
- Mele-Fila**: around 2,000 speakers reported in 1980, on Fila Island in Vila Harbor, and in Mele village on south Efate Island, Vanuatu. There are significant differences between the Mele and Fila dialects. Speakers are bilingual in South Efate.
- Moriiori**: a now extinct dialect of Maori spoken in the Chatham Islands, New Zealand.
- Niuafu'ou**: 690 speakers reported in 1981, on Niuafu'ou and 'Eua Islands, Tonga. Close to East Uvean.
- Niuatoputapu**: a Samoic-Outlier language reported in the 17th century from Niuatoputapu Island, Tonga. Completely replaced by Tongan prior to the 19th century.
- Niuean**: around 11,800 speakers reported in 1986, including 6,000 on Niue and 5,700 in New Zealand.
- Nukumanu**: 200 speakers reported in 1981, on Nukumanu Atoll, northeast of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. Very close to Luangiua and Takuu.
- Nukuoro**: 550 speakers reported in 1979, on Nukuoro Island, Caroline Islands, Micronesia. Many older speakers are bilingual in Ponapean.
- Nukuria**: 200 speakers reported in 1981, on Nukuria Atoll, northeast of Bougainville Island, in North Solomons Province, Papua New Guinea. Also called Nuguria.
- Penrhyn**: 600 speakers reported in 1981, on Penrhyn Island,

- in the northern Cook Islands. Also called Tongareva or Mangarongaro. The language is almost mutually intelligible with Rarotongan, which is rapidly replacing it.
- Pileni:** 880 speakers reported on 1976, on Matema, Taumako, Nupani, Nukapu, Pileni, and Nifiloli Islands in the Duff and Reef Islands, Solomon Islands. Also called Pilheni.
- Pukapukan:** 785 speakers reported in 1979, on Pukapuka Island, Rarotonga, northern Cook Islands, and in New Zealand.
- Rapan:** 400 speakers reported in 1977, on Rapa Island, Austral Islands, French Polynesia. Probably a variety of Tubuai-Rurutu; rapidly being supplanted by Tahitian.
- Rapanui:** spoken by 2,400 to 2,500 people, including 2,200 on Easter Island, 200 to 300 in mainland Chile. Also called Easter Island or Pascuense.
- Rarotongan:** around 43,000 speakers reported in 1979, including 16,800 in the thirteen inhabited Cook Islands (including second-language speakers), 25,000 in New Zealand, and 870 in French Polynesia. Also called Cook Islands Maori.
- Rennellese-Bellonese:** around 1,950 speakers reported in 1976, on Rennell and Bellona Islands, central Solomon Islands. Also called Mugiki, Munggava, or Mugaba.
- Samoa:** 328,000 or more speakers reported in 1987, including 140,000 in Western Samoa, 32,400 in American Samoa, 105,000 in the United States, 50,000 in New Zealand, and 300 to 1,000 in Fiji. American Samoans are bilingual in English.
- Sikaiana:** 485 speakers reported in 1976, on Sikaiana Atoll, central Solomon Islands.
- Tahitian:** around 125,000 speakers reported in 1977, including 117,000 in the Society Islands and some islands in the north Tuamotus, French Polynesia, plus 7,000 in New Caledonia and 300 in New Zealand.
- Takuu:** 250 speakers reported in 1981, on Takuu Atoll, northeast of Bougainville Island, Papua New Guinea. Also called Tauu. Very close to Luangiua and Nukumanu.
- Tikopia:** around 2,020 speakers reported in 1976, on Tikopia Island, Solomon Islands.
- Tokelauan:** around 4,500 speakers reported in 1987, including 1,680 in Tokelau, 100 in American Samoa, 1,740 in New Zealand, and 100 or more in the United States.
- Tongan:** around 108,000 speakers reported in 1987, including 103,200 in Tonga, 300 to 1,000 in Fiji, 4,000 in New Zealand, and 580 in American Samoa. There are also many native speakers in Hawaii, California, and Utah.
- Tuamotuan:** 14,400 speakers reported in 1987, in French Polynesia. Also called Paumotu. Numerous regional variations are now being leveled out as the language is replaced by Tahitian.
- Tubuai-Rurutu:** around 8,000 speakers reported in 1987, in the Austral (Tubuai) Islands, French Polynesia. Also called Austral. Being replaced by Tahitian.
- Tuvaluan:** around 9,300 speakers reported in 1987, including 8,000 in Tuvalu (Ellice Islands), 600 on Nauru, 500 in New Zealand, and 360 in Fiji.
- Uvean, East:** 7,500 speakers reported in 1987 on Uvea Island in Wallis and Futuna, with 12,000 in New Caledonia (including speakers of East Futunan). Also called Wallisian.
- Uvean, West:** around 1,870 speakers reported in 1982, in the northern and southern parts of Ouvéa Atoll, Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia. Also called Faga-Uvea. Different from East Uvean.