



Documentation of the Marquesan languages and culture in French Polynesia

Marquesas Islands

- » one of five archipelagos of French Polynesia (South Pacific) with Tahiti being the political, administrative, educational and economical center
- » ca. 1400 km northeast of Tahiti
- » twelve islands, six inhabited

Facts about French Polynesia

- » **COM** (=collectivité d'outre-mer) of France with partial self-government
- » **official language:** French
- » **French:** language of instruction (school, higher education), *lingua franca* in all public sectors and among different indigenous groups
- » radical westernisation since installation of atomic testing grounds (C.E.P.) in 1960s
- » economic pressures: good command of French, basic requirement for salary labour
- » in urbanised centers of Marquesas (70% of population) general shift from Marquesan to French as home language: most children under age 15 -> French 1st language



School children watching for the first time the ancient technique of cutting semi-ripe breadfruit with shell tools (*veve'e*) for *mā*-production "fermented breadfruit"

Language endangerment

- » language attitudes: low estimate of Marquesan, stigmatised as language of savages and anthropophages
- » media revolution in mid 1980s: 95 % of broadcastings in French, 5% in Tahitian

Collaboration with speech community and institutions

- » major collaboration of Gabriele Cablitz with the Marquesan anthropologist Dr. Edgar Tetahiotupa working at the C.R.D.P. (*Centre de recherche et de documentation pédagogiques de la Polynésie française*) and the cultural association *Te U'i Hou o te Fenua 'Enata*
- » collection of language samples of all Marquesan dialects with representatives of the Association
- » several visits of speech community members to the MPI for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, Kiel University and the *Ethnologische Museum* in Berlin-Dahlem



Cutting semi-ripe breadfruit (*tātā*) for *mā*-production "fermented breadfruit"

Content of documentation

1. Topics

- » traditional food preparation, plant medicine, body plant products, tools, production of tapa, dancing costumes, hats, baskets etc., traditional constructs, fishing techniques, life cycle, legends and narratives of all sorts (local history, personal stories etc.), poems, songs, Marquesan trick languages



Working with the speech community: anthropologist Edgar Tetahiotupa (left), Gaby Cablitz and Tehoatahiiani Bruneau

2. Content of documentation

- » audio and video recordings with transcriptions and translations in French and English,
- » selected texts with interlinear glossing,
- » text editions of narratives,
- » a trilingual dictionary,
- » specialised encyclopaedias of plants, marine life, birds, medicine and artefacts documenting cultural knowledge in the Marquesan language, photos and drawings,
- » a description of the sound system



Documenting old cooking techniques: wrapping sweet breadfruit paste in banana leaves



Preparing plant medicine



Almost obsolete post-European oven construction with volcanic stones

Aims of documentation

- » recording, annotation and archiving of a broad variety of texts
- » providing data for different scientific disciplines: linguistics, anthropology, sociology, oral literature, studies of Pacific history, ethno-botany and -biology
- » capacity building through the training of members of the speech community in language documentation
- » contributing to language maintenance and revitalisation by the development of pedagogical materials such as dictionaries and readers with edited narratives

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