Literacy continues to be a central issue in anthropology, but methods of perceiving and examining it have changed in recent years. In this study Niko Besnier analyzes the transformation of Nukulaelae from a non-literate into a literate society using a contemporary perspective which emphasizes literacy as a social practice embedded in a socio-cultural context. He shows how a small and isolated Polynesian community, with no access to print technology, can become deeply steeped in literacy in little more than a century, and how literacy can take on radically divergent forms depending on the social and cultural needs and characteristics of the society in which it develops. His case study, which has implications for understanding literacy in other societies, illuminates the relationship between norm and practice, between structure and agency, and between group and individual.

Studies in the Social and
Cultural Foundations of Language No. 16

Literacy, emotion, and authority

Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language

The aim of this series is to develop theoretical perspectives on the essential social and cultural character of language by methodological and empirical emphasis on the occurrence of language in its communicative and interactional settings, on the socioculturally grounded 'meanings' and 'functions' of linguistic forms, and on the social scientific study of language use across cultures. It will thus explicate the essentially ethnographic nature of linguistic data, whether spontaneously occurring or experimentally induced, whether normative or variational, whether synchronic or diachronic. Works appearing in the series will make substantive and theoretical contributions to the debate over the sociocultural-functional and structural-formal nature of language, and will represent the concerns of scholars in the sociology and anthropology of language, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and socio-culturally informed psycholinguistics.

1. Charles L. Briggs: *Learning how to ask: a sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research*
2. Tamar Katriel: *Talking straight: Dugri speech in Israeli Sabra culture*
3. Bambi B. Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs (eds.): *Language socialization across cultures*
4. Susan U. Philips, Susan Steele, and Christine Tanz (eds.): *Language, gender, and sex in comparative perspective*
5. Jeff Siegel: *Language contact in a plantation environment: a sociolinguistic history of Fiji*
6. Elinor Ochs: *Culture and language development: language acquisition and language socialization in a Samoan village*
7. Nancy C. Dorian (ed.): *Investigating obsolescence: studies in language contraction and death*
8. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (eds.): *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*
9. Bambi B. Schieffelin: *The give and take of everyday life: language socialization of Kaluli children*
10. Francesca Merlan and Alan Rumsey: *Ku Waru: language and segmentary politics in the western Nebilyer valley, Papua New Guinea*
11. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (eds.): *Rethinking context: language as an interactive phenomenon*
12. John A. Lucy: *Language diversity and thought: a reformation of the linguistic relativity hypothesis*
13. John A. Lucy: *Grammatical categories and cognition: a case study of the linguistic relativity hypothesis*
14. Don Kulick: *Language shift and cultural reproduction; socialization, self and syncretism in a Papua New Guinea village*
15. Jane H. Hill and Judith T. Irvine (eds.): *Responsibility and evidence in oral discourse*

LITERACY, EMOTION,
AND AUTHORITY

READING AND WRITING ON A
POLYNESIAN ATOLL

NIKO BESNIER

Yale University

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

For Guy Besnier
and to the memory of Faiva Tafia

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

xi

This book could not have been written without the unwavering support I received over the years from Elinor Ochs, Harold Conklin, and Brian Street. At Yale, I have had the good fortune of being surrounded by exemplary colleagues, friends, and students: Susan Brownell, Mike Coe, Ian Condry, Mickey Dietler, Micaela di Leonardo, Joe Errington, Angelique Haugerud, Miki Makihara, Nicole Polier, Hal Scheffler, Jan Simpson, and John Szwed, as well as visiting scholars like Michael Lambek, Mahir Şaul, and Jackie Solway, have all had an impact on this work. I cannot fail to mention the collegiality of fellow scholars of Tuvalu, particularly Ivan Brady, Michael Goldsmith, Doug Munro, and Peter McQuarrie, whose insights pepper this book. I received advice and comments on specific details of this project from Philip Bock, René Galindo, Deborah Gewertz, Mike Goldsmith, Mary Hussey, Doug Munro, and Harry Stout. Shirley Brice Heath and Alessandro Duranti read and commented on the entire manuscript, as did David Bloome. My heartfelt thanks to all.

This book was written principally in Honolulu, Albuquerque, and New York City. The luxury to write in Honolulu's superb surroundings was made possible by a Rockefeller Fellowship at the Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawaii. In Albuquerque, I benefitted greatly from Rex Swanda's hospitality and company, and from his occasional queries regarding the nature of my control population for this study. In Manhattan, Richard Ogust kept me on my toes. During the final throes of writing, Charles Briggs, Joe Errington, Julia Hough, Bambi Schieffelin, and Brian Street offered advice, shared their wisdom, and patted me on the hand. Rachel Schofer provided invaluable assistance in manuscript preparation. For the maps, I am indebted to the artistic talents of Robert Williams and Tom Decker.

Parts of this book were presented in talks and colloquia at the University of Sydney, University of New England, University of Hawaii, Bond University, University of Sussex, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the 1987 Boston University Conference on Language Development, the First International Conference on Oceanic Linguistics (Vila, Vanuatu, 1993), and the 1994 Symposium About Language and Society in Austin. Several paragraphs of the introductory chapter are revised from "Aspects of Literacy," co-authored with Brian Street, in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture, and Social Life*, edited by Tim Ingold (Routledge, 1994). Parts of Chapters 4 and 5 have appeared as "Literacy and Feelings: The Encoding of Affect in Nukulaelae Letters," *Text* 9:69–92 (1989), and portions of Chapter 7 as "Christianity, Authority, and Personhood: Sermonic Discourse on Nukulaelae Atoll," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 103:339–78 (1994). Relevant passages are reprinted here with permission kindly granted by Routledge, Mouton de Gruyter, and the Polynesian Society.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS AND ORTHOGRAPHY

The arguments developed in this book rest heavily on the empirical analysis of both written texts and transcripts of spoken discourse produced in the Polynesian language in common use on Nukulaelae Atoll, Tuvalu Group, Central Pacific. This approach foregrounds two questions of particular concern: how spoken discourse should be transcribed; and what orthographic conventions should be adopted in light of the fact that there is no standardized orthography for the language in question. I have adopted a number of conventions in answer to these questions, which are described here.

Transcripts and written texts

Transcribing spoken discourse is an analytic act, as many scholars have demonstrated (e.g., Edwards 1993, Gumperz and Berenz 1993, Ochs 1979a, Tedlock 1983); the selection of linguistic and extra-textual information to be included in the transcript from a very broad range of possibilities, as well as their visual presentation, involve decisions that predetermine how the transcripts are read and what categories become the focus of analytic scrutiny.

Many spoken excerpts cited in this book are not the object of detailed grammatical analysis, although I do pay attention to formal features in my analysis of the meaning of many excerpts. I have therefore adopted transcription conventions that represent a compromise between the fine-grained transcription system used in Conversation Analysis (e.g., Atkinson and Heritage 1984) and the selectively translated paraphrases with which social anthropologists are commonly satisfied. Thus I have found it expedient in most cases to exclude from the transcripts descriptions of prosody (e.g., pitch, loudness, duration) and of cooccurring non-verbal events (e.g., gestures, facial expressions). However, transcripts include all the segmental "noise" audible on tape, such as hesitations, false starts, and other types of repairs. On occasion, I analyze a stretch of spoken discourse in greater structural detail, focusing for example on pitch variations and intonational contours. In such cases, the relevant linguistic categories are noted in the transcript, and the applicable transcription conventions are

explained in the text. The orthography used throughout this book is based on phonemic principles, as discussed below, but the phonological structure of the language is such that this phonemic orthography is very close to the phonetic form of discourse.

Transcripts in the original language are provided first, and are followed by their translations. In the translations, I strive to keep the general "flavor" of the original, sometimes at the expense of English idiomaticity, particularly when the exact wording of the original is consequential for my analysis. However, I have also paid attention to the dangers of "exoticizing" the translation beyond what is required, by ignoring the polysemy of certain words for example.

Following is the list of miscellaneous conventions used in the transcripts:

(words in parentheses)	conjectured or inaudible string
[. . .]	untranscribed string of words
words in bold	illustrative material
word-	abrupt cut-off

In addition, when additional wording or contextual information must supplement the translation for the sake of intelligibility, this information is provided in square brackets.

I generally provide a recording reference (e.g. [sermons:P 1991:2:A:271–277]) between the original transcript and its translation. A typical reference consists of the name of the tape (sermons:P 1991:2), the side of the tape (A), and tape-recorder counter references (271–277). References to written discourse excerpts (e.g. [sermons:P 1991:10]) consist of a file name (sermons:P 1991) followed by a page number (10) where relevant.

In most cases, personal names have been changed to pseudonyms or initials to protect the identity of named individuals. The use of initials is not ideal, although it is often rendered necessary by the finite range of personal names on Nukulaelae. When citing particularly sensitive material, I have changed the initials of individuals to X, Y and Z, and have sometimes left out details in transcript excerpts or background notes.

Writing system and orthography

In the insular Pacific (i.e., Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia), no autochthonous tradition of literacy had developed before contact with the West, and reading and writing were introduced at the time of Europeans influx into the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like the inhabitants of other Pacific Islands, Nukulaelae Islanders use roman characters when writing their own language, mostly confining themselves to the eleven consonant symbols (f, g, h, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, v) and five vowel graphemes (a, e, i, o, u) needed to represent the basic phoneme inventory of their language.

How Nukulaelae Islanders developed historically the orthographic system that they currently use to write their language is undocumented. One can surmise that they tailored it on the orthography that London Missionary Society missionaries devised in the early nineteenth century for Samoan. The orthographic transfer from one language to the other was facilitated by the commonalities in the phonological structures of Samoan and Tuvaluan. However, there are also significant differences between the two systems (e.g., Tuvaluan has phonemically geminated consonants), and difficulties inevitably arose during the borrowing process.

Like other Polynesian languages, the dialects of Tuvaluan (including the Nukulaelae dialect) have a small inventory of basic phonemes. However, they differ from better known Polynesian languages in one major respect: both consonants and vowels can be geminated, whereas only vowels undergo gemination in most other Polynesian languages. This feature, which was first described systematically by Milner (1958), is also found in a few languages of Outlier Polynesia (i.e., small Polynesian-speaking enclaves in Melanesian and Micronesia). It has different phonetic consequences for different consonants: oral stops are heavily aspirated when geminated (there is no aspiration in the ungeminated forms); nasal stops become syllabic; and other consonants are articulated for a longer period of time than their ungeminated equivalents.

In this study, I employ the same orthographic system for spoken and written utterances, and this system is based on phonemic principles. Double graphemes indicate geminated segments. The letter *g* represents a velar nasal stop, *l* is either a lateral or central flap (in free variation), and all other letters have their approximate IPA value. Conveniently, there are only very few differences between phonemic representations and phonetic realizations, and the language exhibits relatively few "fast-speech" phenomena that increase the "distance" between spoken and written forms of the language. An inventory of the graphemes in the orthographic system used in this book is provided in Table 1.

I have deviated from these orthographic norms in a few instances. First, I have preserved the original orthography of some written materials when it seemed appropriate to do so, in which case this is indicated in the text. Second, I have rendered most contemporary personal names (be they pseudonyms or not) and place names in their most common written form when these names occur in the English text (e.g., Funafuti, phonemically *Funaafuti*), but have provided a phonemic version of the name where it first occurs in the book. However, names that appear in transcripts and the place names on Map 1 are all in phonemic orthography. When citing words or texts in Gilbertese and Samoan, I have followed the standard orthographies used in these languages, except where I expressly state otherwise.

There is no standardized orthography for writing Tuvaluan. There have been several attempts to impose orthographic standards, most recently by a

Table 1. *Grapheme inventory*

p		t		k	pp		tt		kk
m		n		g	mm		nn		gg
	f	s		h		ff	ss		hh
	v					vv			
		l					ll		
	i		u			ii		uu	
	e		o			ee		oo	
		a					aa		

governmental committee based on Funafuti, the capital of the country, called the Tuvalu Language Board. This committee has issued several mutually contradictory decrees on Tuvaluan orthography (e.g., Tuvalu Language Board 1980, 1991). Significantly, these decrees concern only the representation of vowel gemination, the one suprasegmental feature that Tuvaluan shares with Samoan: the concern is whether geminated vowels should be indicated with superscript macrons, as in Samoan, or with double graphemes, and whether they should be marked in all instances, only when ambiguity arises, or under no circumstances. The virtual silence over how to treat consonant gemination is probably due to the historical association of Samoan with literacy in Tuvalu, which has shaped what counts as an orthographic problem and what does not (Samoan does not have geminated consonants, so writers of that language are not faced with the problem of how to represent them). For the most part, the Board's decrees have no impact on everyday literacy practices, and as such their fate is the same as other overt attempts to exert authority from above (see Chapter 7 and Besnier 1991a, 1993 for further discussion).

The orthography I have adopted here diverges from the common orthographic practices extant on Nukulaelae and in the rest of Tuvalu, principally because few writers of Tuvaluan mark segmental gemination consistently. I have thus modified the orthography of written texts I cite in this book for the sake of consistency. I have also altered the punctuation of written texts, in that Nukulaelae writers use punctuation sparingly and haphazardly (cf. Chapters 4 and 6). The decision to edit the form of written texts was a difficult one to make. On the one hand, a methodological perspective that focuses on the relationship between texts and their contexts dictates that any modification of the form of textual data constitutes tampering with the evidence. On the other hand, there are practical motivations for the solution I have adopted. First, part of my purpose here is to make selective microscopic comparisons between written texts and genres, and between speaking and writing. Such comparisons would be

unwieldy if the orthography of written texts differed significantly from that of spoken transcripts. Second, there is evidence that the multiplicity of orthographic and punctuation practices and their characteristics sometimes hinder the comprehension of written texts, even for native users of the language, as I discuss in Chapter 4. While the lack of standardization is tied to social factors that are of considerably greater import than processing ease (e.g., a basic suspicion of acts of authority), the reading difficulties that result from the resulting diversity are problematic for the type of analysis I endeavor to present here.

The lack of standardization in written Tuvaluan does not preclude the fact that there is some systematicity within and across orthographic practices, a topic that deserves more attention than I am able to give to it here. Briefly, in the various orthographic systems that Nukulaelae Islanders utilize, geminate vowels are sometimes indicated with two vowels in one of two cases. In the first case, the two morae of the geminated segment belong to two different morphemes, as in words like *fakaasi* "show" (from the causative prefix *faka-* and the root *asi* "appear") and *faiika* "fish" (phonetically *faaika*, from the verb *fai* "harvest" and the noun *ika* "fish"). In the second category fall words in which the second mora of the geminated vowel receives primary word-stress (i.e., is the penultimate mora of the word), e.g., *niisi* "some" and *paala* "wahoo." In addition, there are two minor situations in which double vocalic graphemes are sometimes found. First, geminate vowels may be indicated in borrowings from Samoan words in which a glottal stop occurs between the two vowels, as in *faameo* "to ask a favor" (from Samoan *fa'ameo*) and *vii* "praise song" (from Samoan *vi'i* "to praise," apostrophes in Samoan indicate glottal stops). Second, some writers use double vocalic graphemes in certain contexts to indicate that the consonant preceding the vowel sound is geminated, as in *ttau* "must," written *taau*, and *ssuga* "honorific particle," written *suuga*. These cases suggest that writers are clearly aware of consonantal gemination, but that they mistakenly attribute the locus of gemination to the vocalic segment that follows. Generally speaking, consonant gemination is otherwise not indicated, although a few writers do mark it intermittently with an apostrophe either before or, more rarely, after the consonant (e.g., *'mao* or *m'ao* for *mmao* "far away"). On occasion, writers mark consonant gemination by reduplicating the entire syllable (e.g., *mamao*); indeed, many (but not all) geminate consonants originally derive from reduplicated syllables that have undergone a reduction process, although non-reduced forms are never used in the spoken form of the southern dialects of Tuvaluan. It is also very possible that the use of reduplicated syllables in writing is borrowed from written Samoan (the Samoan word corresponding to Tuvaluan *mmao* is *mamao*). Again, one perceives the influence of Samoan orthographic conventions in these

various patterns, although the apostrophe has a completely different meaning in the written form of that language.

Word boundaries are where most variation is encountered, although some consistency does emerge. Certain one-mora function words that are homophonous with either the last segment of the previous word or the first segment of the following word are frequently omitted in writing. Such is the case of the possessive prepositions *a* "alienable possession" and *o* "inalienable possession" (in the following illustrative sentences, I provide the version as originally written on the first line, the version in phonemic orthography on the second line, the word-by-word glosses on the third line, and the idiomatic translation on the last line):[1]

Fai a   **muna**   tagata.
Fai a   **muna a**   ttagata.
say Cnt word of the + man
    "The man [then] says."

Ia   tela   te   mea   mo   togi meakai   **au**   tama.
Ia, teelaa te   mea   moo   ttogi meakkai **a au**   tama.
Itj that   the   thing Cmp buy   food   of your child
    "Here, here's something with which [you] can buy some food for
    your children."

Ate   **taeao**   tatou   tai   nofoaki foki e lo.
A   te   **taeao**   **o** taatou tai   nofoaki foki eeloo.
Cnt the   morning   of we-3-i quite present   also indeed
    "This morning we have quite a few [important people] present."

One-mora function words that occur in sequence are usually written as one word. For example, the conjunction *mo* "and," the ergative case marker *nee*, and the locative preposition *i* "at," when followed by the definite singular article *te*, are written as *mote*, *nete*, and *ite*. Similarly, the verb *oti* "finished" and the inceptive aspect marker *koo*, which together mark perfective aspect, are frequently written together as *kooti* or *koti*, and the anaphoric pronouns *ei* coalesces in writing with the locative preposition *i* or the directional preposition *ki*, yielding *iei* and *kiei*. These patterns reflect stress-assignment rules, according to which stress is assigned to these sequences as if they formed single words. But some word strings are commonly written as one word simply because they frequently occur in sequence in discourse. For example, the quantifier *soo* "any" is very frequently followed by the indefinite article *se*, and as a result the sequence is frequently written as one word, *sose*; for the same reasons, the universal tense marker *e* and the existential verb *isi* appear as *eisi*, and the demonstrative *teelaa* and the downtoning adverb *laa*, which together form a discourse conjunct *teelaa laa* "thus," are written as *telala*.

In contrast to these mergers, one also encounters splitting tendencies. Certain monomorphemic words, such as the durative aspect marker *koi* "still" and the deictic adverb *aka* "up," are frequently found written as two words (*ko i* and *a ka*), probably because they thus resemble more common morphemes in written form. Dual and plural possession pronouns, as well as indefinite singular possessive pronouns, are usually written in two words, the first of which is homophonous with the article from which the possessive pronoun is formed. For example, *nemaa* "some [of] our" (dual exclusive) is usually written as *ne ma*, *telotou* "their" (plural) as *te lotou*, and *seaku* "one [of] my" as *se aku*. Dual second-person possessive pronouns are often broken up in the middle of the possessive morpheme, so that *teaulua* "your" (dual) can appear as *teau lua*.

Some more or less idiosyncratic patterns of variation result from the homophony between single morphemes and morpheme sequences. The conditional conjunctions *kaafai* and *maafai* and their allomorphs are sometimes written as two words, *ka fai* and *ma fai* respectively, because they thus resemble the tense-aspect markers *kaa* and *maa*, which can also have conditional meanings. In contrast, the verb *fai* "do," which is also related to the form of the conjunctions, is sometimes written in one word with the tense-aspect markers *kaa* and *maa*, even when it clearly functions as the main verb of a conditional clause:

Kafai	te	fatele	pela	seai	mai	fua	ne	tino.
Kaa fai	te	faatele,	peelaa	seeai	mai	fua	ne	tino.
Fut do	the	dance	thus	Neg	Dxs	just	some	person

"When there is a dance, it's as if no one were here."

One interesting case is that of the verb *iloa* "know" preceded by the universal tense marker *e*, and the intensifying adverb *eiloa*, which itself is compounded from the anaphoric pronoun *ei* and the intensifier *loa*. The strings *e iloa* and *eiloa* are homophonous, and they are written either as two words, *ei loa*, or as one word, *eiloa*:

Telala	**eiloa**	ne	au	ko	koe	e	alofa	mai.
Teelaa laa,	**e iloa**	nee	au	ko	koe	e	alofa	mai.
thus	Nps know	Erg	I	Foc	you	Nps	feel-empathy	Dxs

"So I know that you have empathy for me."

Seai	**ei loa**	se	tino	**ei loa**	ne	ia	te	mea	tena.
Seeai	**eiloa**	se	tino	**e iloa**	nee	ia	te	mea	teena.
Neg	indeed	a	person	Nps know	Erg	he	the	thing	that

"No one knows what this is."

A handful of additional orthographic details are worth noting. Reduplicated words or portions of words of more than one mora are often written with a "squared" sign following the base string, e.g., *Nukulaelae* is rendered

as *Nukulae²*, *laulau* "to [continually] tell" as *lau²*. This practice is associated with "informal" written styles (e.g., letter writing) or with writing done under time constraints (e.g., minute taking), and is particularly conspicuous with high-frequency words, and with words in which the reduplication has a predictable meaning (e.g., when it marks continuative or iterative aspect).

Finally, in telegrams, Nukulaelae Islanders use a modified orthography whose features are to a certain extent predictable. Telegraphic orthography has the following general characteristics: articles, prepositions, tense-aspect markers, conjunctions, and negative particles are written together with the following word, while postponed deictic adverbs (*mai* "hither," *atu* "thither," *aka* "up," *ifo* "down") are written together with the preceding string if the latter is not already too long. The text of the following telegram illustrates these various patterns:

TECHEQUE	FAKAMULI	SETALIA		OFULI		ITEBANK
te cheque	fakamuli	see	talia	o	ffuli	i te bank
the cheque	last	Neg	authorize	Cmp	change	at the bank

FAIMAI	KEFAITALI	ISE	2/3	MASINA	KEMAUA	MAI
fai mai	kee faittali	i se	2/3	maasina	kee maua	mai
say Dxs	Sbj wait	at a	2/3	month	Sbj get	Dxs

SETALIAGA	ITEBANK		NEUMAI	IEI
se taliaga	i te	bank	ne aumai	i ei
a authorization	from the bank		Pst bring	from Anp

ALOFAATU
alofa   atu
feel-empathy   Dsx

> "The bank is not willing to exchange the last cheque[,] [they] say that [we have to] wait 2/3 months for [it] to clear at the bank from which it originated[.] Love [signature]"

As in other parts of the world, these conventions are obviously geared to minimize the word-count and hence the cost of transmitting the message.