

Dispatch Destinations: French Polynesia and Easter Island

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1. Research topics

Since my doctoral course, I have studied Austronesian linguistics with a focus on Malagasy dialects. I also carried out research for three months in Rurutu, situated in the Austral archipelago in French Polynesia, and for three months in Rapa Nui (Easter Island, Chile), to broaden my perspective.

Malagasy, Tahitian, Rurutu, and Rapanui belong to the Austronesian family; Malagasy belongs to the Western Malayo-Polynesian subgroup and Tahitian, Rurutu, and Rapanui are classified as Eastern Polynesian, a low-level subgroup of the Oceanic group. Among the Proto-Polynesian family of languages, Tahitian and Rapanui have split off most recently (Lynch 1998).

My main objectives and interests are to undertake comparative linguistic and ethnobotanic studies based on the results of a linguistic survey conducted in Austronesian areas. In this fiscal year, I carried out a survey on the islands of Rurutu and Rapa Nui (i.e., Easter Island). Moreover, I investigated the human-nature relationship in the daily life of those islands. The following report details my findings in each island.

2. Content of overseas research

2.1 French Polynesia (Tahiti and Rurutu)

French Polynesia, an overseas territory of France, consists of five archipelagos, the Society Islands, Tuamotu Islands, Gambier Islands, Austral Islands, and Marquesas Islands. Of a total population of 294,935 (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] 2011), 78% are Polynesian, 12% Chinese, 6% local French (i.e., native French speakers from France permanently residing in Polynesia or French-speaking descendants of French immigrants), and 4% metropolitan French (i.e., French citizens who are temporarily living in Polynesia). Tahitian is designated the official language, although French is considered to be more prestigious. My main focus was the Rurutu language, spoken by 2000 residents of Rurutu (Guillin 2001), which is situated in the Austral archipelago.

2.2 Descriptive study of Rurutu

2.2.1 Sociolinguistic background

The Tahitian language has become more frequently used than before due to the prevalence of media such as radio and television, further development of the transportation network among the islands, and an increase in the number of people coming from and going to Rurutu and the other islands. As a result, more people interact with Tahitians. Nowadays, Rurutu is profoundly affected by the Tahitian language, which is one of those most endangered in the world.

In the course of primary-school education, residents of Rurutu learn the official languages of the territory, which are French and Tahitian. Rurutu (the local language called *Reo ma'oi*) is taught a few hours a week as a local language. From primary through higher education, French is used in classroom instruction.

My observations and interviews in the field revealed that the generation of individuals older than 50 years has ample linguistic command of Rurutu; monolingual speakers are conspicuous in this population. Most Rurutuans aged 30 to 40 years are bilingual in Rurutu and French. The generation of individuals aged 15 to 20 years has knowledge of Rurutu; however, they mostly use French to converse amongst themselves and in work contexts. Children younger than age 15 years do not speak Rurutu often; their knowledge of the language is passive and consists only of terms pertaining to native plants and indigenous foods and traditions.

2.2.2 Pilot survey on the Rurutu language

With the help of native speakers of Rurutu, namely, Ms. Tania and her family, I conducted linguistic research for three months. I gathered basic vocabulary, attempted to describe personal pronouns and the number system, inalienability/alienability and its uses, numerals, numeral classifiers, reduplications of verbs and adjectives, affixations of nouns, and as many other verbal categories as possible within my time constraints. Lastly, I made audio recordings to preserve examples of oral literature (such as folktales) and translated words with the help of a language consultant. Because I cannot report all of my findings herein, I introduce possessive personal pronouns, reduplication, words that describe the relationship between local people and native plants, and words that pertain to indigenous uses of native plants of the Rurutu Islands in this report.

2.2.3 Comparison between Rurutu and Tahitian

Regular phonetic correspondence between Rurutu and Tahitian is observed in [ʔ] vs [f] and [ʔ] vs [h] (Table 1).

Table 1 Comparison Between Rurutu and Tahitian

Gloss	Rurutu	Tahitian
House	ʔare	fare
Family	etiʔi	fetiʔi

to listen	aroʔoʔo	faroʔoʔo
Coconut	aʔari ^{*1}	haʔari
Hair	uruʔuru	huruhuru
Woman	vaʔine	vahine

^{*1} *Nia* is also used.

2.2.4 Possessive personal pronouns

Like other Polynesian languages, Rurutu has a complex system of personal pronouns, number system, relationship between possessors and possessed items, inclusive and exclusive forms, and so forth. Herein, I describe the possessive personal pronoun. The possessive personal pronoun has two categories, the alienable possessive pronoun and the inalienable personal pronoun. If the possessed item relates to a permanent or necessary possessor, the relationship is called inalienability; in this case, an inalienable possessive pronoun is used. When the possessed item is freely separated from the possessor, the relationship is called alienability; in this case, an alienable possessive pronoun is used. Table 2 shows possessive personal pronouns in boldface in Rurutu.

Table 2 Possessive personal pronouns in Rurutu

Person	Inalienable	Alienable
1 st person singular	toʔu paʔo (my head)	taʔu eiʔa (my fish)
2 nd person singular	toʔoe paʔo (your head)	taʔoe eiʔa (your fish)
3 rd person singular	to na paʔo (his/her head)	ta na eiʔa (his/her fish)
1 st person dual		
Inclusive	to taua paʔo (our head)	ta taua eiʔa (our fish)
Exclusive	to maua paʔo (our head)	ta maua eiʔa (our fish)
1 st person plural		
Inclusive	to tatou paʔo (our head)	ta tatou eiʔa (our fish)
Exclusive	to matou paʔo (our head)	ta matou eiʔa (our fish)
2 nd person dual	to orua paʔo (your head)	ta orua eiʔa (your head)
2 nd person plural	to outou paʔo (your head)	ta outou eiʔa (your fish)
3 rd person plural	to ratou puoko (their head)	ta ratou ika (their fish)

Inalienable relationship in Rurutu tends to appear in words for body parts; items to wear, such as clothing, eyeglasses, and hats; and transportation terms, such as ships, cars, and horses. In addition, edible items, abstract nouns, and material nouns are regarded as alienable in Rurutu, as are lexical categories such as kin terms and terms such as house, parents, and bed, which are associated with alienable or inalienable possessives, depending on the possessive relationships.

2.2.5 Reduplications

Reduplication is widely used in verbal morphology and noun and adjective derivation. It expresses plurality, reciprocity of actors or patients, repetition, and deviation from the base meanings of reduplicants. There are two ways of reduplications, namely, total reduplications, which reduplicate all parts of the word, and partial reduplications, which reduplicate part of the word. Table 3 shows the reduplication form of verbs and their base word.

Table 2 Reduplication form of verbs

Base words	Gloss	Reduplications	Gloss
Mato	to beat	matomato	to beat each other
Ere	to love	ere?ere	to love each other
Ori	to dance	oriori	to dance (all together)
Inu	to drink	inuinu	to drink with everybody
Ata	to laugh	ata?ata	to laugh always
Imene	to sing	imenemene	to hum
po?ia	to be hungry	popo?ia	to be a bit hungry

2.2.6 People and nature

Other than a tiny number of tourists who visit for whale watching, the island of Rurutu is silent and rich in natural features, surrounded by the mountains and the sea. Only very recently have television and the Internet spread in the village; local people said that the daily lifestyle on the island has greatly changed during the past two decades. Because of its fertile soil, in which the islanders grow oranges, pineapples, papayas, grapefruits, guavas, coconuts, and taros in their gardens and fields, the island provides its residents with a basic amount of self-sufficiency. Besides cultivation, the islanders spend large part of their daily lives for fishing and harvesting flowers.

Taro cultivation is particularly valuable for the people of Rurutu and has formed an important part of their cultural identity since early times. Theft of the vegetable was a capital crime at one time. The islanders plant taro on a full moon day, in the hope that the taro will grow to be as large as the full moon. At the traditional July festival of *Heiva*, celebrated island-wide across the archipelagos of French Polynesia, cars are decorated with taros, grapefruits, cassavas, and bananas. Dancers, wearing beautiful dresses made of banana leaves and local flowers, gather in the festival square. Fancy-looking, richly ornamented food stands are weighed down with banana leaves, screw pine, hibiscus, *Gardenia taitensis*, and grapefruits. This does not mean that the islanders waste plants or foods; on the contrary, they respect the local plants, taking full advantage of the rich agricultural environment of this island during this most important festival of the year. By contrast, when celebrating *Heiva* (traditional festival in

July) in Tahiti, the Tahitians often wear artificial flowers on their heads to augment their dressy clothing. I was impressed with such local spirit; I love Rurutu and its people (Pictures 1–3). Table 4 shows some native plants of Rurutu and their local uses.

Table 3 Native Plants of Rurutu and Their Local Uses

Rurutu Term(s)	Scientific Name	Uses
noni, nono	<i>Morinda citrifolia L.</i>	This multi-purpose plant is highly valued in making dyes and medicines and as a foodstuff during times of famine. The juice from the crushed fruit, which is often mixed with banana, is used to treat cancer, stomachache, and oral infections. Today, the juice, which is used as a type of natural sports drink, is consumed after heavy physical exertion.
Tiare Tahiti¹	<i>Gardenia taitensis</i>	This plant's flower is worn singly over the ear by women for decorative purposes. It is also used to make leis and other decorations and as a treatment for colds, headaches, and other ailments.
fara	<i>Pandanus</i>	This plant holds the most important value in Rurutu, namely, principal craft value. The leaves are used to produce floor mats, finely woven mats, baskets, fans, hats, pencil boxes, artificial flowers, and cigarette paper. Its fragrant fruits are commonly fashioned into leis and used to produce fragrance for soaps when

¹Reportedly, the *tiare tahiti* ("Tahitian flower") originated in Vanuatu (Whistler 2009).

mixed with coconuts oil. The name of its flower, *hinano*, is also used as a girls' name and a brand of Tahitian beer.

Picture 2 Hats made of *Pandanus* and leis of flowers or shells, traditionally used for welcoming people and seeing them off. **Picture 1** Bottle covering made of screw pine



Picture 3 Car decorated with taros, banana leaves, etc., at the opening ceremony of the Heiva festival



2.3 Rapa Nui (Easter Island, Chile)

Rapa Nui (Isla de Pascua in Spanish, Easter Island in English), which has a 160 km² surface, is a volcanic island located in the remote eastern Pacific Ocean. More than 4,000 km from Tahiti and 3,700 km from the coast of South America, the nearest inhabited island is Pitcarin Island (a British domain), which is 2,000 km away. Rapa Nui was included in the Chilean territory in 1888.

In this small isolated island, there are plenty of attractive cultural heritage features, including an ancient lost script “*rongo rongo*”, Moai statues, the birdman ritual, and the Rapanui language; these features have captivated archeologists, ethnologists, linguists, and tourists. The main street in the village of Hangaroa is vivid and crowded with guesthouses, tourists, restaurants, rental-car agencies, travel agencies, etc. Rapanui is a living language spoken by people born and raised in Rapa Nui. Today, however, Spanish is the dominant language used in schools; also, Rapa Nui locals find it necessary to communicate in Spanish with immigrants from Chile. After a car trip 10 minutes away from the main village, one can listen to daily communication being conducted in Rapanui.

2.3.1 The name “Rapa Nui”

Polynesian people generally use and prefer the name *Rapa Nui* when referring to the island and when referring to its people and language, *Rapanui*. (*Rapa* means “island” or “plate,” and *nui* means “large” or “big.”) This island is also known by the name *Te pito o henua* (“the navel of the earth”). Reportedly, its name originated as a contrast with that of a small island called Rapa Iti (*iti* means “small”; surface area, 40 km²; population, 480), which lies in the extreme southern part of the Austral archipelago in French Polynesia (Michel 1993, Ojeda 1947, Make

and Ghasarian 2008).

2.3.2 Beginning of a descriptive study of Rapanui

Rapanui is the Polynesian language spoken by the inhabitants of Easter Island, Republic of Chile. My knowledge and research experience in Rurutu and Tahiti were great stepping stones to begin research in Rapa Nui. During the first week of my arrival, I found many Tahitian words written in signboards and advertisements on the street. Many borrowed words in Rapanui, including the days of the week, were derived from Tahitian.

I started my research by gathering information at the museum (Museo Antropológico P. Sebastian Englert) and the public library, as well as looking for information on written materials in Rapanui at the small bookshelves in souvenir stores in the village. I found a lot of useful documentations.

During the latter half of my days in Rapa Nui, I worked with a Rapanui local assistant, who is talented at botany, to try to gather basic vocabulary and the names of local plants and their uses. In Rapanui, although different types of fruits, plants, vegetables, and beans have individual, specific names, it seemed that no collective nouns such as “fruit,” “plants,” “vegetables,” or “beans” could be found. As for “animal” or “insect,” Rapanui uses *manu*, which means “bird.” A multitude of terms regarding lunar age is found systematically in Rapanui; these words are still in use in counting the calendar dates.

As I dealt with possessive pronouns in section 2.2 in describing the native language of Rurutu, I note the possessive pronouns in Rapanui for comparison. In Rapanui, there is an alienable/inalienable distinction in the singular forms but not in the dual or plural forms. In Table 5, possessive pronouns are listed in boldface. With regard to the distinctive use of alienable and inalienable semantic categories, I found limited information. As in Rurutu, terms referring to body parts and modes of transportation tend to involve an inalienable relationship, whereas terms referring to food, material nouns, and abstract nouns tend to involve an alienable relationship.

Table 4 Possessive Pronouns in Rapanui

Person	inalienable	alienable
1 st person singular	to?oku puoko (my head)	ta?aku ika (my fish)
2 nd person singular	to?u puoko (your head)	ta?a ika (your fish)
3 rd person singular	to?ona puoko (his/her head)	ta?ana ika (his/her fish)
1 st person dual		
Inclusive	taua puoko (our head)	taua ika (our fish)
Exclusive	maua puoko (our head)	maua ika (our fish)

1 st person plural		
Inclusive	tatou puoko (our head)	tatou ika (our fish)
Exclusive	matou puoko (our head)	matou ika (our fish)
2 nd person plural	korua puoko (your head)	korua ika (your fish)
3 rd person plural	raua puoko (their head)	raua ika (their fish)

2.3.3 The string-figure language *kai kai*

I discovered an interesting way of communication by string figure or cat's cradle, which is very similar to the traditional Japanese game *ayatori*, in which a string figure is interchanged among two or more people to create shapes such as a boat, bridge, and butterfly. On Rapa Nui, a type of string figure, *kai kai*, is used as a means of communicating stories and of handing down the messages of these stories from generation to generation. As seen in Picture 4, Rapanuis use a longer string than that used in *ayatori* to tell a long story, manipulating the string into the shape of a canoe, the sea, fish, etc. These ways of telling cultural stories are preserved among the older generation; additionally, transmission of these stories through *kai kai* remains a living tradition. In contrast to *ayatori*, *kai kai* features no additional participant in constructing the string figure; only one person tells a long story through manipulation of the string and by a rhythmic style of speaking.

Picture 4 Language consultant Ms. R. Pakarati Araki telling a story with *kai kai*



2.3.4 People and nature

2.3.4.1 Environmental issues and public consciousness in Rapa Nui

At the entry gate to this small, isolated island, a strict security check is performed on visitors and their possessions. Not only suitcases and carry-on luggage but also the artificial

flowers on the accessories worn by visitors are subject to x-ray inspection. (It was ironic that nothing was inspected at the time of departure.) The damaging effect of alien species on the ecosystem of this island is a remarkable and serious issue.

The island is covered with beautiful *Cytisus scoparius* bushes, on which yellow flowers bloom. This species of highly fertile bush is one that destroys the local ecosystem. On roadsides, red flowers of the deciduous tree *Erythrina variegata*, which reportedly originated in Africa, are in full bloom. In front of their houses, locals plant colorful *Nasturtium* flowers, which are cherished as the symbol of Rapa Nui. A multitude of attractive plants are observed on this island, most of which are alien species. Before the arrival of the Polynesian people, the island was covered with indigenous palm, *Jubaea sp.*, and other species that are now extinct (Hunt and Lipo 2007, Mieth and Bork 2010). It is reported that the island was composed of dense forests of a native species called *Toromiro* (Hunt 2006); however, the forests had been destroyed due to the use of wood as material for the construction and conveyance of Moai statues, houses, and canoes, along with human-made alterations to the natural landscape, population increases, and excessive urbanization. Today, the island is covered with grasses, volcanic stones, and the alien species mentioned herein.

When the Polynesian people first arrived on Rapa Nui, they had brought a rat, *Rattus exulans*, and a rooster, *Gallus gallus* (Hunt 2007, Hunt and Lipo 2007). Hunt (2006) hypothesizes that the alien rats destroyed the local ecosystem by preying on native plants; Mieth and Bork (2010) claim that human-made alterations to the natural landscape had a much more serious effect on the local ecosystem than alien rats preying on native plants.

Nowadays, the National Forest Cooperation (CONAF) has begun to plant the indigenous species *Toromiro* (*Sophora Toromiro*), with the goal of recovering and preserving forests for the future. This is a long-term strategy because *Toromiro* is fairly vulnerable to climate change and pests; also, it takes more than 50 years for this plant to grow into a large tree. CONAF workers cover this tree with a rock called *manavai* (*mana* means “spirit, magical power, holy power”; *vai* means “water”); CONAF workers reiterated trial and error by carrying out various experiments in order to protect seedlings and find the best way to promote the growth of plant. Furthermore, a short musical was written for children, *Árbol Toromiro* (*Toromiro Tree*), which expresses hopes of restoring the forest and aims to teach children the importance of the forest, saying “Let’s plant a tree, let’s recover the forests in the island.”² Today, the deforestation resulted from the arbitrary actions of humans in the past is an issue tackled by many generations of island residents.

²“Voy a plantar un Toromiro, este árbol quiero rescatar. Los han cortado casi todos. ...¡Vamos a reforestar y al Toromiro salvar!”

Source: *Árbol Toromiro*, Fariña and Aránguiz, Radioteatro musical Infantil Rapanui.

2.3.4.2 Plant uses

Local people are still using traditional plant medicines today; Rapanui hospital patients can choose traditional medicine or Western medicine. I was impressed when a staff member of CONAF said thoughtfully to me, “My friend, who was given 6 months to live by the hospital when he was being treated with Western medical techniques, continued to take *matuʔa puaʔa*, (a plant used for cancer treatment) and he got well—he was cured and is still living with energy now.” At the pension, a Chilean tourist who had been wounded in an automobile accident was treated by the owner with banana leaves cooled in water, which the owner placed on the tourist’s wound.

On such a small remote island, limited resources are available; everything is expensive because of aerial transportation fees. Hence, all of the plants cultivated in the garden or found alongside the street are precious. Table 6 shows some uses for local plants; this information was gathered by the research assistant, who is a botanist and staff member of CONAF.

Table 5_Uses of Plants Commonly Found on Rapa Nui

Rapanui	Scientific Name	Uses
miro tahiti	<i>Melia azederach</i>	A pulp made from the mashed leaves of this plant can be applied to a scratch on the body or can be used to treat skin allergies.
matuʔa puaʔa	<i>Polypodium scolopendria</i>	This plant can be used for a treatment against asthma, headache, and cancer, as well as a tonic.
tuava	<i>Psidium guajava L</i>	This plant can be used as a treatment against stomachache and cough.
popora	<i>Solanum fosteri</i>	This plant can be used as a treatment against stomachache. It is indigenous to Rapa Nui.
mahute	<i>Broussonetia papurifora</i>	This plant can be used to make cloths.
tipanie	<i>Plumeria</i>	Its flower can be used as ornamentation.
toromiro	<i>Sophora Toromiro</i>	This species is indigenous to Rapa Nui and is being raised carefully by islanders for future use.

2.3.4.3 Role of horses

In Rurutu and Rapanui, terms for animals, including “dog” and “cow,” are associated with alienable possessive pronouns; only “horse” is associated with inalienable possessive pronouns. During my stay in Rurutu, I did not understand very well why “horse” is associated with

inalienable possessive pronouns. In Rurutu, horses are mainly used in the tourist industry, such as in horse riding or horseracing at the traditional festival, *Heiva*. Cars are widespread; nearly all islanders use a car as their means of transportation. However, in Rapa Nui, horses are an important means of everyday transportation. Rapanuis ride horses to visit their friends, to wander the streets, to climb the mountain, to go to the supermarket, etc. A man who owns more than forty horses told me that the reason why he owns so many horses is simply that he loves them.

Almost all Rapanui families have a horse. Only recently was the car introduced as a means of transportation and only recently did it become affordable for ordinary people. Horses are also used to cultivate the land, to eradicate weeds in the fields, and so forth.



Picture 5 Domestic horses cared for by a Rapanui man who owns a field

2.3.5 Lexical correspondence: Tandroy, Merina, Malay, Tahitian, Rurutu, and Rapanui

In Table 7, I list the correspondent words of the Austronesian languages I have been studying, namely, the Tandroy dialect of Malagasy, the Merina dialect of Malagasy, Malay, Tahitian, Rurutu, and Rapanui. For example, in examining the word for “yam,” a phonetic correspondence, such as [v]-[v]-[b]-[f]-[ʔ]-[h], is found among Tandroy, Merina, Malay, Tahitian, Rurutu, and Rapanui. Correspondence such as [v]-[b]-[ʔ]-[h] can be also found in the word “hair” among Tandroy, Merina, Malay, and Rurutu” The word for “hot” in Malagasy indicates “sun” in Tahitian and Rurutu. As for “eye,” all listed languages have this word in common except for two Malagasy dialects. Table 7 clearly indicates that these languages have split from the same parent language.

Table 6_Lexical Comparison Among Tandroy, Merina, Malay, Tahitian, Rurutu, and Rapanui

Tandroy (Malagasy)	Merina (Malagasy)	Malay ^{*1}	Tahitian	Rurutu	Rapanui
Western-Malay		Malay	Oceanic group, Eastern Polynesian		

	Polynesian group		-Sumbawa group			
sky	lanitse	lanitra	langit	raʔi	raʔi	rangi
human	ulurje	uluna	orang	taʔata	taʔata	taʔata
child	anake	zanaka	anak	tamariʔi	tamariʔi	poki
fish	fia	trundru	ikang	iʔa	eiʔa	ika
yam	uvi ^{*2}	uvi ^{*2}	ubi	ufi	uʔi	uhi
eye	masu ^{*3}	masu ^{*3}	mata	mata	mata	mata
hair	vulu	vulu	bulu	huruuru	uruʔuru	huruhuru
death	mate	mati	mati	mate	mate	mate
hot	mafana	mafana	hangat	mahanahan a ^{*4}	maʔanaʔana [*] 5	mahana ^{*6}
scared	matahutse	matahutra	takut	matahu	mataʔu	mataku
five	dime	dimi	lima	rima ^{*7}	rima ^{*7}	rima ^{*7}

^{*1} From Board of Scholars, University of Penang, Malaysia. 1992. English-Malay, Malay-English dictionary. New Delhi: Language of the World Publications.

^{*2} Indicates “potato” in this language.

^{*3} *Masu*, meaning “eye” in Malagasy, is originated from the Swahili word *macho* (Tryon 1995).

^{*4} The reduplication form of *mahana*, meaning “sun.”

^{*5} The reduplication form of *maʔana*, meaning “sun.”

^{*6} cf. “Sun” is *rāʔa* in this language.

^{*7} Meaning “hand.”

3. An impressive experience that occurred during research

3.1 Companionship and interaction through the eel

In the field, it is necessary and essential to spend a great deal of time patiently negotiating and chitchatting non-scientifically with local people on a daily basis to foster confidential relationships that will yield accurate and useful data. In Rurutu, for example, I viewed fish at the seaside for an entire day, accompanied by the children who lived near me. In Rapa Nui, I helped to harvest guava, beans, broccoli, and so forth from early morning until 10 PM. Such periods of long-term communication strengthen mutual bonds of trust and eventually establish a relationship of trust beyond that shared by researchers and collaborators. In the course of such exchanges with locals, I may discover new research questions or ideas. Herein, I report a story

about eels that sparked lively conversation on Rurutu and Rapa Nui.

3.1.1 Rurutuans do not customarily eat eels

In Rurutu, plenty of eels swim around the taro fields; although everyone knows this, nobody eats the eels. Rurutuans were astonished when I told them that eel is a highly appreciated, expensive food in Japan. They were curious about the fact that Japanese people eat eel; because the taro fields are always full of eels, we decided to catch some and try to cook them. Catching eels for food and cooking them were intensively interesting activities for Rurutuans, from children to the elderly. Finally, only I ate eel, as the Rurutuans watched curiously. Just as I had been unable to eat baked dog meat, a traditional Polynesian food that is not customarily consumed by Japanese people like me, the Rurutuans seemed to find it strange that eels might be eaten.

According to my linguistic assistant, a long time ago, her parents told her, “Don’t cast rocks at eels or the water will disappear from the fields! It is thanks to eels that we receive water in the fields.” Because there is no river in Rurutu, the locals irrigate the field with water from the sea.

Picture 6 Catching eels at a taro field



Picture 7 My first attempt to clean and cook an eel



3.1.2 Eel is a favorite food among Rapanuis

In Rapa Nui, the moment I explained that we Japanese are great eaters of eels, people were excited and welcomed the news, saying, “Oh my dear friend you understand the taste of eel!” This further encouraged amicable relations. Rapanuis are also great eaters of eel; once they find eels in the sea, they soon keep them in the refrigerator. Almost all Rapanuis love eating home-cooked eel and often have meals featuring this fish at home. It is only because Western tourists do not like to eat eel that we cannot find the fish on the menu at restaurants, local people told me. When I asked local people on the street whom I met by accident, all of them said that they have eel in their houses at that moment. They eat eels fried, in soup, baked, etc. I should

learn to cook eel in the Japanese style for the next time I visit.

Picture 8 Soup with eel in Rapa Nui



4. Achievement of self-estimated research goals for this dispatch program

My research during the first three months in Rurutu was fruitful. However, the distinction of long and short vowels, the positions of stress, and other such questions remain to be investigated in detail. As time allowed, I carried out the research to the best of my ability; nevertheless, although I spent time analyzing word formations and derivations in Rurutu and Rapanui, I was not able to perform further research on the syntax of those languages because the study was developed as a pilot program and the languages were new to me. Regarding native plants and their uses, I could identify their individual names and local names; despite this, my findings lack the amount of detail and data that I had expected to gather. During this short research period for the pilot research performed in Polynesian areas, I was able to gather exhaustive data on Rurutu, a language that has never been documented, to my knowledge.

During the latter three months of my research, conducted in Rapa Nui, I felt puzzled because it was my first contact with South America; also, I felt lost when I realized that I had come so far away from my home to spend time alone on such an isolated, remote island. It also took time to get used to South American culture, which has spread to Rapa Nui; because I was learning the local greetings and other types of speech, I could not start my research easily. I was impressed when I found Quechua vocabulary in Spanish spoken by Chilean immigrants. The differences between the type of Spanish spoken in Spain and the type of Spanish spoken in Chile, although irrelevant to my major research topic, surely opens a new area of interest for my future research.

It is a well-known fact that Malagasy, spoken in the westernmost French Polynesian island of Madagascar, and Rapanui, spoken in Rapa Nui, the easternmost island I visited, were split from the same proto-language. Naturally, I know this; still, it was a valuable experience to be able to observe and compare each of these living languages at the places where they were most widely spoken to confirm that these languages were indeed derived from the same parent languages.

5. Future subjects

Other than Madagascar, where I conducted research during my doctoral course, and Malaysia and Indonesia, where I have briefly visited for short-term research and participated in conferences, my long-cherished dream has been to travel on foot through the vast easternmost Austronesian language areas to the westernmost area. The dream came true thanks to my field research in French Polynesia and Rapa Nui (Easter Island) for this dispatch. During my six months of field research in Polynesia, Prof. Shigeki Kaji visited French Polynesia to find out how my linguistic research was going; then, in December, when I felt lonely in Rapa Nui, Prof. Kazuharu Mizuno visited me and gave instruction from physical and geographic points of view.

My future research will involve analyzing the primary data that I collected in this research trip and preparing a preliminary Austronesian comparative study, paying more attention to seafaring technology and its terms that are particular to maritime culture, native plants, and natural resources. By doing so, I can describe these elements from an ethnobotanic perspective that can provide precise data for comparison across Austronesian areas.

From the end of December 2011 to the end of March 2012, I will stay in INALCO (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales) as a visiting researcher to deepen my thesis and research through continuing education. By participating in regular meetings on related topics such as Indian Ocean studies, Oceanic Linguistics research groups, and any other related conferences held in Paris, as well as exchanging ideas through discussion, I will revise and strengthen the weak points of my thesis, “A Descriptive Study of the Tandroy Dialect of Malagasy.”

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