

LANGUAGES

THE languages spoken in the Pacific area in historic times are numerous and quite diverse in character. In some cases, their speakers are confined to a distinctive physical type; in others the distributions correspond in a general way to the appearances of specific cultures. Although there is no inherent relationship between language, physical type and culture, such correspondences nevertheless provide important clues to the antiquity and chronological relationship of the languages, and also throw light on the questions of migrations of peoples and the movements and diffusions of cultures. Although some of the languages have not been adequately studied, most of them are sufficiently well known to permit their classification into four linguistic stocks: Tasmanian, Australian, "Papuan" and Malayo-Polynesian.

Tasmanian, which has been extinct since 1876, was spoken by about 2,500 persons on the island of Tasmania. The peripheral location of the island and its long isolation from Australia suggest that this language has the greatest antiquity of any of the known tongues of the Pacific. We may presume that it was carried through the East Indies, New Guinea and Australia in early times, but it has left no traces, so far as is known, although recent investigations in Queensland indicate that it may have contributed to certain Australian dialects still spoken in that area. If the Tasmanians represent an ancient mixture of Pygmies and Australoids, the Tasmanian language presumably belonged to one or the other. The only living Pygmies known to speak a language of their own are the Andaman Islanders, but it is possible that other Pygmy languages may yet come to light in New Guinea and the Malay Peninsula. Most of the Negrito groups in these two areas, like those in the Philippines, seem to have long since adopted the languages of their respective neighbors. There are suspicions that Tasmanian is related to Australian, but the evidence is not conclusive.

The Australian language is now found only in Australia, where it undoubtedly has a great antiquity. It presumably was preceded by Tasmanian, and in turn underlies the present languages of New Guinea

and the East Indies. There is a possibility that traces may still be found in southwestern New Guinea. We may suppose that Australian was brought to the continent by the Australian physical type, but it does not follow that other Australoids necessarily spoke the same language.

The term "Papuan" has long been used to designate the "non-Melanesian" languages found in the interior and southwestern portions of New Guinea and in certain mountain areas of other islands in Melanesia, as well as in some of the islands to the west of New Guinea as far as the Moluccas. Since "Papuan" has also been applied to a physical type and to a culture, its use leads to confusion. Furthermore, it implies a linguistic unity of the various languages so classified, and such a relationship has not been established.

The distribution of "Papuan" in mountainous and isolated areas, surrounded or flanked in all cases by Malayo-Polynesian languages, well indicates the chronological relationship of the two. The number of speakers of "Papuan" cannot be indicated accurately, but may exceed 1,000,000. The vast majority are Negroids, the remainder Negritos and Australoid-Negroid mixtures. These considerations suggest that "Papuan" languages were brought to New Guinea by early Negroids whose descendants are still in process of absorbing physically their predecessors in the interior of New Guinea, New Britain and New Ireland, most of whom seem to have capitulated linguistically to "Papuan". The appearances of "Papuan" in the Melanesian islands to the east of New Guinea may not be very ancient, but the results of migrations from eastern New Guinea, New Britain and New Ireland at about the same time the Melanesian speaking peoples were arriving in these areas.

All the native languages of the Pacific not classified as Tasmanian, Australian or "Papuan" belong to the great Malayo-Polynesian linguistic stock, spoken today by almost 90,000,000 people. Before English became the most far-flung language of the world, Malayo-Polynesian occupied the greatest distribution, for it extended half way around the earth from Easter Island to Madagascar, off the east coast of Africa. There are many major divisions of Malayo-Polynesian. The most important ones, in so far as numbers of speakers are concerned, are found in the East Indies. For instance, of the over 40,000,000 inhabitants of Java, 27,000,000 speak Javanese, 8,500,000 Sundanese. In Sumatra, Borneo, Celebes, Bali and the Philippines, other related languages are spoken by from one to several million people. To the

east and northeast of the East Indies only three major divisions are found. These are Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian, the distributions of which correspond to the Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian culture areas, respectively. Micronesian influences have extended into northern Melanesia, and Polynesian influences and colonies are present in eastern and southern Melanesia. Speakers of an archaic form of Polynesian still live in parts of Micronesia. These considerations indicate that Polynesian was carried into the Pacific via Micronesia and that some of its speakers, after reaching Samoa, turned westward to meet the speakers of Melanesian who possibly were still moving eastward at that time. Micronesian obviously followed Polynesian, and in turn is now being influenced by related languages of the northern East Indies and the Philippines. When the Europeans arrived in the Pacific, there were over 1,000,000 speakers of Polynesian. Their numbers were reduced to about one-fifth of this figure by 1900, but have now increased to over 300,000. Melanesian probably is spoken today by over 1,000,000 persons. There are about 100,000 speakers of Micronesian.



Fig. 7. Fan with a carved bone handle, Marquesas Islands.
(height 20")