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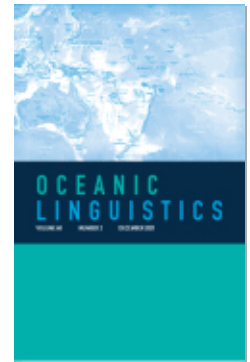
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In Memoriam

John Dominic Lynch (1946–2021)

Paul Geraghty and Andrew Pawley

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC AT SUVA AND AUSTRALIAN
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

1. PROLOGUE.¹ John Dominic Lynch died on May 25, 2021 in Port Vila, Vanuatu, aged seventy-four. During a career spanning fifty years he was a central figure in Pacific linguistics, a highly productive researcher, editor of two journals, and much respected colleague and teacher.

A large part of Lynch's research effort focused on the Oceanic languages of Vanuatu. He wrote substantial grammars and dictionaries of two Southern Vanuatu languages and produced sketches of five others. He unraveled the complex phonological and morphological histories of the Southern Vanuatu group and the languages of Malakula. He made influential contributions to the wider field of Oceanic comparative historical linguistics. He also wrote extensively on Pacific pidgins, the role of English in the Pacific, and language and education in South Pacific nations. He wrote the standard textbook on Oceanic linguistics and coauthored a widely used textbook in general linguistics.

Lynch sustained this remarkable productivity while also occupying senior administrative posts at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and The University of the South Pacific (USP) more than twenty years. He was Dean of Arts at the UPNG from 1981–1985, then as Vice-Chancellor from 1986 to 1991 he guided the university through six years of politically turbulent times. His move to the Emalus (Vanuatu) campus of the USP in 1991 was largely to avoid administrative burnout but even so, he served as Pro-VC and head of the campus for thirteen years. From 2007 to 2019 he was editor of *Oceanic Linguistics*, the leading journal in Austronesian and Papuan language studies.

2. BEGINNINGS. Both John's parents were of Irish Catholic stock. John was born in Sydney on July 8, 1946, the eldest of five brothers. Their father, Gregory Lynch, was a chemical engineer. Their mother, Pat Conaghan, was a high-school music teacher. The family lived in the outer northern suburbs of

1. Thanks to David Arms, Robert Blust, Robert Early, Colin Filer, Brendan Lynch, Claire Moyses, Malcolm Ross, Hans Schmidt, and Fiona Willans for comments and reminiscences.

Sydney until 1958. John attended Prouille Dominican and then Christian Brothers primary schools. In 1958 the Lynches moved to Melbourne, where John attended the Jesuits' Xavier College. In an autobiographical fragment about his childhood years he says little about his school subjects and a good deal about playing cricket and rugby football and keeping cricket statistics. But his brother Brendan writes that "John always had a love and a talent for languages. In his high school years he studied Latin, French, Greek and German — in fact the school didn't offer German so he taught himself and was tutored by the Austrian wife of one of his teachers, and he passed the German exam too in his final year."

3. UNIVERSITY STUDIES. In 1964 John obtained a Commonwealth Scholarship and began an honours degree in Arts at The University of Sydney, graduating with first class honours in 1968. Although he majored in Anthropology, students could take the linguistics courses as their special Distinction work in Anthropology and John did this. His sole linguistics teacher during his four years at The University of Sydney was Rev. Dr. Arthur Capell, a scholar who had done much pioneering descriptive and comparative research on the indigenous languages of Australia and the Pacific Islands. Capell was an enthusiast for languages but a man of dry teaching style. One year John was the only honours student in linguistics and attended classes in Capell's office, where the latter read from his lecture notes for the whole hour.

Health issues forced Capell to retire from teaching in 1968. One of his research interests was in the languages of the three main islands of southern Vanuatu, Aneityum, Tanna, and Erromanga, and he shared his extensive materials with John, who had decided to pursue a career in linguistics, focusing on the "Melanesian" languages, that is, the non-Polynesian Austronesian languages of Melanesia. John's timing was good. The 1960s and the 1970s saw the establishment of linguistics programs in universities in Australia, New Zealand, Hawai'i, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Fiji, several with a focus on Pacific Island languages.

John gained an East-West Center grant in 1968 to do a doctorate at the University of Hawai'i (UH). Among the faculty of the UH Department of Linguistics was George Grace, the leading Oceanic historical linguist, who chaired his thesis committee. Among contemporary students was Robert Blust. For his PhD thesis John undertook to do a descriptive and historical analysis of the complex phonology of Lenakel, one of five languages spoken on Tanna. Capell's materials provided a jumping-off point but extended field-work would be required. In 1969 he made the first of five field trips to Tanna.

John was delighted to find that Honolulu had an active cricket club. Games were played on a concrete pitch with coir matting in a dedicated area of Kapi'olani Park, against visiting teams. The Honolulu club players were a cosmopolitan lot, including businessmen and students from Sri Lanka, England, Australia, New Zealand, and the Caribbean.

4. UPNG. In the meantime there was a job opportunity at the UPNG in Port Moresby. In 1969 I (Andrew Pawley) took a year's leave from The University of Auckland to establish undergraduate courses in linguistics in the newly founded Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the UPNG, headed by the anthropologist Ralph Bulmer. In 1970 John took over this position, inheriting my course notes.

For the next few years he divided his time between teaching at UPNG, taking courses at the UH, fieldwork on Tanna, writing his doctoral thesis, and taking over the editorship of *Kivung* (later renamed *Language and Linguistics in Melanesia*), the journal of the Linguistic Society of PNG. I served as external examiner and adviser for the linguistics program at UPNG for several years, and soon came to know John pretty well. He was someone who did things efficiently and without fuss. He liked to be quietly busy, always happiest when he had a research project in hand and another couple simmering on the backburner. In his very first letter to me, in June 1969, he made only a brief mention of his PhD thesis topic, but outlined with enthusiasm an article he was writing about an unrelated issue in Tongan syntax.

Kivung was established in 1968. Lynch was editor of volumes 7 to 11 from 1974 to 1978, then review editor from 1982 to 1986, and an associate editor or editorial board member from 1986 onward.

In 1974 a Department of Language was created at UPNG. With some sixteen full-time staff, it had both academic and service functions: to teach and do research in linguistics, focusing on the indigenous languages of PNG, and to teach English language courses to students of Law and Science and to Preliminary Year students. Tom Dutton was seconded from the Australian National University to serve as Professor for the three years 1975–77. John was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1976 and Professor in 1978. He carried a heavy classroom teaching load, up to seventeen hours a week.

As his administrative competence became generally recognized, he was asked to take on more senior roles in the University. He served as Dean of Arts for several years, became Acting Vice-Chancellor in January 1986, and in September 1986 he was appointed Vice Chancellor. It is not clear if those who appointed him were aware that John was the anonymous author of an occasional newsletter, entitled *Moving Finger*, satirizing various aspects of UPNG bureaucracy and politics. Three of his Papua New Guinean students, Otto Nekitel, Kenneth Sumbuk, and Apoi Yarapea, went on to complete doctorates at universities in Australia and Zealand and returned to teach in PNG. In 1985 John was awarded PNG's Tenth Anniversary Medal in recognition of his services to education.

5. PACIFIC LANGUAGES UNIT, USP. After twenty-one years, John's stint at the UPNG came to an end. In the 1980s the UPNG became politically increasingly turbulent. In 1991 students boycotted classes for seven weeks and the Council closed the University for the remainder of the year. John approached the USP to ask whether UPNG students could take courses at the Solomon Islands or Emalus (Port Vila, Vanuatu) campuses of the USP.

Coincidentally, the Director of the Pacific Languages Unit (PLU) at the Emalus campus, Terry Crowley, resigned to take a position in New Zealand, and John was invited to replace him. John resigned from the UPNG, and late in 1991 he and his wife Andonia Piau-Lynch (known to all as Andy) and their two young sons moved to Vanuatu, where Andonia forged a career first as an educational psychologist (the only degree-holding psychologist in Vanuatu) and later as an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and for women's rights.

When John took up the job of Director, the PLU had already been functioning for nine years. The Unit's mission to research and develop Pacific languages was well under way, notably with Crowley's 1987 four-volume course materials for the study of Bislama, all written in Bislama, the first of its kind, and course materials for other areas of linguistics designed specifically for Pacific Island students.

John was no stranger to either Vanuatu or PLU, having done extensive fieldwork there and also worked with Crowley in organizing UNESCO-sponsored workshops on language development in Melanesia in 1985 and 1988 and on the foundation course book *Communication and Language*, first published in 1988. He continued this work in Vila and by 1993 had published course materials for the analysis of language and applied phonetics and phonology (with Jan Tent), leading to a complete portfolio of original courses for a Major in Pacific Language Studies.

In 1995 John was given a personal chair, as Professor of Pacific languages, and made head of the Emalus campus until his retirement in 2007. In 2008 he was elected as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. In 2016 he was awarded Vanuatu's 30th Independence Anniversary Medal for his services to the nation in linguistics, language studies, and education.

6. RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS. Lynch was a prolific researcher and writer throughout his career. He published 125 articles and 7 single-authored, and 8 coauthored books (see list of publications below).

The main focus of his research was on the languages of Vanuatu and particularly those of southern Vanuatu, yielding nearly seventy articles and the monographs: *An annotated bibliography of Vanuatu languages* (1994), *The linguistic history of southern Vanuatu* (2001), and *The languages of Vanuatu: a new survey and bibliography* (2001) (the last coauthored with Terry Crowley).

The southern Vanuatu languages have undergone complex sound changes and much of John's work dealt with historical phonology. In the second half of 2000 he was a Visiting Fellow in the Laboratoire de Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Villejuif, France, where he collaborated with Françoise Ozanne-Rivierre on a paper on evidence for a Southern Oceanic subgroup embracing the languages of Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and the Loyalties. He also wrote insightful papers on Oceanic historical morphology, Pacific pidgins, the role of English in the Pacific, and language and education in South Pacific nations.

There are two major publications of a more general nature in Oceanic linguistics that he will be remembered for. One is *Pacific Languages: an introduction*, published by the University of Hawai'i Press in 1998. Intended for a nonspecialist readership, it was based on an undergraduate textbook on the structure of Pacific languages, to which was added content on the languages of Australia, language and society, language and culture, and more on Papuan languages, and has remained required reading at USP and other universities.

His 2002 publication with Malcolm Ross and Terry Crowley, *The Oceanic Languages*, a compendium of descriptions of forty-three Oceanic languages with a great deal of additional material on the sociolinguistic background and the reconstructed ancestral language, Proto-Oceanic, was intended in a sense to replace Ray (1926). It has become a standard reference work, affectionately known to Oceanic linguists as "the blue book," from the color of its cover.

On the untimely death of Terry Crowley in 2005, John took it upon himself to finish four short grammars of languages of Malakula Crowley had been working on, and so began John's interest in the languages of Malakula, and, in particular, their historical phonology.

His work ethic and talent for writing were legendary: Jan Tent, who worked with him on course books on phonology and morphology in the 1990s, writes: "I was amazed at how quickly John wrote. The first draft was the final draft, it was always that good. It was a great honor and privilege to have had the chance to work with John in developing and writing those two courses." Hans Schmidt, who worked with John at PLU for several years, comments on his lucidity: "He made an effort to write articles and books in a way that everyone could understand them, and did not hide behind a wall of scientific jargon."

7. OCEANIC LINGUISTICS CONFERENCES. John was cofounder of the Conferences on Oceanic Linguistics, which are held every three years and have come to be known by the acronym COOL. He related how the first COOL came about:

It was after the 1991 ICAL [International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics] that was held in Honolulu that Paul Geraghty mentioned to me that Oceanic linguists seemed to have been getting a bit 'lost' within the wider Austronesian community, plus the fact that there had to be parallel sessions because of the large number of papers. So he asked me if I would think about organizing a purely Oceanic conference, separate from the ICALs, and the first was held here in Port Vila in 1993, with a small seed grant [...] from USP. All of the others have been held separately from ICALs, though in 2002 in Canberra there was an ICAL immediately followed by a COOL. Generally there have been around fifty or so papers, which meant a week with no parallel sessions and usually either a day or half a day off in the middle for a rest, excursions, sightseeing, etc. (Grace, Bender, and Lynch 2011:293–94)

COOLs have continued unabated since, although John was unable to attend the two most recent—COOL10 in Honiara in 2017 and COOL11 in Noumea in 2019—because of ill health.

8. EDITOR OF OCEANIC LINGUISTICS. The flagship journal for Austronesian and Papuan linguistics, *Oceanic Linguistics* (OL), first appeared in 1962. George Grace remained its editor for some thirty years. He was succeeded by Byron Bender in 1991. Under Bender's watch OL flourished, with the average size of volumes (two issues a year) doubling to over 500 pages, yet coming out on time. In 2006 Bender, in his mid-70s, was looking to retire from the editorship. He approached the review editor, Robert Blust, about succeeding him but Blust declined. He then asked Andrew Pawley who also declined but strongly recommended John Lynch as someone with proven credentials. Byron did not know John very well but took the plunge. John accepted and the rest is history. They jointly edited the 2006 volume, which ran to over 700 pages, then John became sole editor with Byron stepping back to play an advisory role as “managing editor.” John continued as editor for twelve years.

Blust, who stayed on as review editor, commented that “working with John was an absolute pleasure. Everything was done on time, emails were like a phone conversation, with replies often coming within minutes of a question [...] And as a contributor to the journal I found John invariably quick to respond to questions, good at finding suitable readers, and always able to ask helpful questions about my writing” (Ross and Blust 2021:ix).

9. COLLEAGUE AND MENTOR. John will be remembered as a kind and gentle soul, self-effacing, and humble, with a keen sense of humour and willingness to help anybody. David Arms recalls how he was apprehensive when he was appointed to Tanna and asked to research the languages there, fearing that John might consider him to be trespassing on his territory. On the contrary, he was very welcoming, and afforded him every possible professional courtesy and assistance. Arms' experience is echoed by many others.

10. RETIREMENT AND HEALTH. John retired from the USP in 2007 but continued to live in Port Vila. He lost Andonia to cancer in 2011. In late July, 2014, his own health took a turn for the worse. He suffered congestive heart failure and was admitted to hospital—for the first time in his life. Although he was discharged after two weeks, he was readmitted soon afterward with hematoma and infected muscle tissue, and again later in the year for more attention to his heart. He was medically advised not to fly, which meant, among other deprivations, that he could no longer attend the COOL that he had cofounded. But his research work and collegiality continued unabated. He enjoyed attending Monday kava drinking sessions in Vila and conversing with locals and visiting scholars. He was proud that his sons Brendan and Steven have forged the foundations of successful careers. Brendan is a pilot with

Air Vanuatu. Steven is an IT technician and has represented Vanuatu in international cricket tournaments.

11. LEGACY. John was not only a brilliant and prolific scholar but also someone who believed passionately that people of the Pacific should be facilitated in overcoming their colonial linguistic hangovers and taking control of their languages for use in education and in the modern world. Having written in 2002 that there were “plans for other languages to be brought into the [Pacific Vernacular] programme in the near future” alongside Fijian and Hindi (Lynch and Mugler 2002), John would have been disappointed that, not only did USP take a further fifteen years to make any progress toward this goal, but it also eliminated many of the PLU courses from the linguistics program during its 2006 restructure. As observed by Willans (2016:356), it appears that USP may have been “inadvertently [...] squeezing out opportunities to study, learn and use the languages of its own region, since the non-financial benefits of such activities are erased from the discussion.” However, John remained a supportive colleague throughout his emeritus years, and was delighted to see new programs in five Pacific languages being added in 2017–18 and the linguistics program being redeveloped to include much of the Pacific material that had been earlier removed (Willans p.c.).

THE PUBLICATIONS OF JOHN LYNCH

The list of publications does not include book reviews, textbooks compiled for Lynch’s courses at the University of Papua New Guinea and the University of the South Pacific, and the four grammars of Malakula languages by Terry Crowley which John edited after Crowley’s death. John’s publications in *Kivung* and *Language and Linguistics in Melanesia* are freely available online at <https://langlxmelanesia.com/>; those in *Pacific Linguistics* at <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/132248>.

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