

George W. Grace, Canala Dictionary (New Caledonia). Pacific Linguistics, Series C, No.2, Canberra, 1975; x+128.

George W. Grace, Grand Couli Dictionary (New Caledonia). Pacific Linguistics, Series C, No.12, Canberra, 1976; x+113.

These two dictionaries represent a considerable addition to the published data on languages of New Caledonia. Both languages are located in the south-central area of the island: Canala (more properly, though less eugraphically, Xăăci*) is found on the east coast, while Grand Couli is on the west coast. The latter language appears to represent a levelling of the ^ʔŋi and Mea languages, whose speakers were resettled in the same area after an 1878-79 revolt; the language has previously been referred to by Grace as La Foa.

The dictionaries are identical in format. They begin with an Acknowledgements section, which is followed by an Introduction giving the aliases, location, and dialect-composition of the languages. Brief sections on orthography, structure, and the kinds of information found in the dictionary entries follow. The orthography section is essential, since although both languages favour open syllables and have a high proportion of monosyllabic roots, their phoneme inventories are large: Canala (vi) has twenty-six consonants, Grand Couli (vi) has twenty-seven consonants, and both languages have ten oral and eight nasal vowels.

The dictionary proper is divided into two sections. One (Canala 1-73, Grand Couli 1-58) lists morphemes in the languages together with English glosses, cross-references, dialect information, and illustrative examples. Something over 2,000 entries are given for each language, with the Canala list being slightly larger than the Grand Couli. The other section (Canala 77-128, Grand Couli 61-113) is an English Index, which in each case seems to be less mechanically produced -- and therefore far more useful -- than the English indexes of some earlier Pacific Linguistics dictionaries (e.g., Fox 1974).

Grace explicitly states (p.iv. of both works) that historical reconstruction is the ultimate objective of the collection of the lexical data. In this context, the two dictionaries are useful additions to Melanesian lexicography, and will be of considerable assistance both to linguists working on the historical relationships of the languages of Melanesia, as well as to those who seek some general understanding of the nature of New Caledonian languages.

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Reference

Fox, Charles E. 1974. Lau Dictionary. Pacific Linguistics, C25.