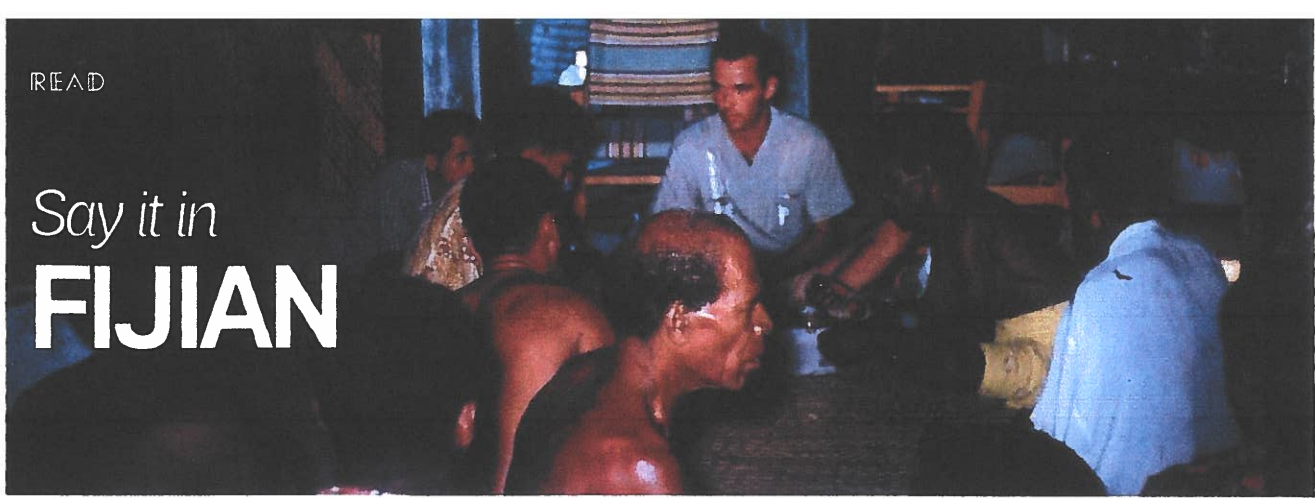


Say it in FIJIAN



Schutz during a data gathering trip in a Fiji.

By SEONA SMILES

When Al Schütz was asked by his Cornell University professor in 1960 if he would be interested in going to Fiji, he said "Sure. Where is it?" As he explains it, this response was probably understandable for a young chap not five years removed from his Indiana, USA family farm, who had not yet seen the Pacific Ocean. He had entered Cornell to do a Master's degree to qualify him to teach secondary school English and Maths (obviously not Geography). The idea that he would be still working on Fijian language (iTaukei) more than half a century later was unlikely, to say the least.

Yet 40 publications dealing with the Fijian language down the line, he recently produced the Fijian Reference Grammar, 454 pages thoroughly revising his 1985 work, *The Fijian Language*. In between the Fijian language work, Schütz has also studied and written on Hawaiian, Tongan, Samoan, Maori and Nguna, a language of Vanuatu.

The Fijian Grammar is based on data, not linguistic theories, and relies heavily on language in context. It is grounded on material written and spoken by Fijians, ranging from advice offered by colleagues with whom he worked on the Fijian Dictionary Project in the 1970s to Fijian language newspapers and text books. It records loanwords and terms from casual conversation, and from the text of a Fijian play, *Lakovi*, by iTaukei culture specialist Apolonia Tamata and popular Fiji dramatist Larry Thomas. It was the play, that exists in both printed and DVD form, that sparked the sociolinguistic study that helped inform the Grammar, along with the publication of the monolingual Fijian dictionary, *Na iVolavosa vakaViti* (2005) that opened the way for an expanding discussion of the Fijian sound system to include more recent additions, some borrowed from unrelated languages.

But while the hefty 454 page Grammar is surprisingly straightforward and contains fascinating snippets of information, it is probably not University of Hawaii Emeritus Professor Albert Schütz's best-known work in Fiji. His name is strongly associated with a small, slim, yellow-covered book of 55 pages titled *Say it in Fijian*, a worthy little work that has helped decades of visitors, expatriates and those of us without the Fijian tongue to negotiate the language basics. Prof Schütz worked with Ratu Rusiate Komaitai of Bau in 1967-68 to develop language materials for the first Fiji Peace Corps training programme, which later provided the text for *Spoken Fijian* (University of Hawaii Press 1971), and thence *Say it in Fijian*.

It initially got a cool reception from Pacific Publications Pty Ltd (then publishers of *Pacific Islands Monthly*) who were of the opinion that they "didn't have much faith in tourists as book buyers". A prediction that was far off the mark.

"Although the accuracy of sales records has suffered with a number of corporate takeovers, the booklet has sold well, proving that tourists can be faithful book buyers," Schütz said. The first print run was in 1972, with revised editions throughout the '70s, and most recently in 2003. This meant that when it was suggested the book should be put

online, the text was already in digital form, along with some never previously seen digitised colour pictures from the 1960s. However the complicated threads that were ultimately woven to produce the e-book meant that the transformation was not automatic.

Apart from Schütz "dragging a 19th-century mind into 21st-century technology", the e-version includes an extensive collection of audio recordings by native Fijian speakers pronouncing the words clearly and accurately – a significant step up from what could be found on line to that point. It is described as being crafted to allow beginning students and visitors to quickly acquire a basic familiarity with many common and practical phrases.

Another slim volume that endeared Prof Schütz to Suva residents and their visitors is the 52-page *Suva*, a history and guide published by Pacific Publications in 1978 and known irreverently by some as 'The street walkers' guide to Suva'. Put together with the assistance of a former Fiji Times editor, the late Sir Len Usher, it covers the founding of the city to Suva in its second century, including many of the still existing landmarks, even though many are marked by change, for the better or worse.

A couple of those still standing include the refurbished Grand Pacific Hotel, which still has its original impressive entry and lobby; the Carnegie founded Suva City Library, still hanging in there, recently repaired after Cyclone Winston and continuing to provide a tremendous service to Suva readers; the Triangle with its battered ivi (Tahitian Chestnut) tree and concrete where there was once a small lagoon and later a bit of a park; and the Fiji Museum in Thurston Gardens, both benefitting from some recent support, although there is still much to be done to keep them the treasures they are for the Fiji people. But the delight of this small book for many is the description of the origins and background to the names of Suva streets. Who knew the swarming intersection of Princes Road, Edinburgh Drive and Ratu Mara Road was named Jubilee Junction in honour of the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 1977?

Steep Waimanu Road was named for the Waimanu River and built to connect with Samabula as part of the project to open a way to the Rewa. In 1881 the *Suva Times* reported: "It is a most excellent thing to make good roads, and roads with sharp turns are not good roads, hence we rejoice to see part of the prison labour usefully employed in making a decently rounded elbow on the Wai Manu road below Mr Huon's residence." As the blurb says, 'the streets of Suva are named for figures as well-known as a Queen or obscure as a Governor's secretary... Many people are all but forgotten, except for traces they have left on the landscape.... They include the Governor who was sued for slander, the Victorian lady writer, the Tongan who nearly became King of Fiji and the chief Justice who was removed from the Colonial Service...'

A happy day in Suva would be well spent strolling the historic streets and trying out a newly acquired smattering of Fijian with the friendly locals. For 'Say it in Fijian' e-version, Google the title and Topos Media. Find Fijian Reference Grammar on Amazon.