

Niatoputapu-Tafahi

Niatoputapu-Tafahi is an extinct Polynesian language or dialect cluster which was spoken on the islands of Niatoputapu and Tafahi in what is now Tonga. Like East Futuna, East Uvea, Niuafu'ou and Niue, they lie in the transition area between the ancestral Polynesian home islands of Tonga and Samoa. However, Niatoputapu and Tafahi became part of the Kingdom of Tonga and their indigenous language or dialect cluster died out in the 18th or 19th century, although traces of it may still be found in the present-day Tongan speech of the islanders.

Most of what is known about Niatoputapu-Tafahi comes from a wordlist with thirty-two entries compiled by the Dutch mariner Iacob Le Maire at Tafahi in 1616.

Linguistic lineage

The linguistic lineage is thought to be Polynesian, Nuclear Polynesian, Samoic, but due to the lack of more reliable data its position within Nuclear Polynesian remains somewhat unclear.

Vowel inventory

The reconstructed vowel inventory consists of five segments as listed below and is similar to most other Polynesian languages in that respect. These vowels have approximately Spanish values and also occur geminated (i.e. as sequences of two identical vowels).

Consonant inventory

The reconstructed consonant inventory consists of ten consonants as listed below and is of average size in Polynesia. By comparison, Hawaiian features eight consonants and Tongan twelve. Note that there is no evidence for the glottal stop in the source available, although it might have been present, and that the four instances of (orthographic) <h> are entirely inexplicable.

Syllable structure

The syllable structure may be summarised as follows: (C)V₁(V₁), i.e.: (an optional consonant, followed by) an obligatory vowel (or, optionally, a geminated vowel).

Full and partial reduplication as well as prefixes and suffixes were used extensively for word formation and the expression of various grammatical and semantic categories. The causative prefix was probably *faka-*.

Niatoputapu-Tafahi alphabet

A a	Ā ā	E e	Ē ē	F f	G g	I i
[a]	[a:]	[ɛ]	[ɛ:]	[f]	[ŋ]	[i]
Ī ī	K k	L l	M m	N n	O o	Ō ō
[i:]	[k]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[ɔ]	[ɔ:]
P p	S s	T t	U u	Ū ū	V v	
[p]	[s]	[t]	[u]	[u:]	[v]	

Language samples

- tasi - one
- lua - two
- tolu - three
- fā - four
- lima - five
- ika - fish
- ufi - yam
- fano - to go (away)
- matau (mātau) - fish hook