

DR. WILLIAM ANDERSON: FORGOTTEN PHILOLOGIST

ALBERT J. SCHÜTZ

The largest sample of Hawaiian words from the report on Captain Cook's third voyage is the list collected by William Anderson, surgeon and unofficial naturalist for the expedition.

Anderson, born in Scotland in 1750, was educated at Edinburgh University. In December 1771, he joined Cook's crew for the second voyage, serving as surgeon's mate. On the third voyage, he was Surgeon aboard the *Resolution* (Beaglehole 1974).

Because Anderson knew that he had tuberculosis, he had considered staying in the Society Islands when Cook's ships prepared to sail north toward the harsh winter of the northwest coast of North America. Had he done so, he would have missed the expedition's historic encounter with Hawai'i, and we would be denied his careful record of the language.

ANDERSON AT WAIMEA

Shortly before landing at Kaua'i, Anderson had been very ill. But on 21 January 1778, he felt well enough to walk with Cook and the artist John Webber about a half mile up the Waimea River to the Ke'a'ali'i *heiau*.



FIGURE 5.1: VILLAGE OF WAIMEA, KAUA'I (Bingham 1847:217)

The records of this short excursion show that each man recorded his impressions of the *heiau* in a different way. Cook, duty-bound to keep a journal in which he wrote a detailed account of his observations, no matter whether

they were important or trivial, described the scene in words, which you can read in Beaglehole 1967 (III[1]):269–71.

Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show how Webber, the artist, recorded his own observations. Note the changes from a sketch to the final version—a watercolor version rendered several years later.

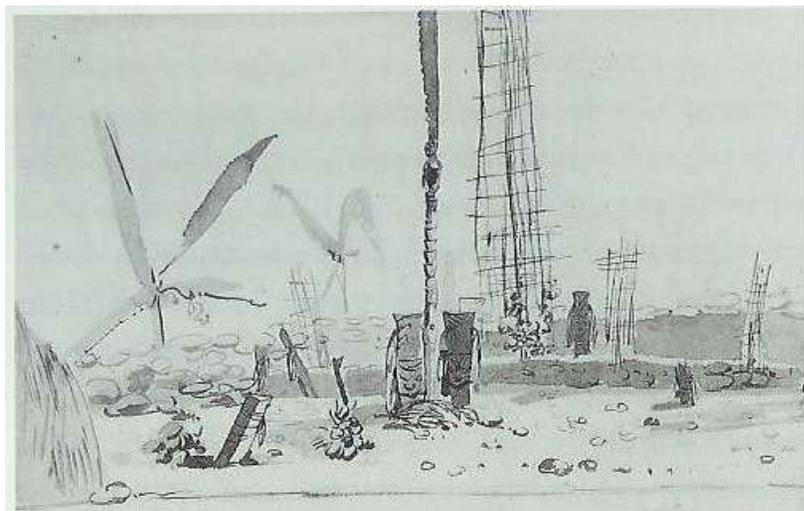


Figure 5.2: THE HEIAU AT WAIMEA¹

While Webber was sketching what he saw, Anderson was focusing on what he heard—the Hawaiian language. His end product—the word list—raises a number of questions.

First, how was he able to elicit and write words from a language he had never heard before? The earlier accounts from Cook’s first and second voyages of the first meetings between the crew and the Polynesian islanders would have us believe that some fairly complex ideas were communicated between the two groups. How this was done, however, remains unclear, for writers described the

¹ Figure 5.2: John Webber, Study of a “Heiau” at Waimea, 1778, ink wash over pencil, 7 5/16 x 12 3/16. Source: David W. Forbes, 1992:18 (original: British Library, London, MS 17277, no. 18v.). Figure 5.3: from *Hawai‘i Looking Back* (Glen Grant; Bennett Hymer; and the Bishop Museum Archives. 2000. Mutual Publishing. P.4. Credited to the Bishop Museum.) Figure 5.4: John Webber. *English* (1752–1793). A “Morai.” in Atooi. ca. 1781–83. pen, ink wash, and watercolor. 8 3/4 x 14 9/16. (22.2 x 37 cm). Dixon Library. State Library of New South Wales. (This copy from Forbes 1992:34.)

process with such vague phrases as “... we endeavour’d to explain as well as we could” or “... made signs to us.”



Figure 5.3: THE HEIAU AT WAIMEA

The meeting between Cook’s crew and the Hawaiians was in sharp contrast to those earlier encounters with Tahitians, for no such rudimentary sign language was necessary. In spite of the great distance between Tahiti and Hawai‘i, the striking similarity between their languages was one of the first things that several journal writers mentioned (see CH 2). And by this time, the members of the crew were familiar enough with Tahitian to make it easy to talk with the Hawaiians—at least about simple matters.

Perhaps because Anderson was interested and trained in the study of language, his ability to speak Tahitian was much more than just basic. David Samwell, his first mate on the *Resolution*, reported that Anderson was better at speaking and understanding Tahitian than anyone else on the expedition. Even a quick look at his word list shows us that he must have used Tahitian to elicit some fairly complicated grammatical concepts that would have been very hard to elicit through gestures.

Those of us concerned with the more technical aspects of Anderson’s task would ask this question: What kind of alphabet did he use? This is a question we can answer by studying not only the Waimea list, but other examples of Anderson’s work as well.

ANDERSON'S ALPHABET

Some critics have called Anderson's method of writing Hawaiian confused and unsystematic. And at first glance, we might agree, for many words are spelled very differently from the way they are today. For example, note the difference between his spelling and the modern spelling of the common words shown in figure 5.4.

ANDERSON'S SPELLING	MODERN SPELLING	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<i>eeneeo</i>	<i>he niu</i>	it's a coconut
<i>haire</i>	<i>hele</i>	go
<i>haieea</i>	<i>he i'a</i>	it's a fish
<i>ou</i>	<i>au</i>	I

FIGURE 5.4: SAMPLES OF ANDERSON'S HAWAIIAN SPELLING

One of the greatest obstacles to understanding these earliest attempts to write Hawaiian is that at the end of the eighteenth century, there was no standard phonetic alphabet with which to write a language that had never been written before. As a result, visitors to Hawai'i wrote words the way they "heard them," which usually meant that they used the conventions of their own language—in this case, English.



Cook monument in Waimea²

However, as anyone who reads and writes English knows, its spelling is only partly regular. To overcome this difficulty, Anderson, because he was familiar with several Polynesian languages (especially Tahitian), had worked out a fairly consistent way to represent their words on paper. What his critics seem to have missed is that he described the system that he used for his Tahitian word list; it is included in the official publication of Cook's second voyage. Its aim was, as Cook

wrote, to "help the reader to a proper pronunciation of the different Words."

These rules reflect an approach that was common then—to begin with spelling and then move to sound. In other words, rather than tell what letter should be used for a particular sound, the rules showed what the letter *a* represented, and so on. (Now, linguists proceed in the opposite direction: we begin with sound, which leads us to spelling.)

For Tahitian, the consonants posed few problems, but it was the way that Anderson treated the vowels that made his transcription guide unusual. When Anderson wrote Tahitian words, he used conventions that applied then, and still apply, to English: certain combinations of letters represent simple sounds. For example, *ai*, *ee*, and *oo* (as in *rain*, *see*, and *food*) stood for what Tahitian now writes as *e*, *i*, and *u*. To show that these combinations were units and belonged to one syllable, he linked the letters with a line across the top. (To avoid using these unusual symbols, the printer marked such vowel sequences by using italics, as in figure 5.4. However, no information was lost in this change.)

If two vowels represented two sounds (and two syllables as well), he wrote a dot over each. (For example, see *ròà* in figure 5.5.) It is likely that Anderson marked these vowels in this way so that an English reader wouldn't pronounce *oa* as one vowel, as in *boat*. Finally, he marked the syllable with the strongest accent in some words or phrases of three or more syllables, as in "e'reema."

ANDERSON'S SPELLING	RESPELLED WORDS	CURRENT SPELLING	GLOSS
<i>ròà</i>	roa	roa	Great, long, distant
<i>e'reema</i>	e'rima	e rima	Five
<i>ry'poeea</i>	rai'poia	raipoia	Fog or mist
<i>e'hoora</i>	e'hura	e huri	To invert, or turn upside down
<i>paroo, roo</i>	paruru	paruru	A partition, division or screen

FIGURE 5.5: ANDERSON'S SPELLING OF TAHITIAN WORDS, COMPARED WITH CURRENT SPELLINGS

Although the part of his journal that contains the Hawaiian list has been lost, those parts that still exist show that only a few months before reaching Hawai'i, Anderson was still using this system, as you can see from the sample of Māori words in figure 5.6. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that Anderson would have used these conventions for Hawaiian as well.

Anderson's one visit to the *heiau* seems to have been his main contact with native speakers. Bad weather limited the number of trips ashore; even Cook

went on land only three times. On 2 February, the expedition left the islands and headed north—toward a climate not only less comfortable than that of Tahiti and Hawai‘i, but also, for someone with tuberculosis, fatal.

Anderson continued to write in his journal until 3 June 1778. He died exactly two months later, only twenty-eight years old. In his own journal, Lieutenant James King wrote the following eulogy, entitled “Portrait of Anderson” (Beaglehole III, Part 2, Appendix III, King’s Journal, pp. 1429–30):

+ Āi	Yes
+ Hāiūre	No
+ Ōha	Fish
Hehāi	To chew or eat
+ Ōwaha	A boat or canoe
Makha'i'eide	Cold
Taōmy	Come here
A'ōdānāi	Presently - by and by - today
+ Tah'ōpo	The head
Ōhōshā	The eyes
+ Ōēnza	The hand
Nōe f Hā'ōrahā	Large
'Whāro	Red
Hakāhā	Cloth
ōū	I
Hāe	You
Tāōa	He
Ōnān	Heath - I say
Hāhāia	Where - Where - at or by
Māhā	God of any kind
Hōmy, or Mōyō	Give me - (us)

FIGURE 5.6: A SAMPLE OF ANDERSON’S TRANSCRIPTION OF MĀORI³

³ From William Anderson’s journal, 1777, Admiralty Records. Note the lines over the vowel combinations, apparently considered diphthongs. Contrast this convention

At 1/2 past 3 PM dyed M^r Anderson our Surgeon: his decline was too rapid since our leaving the Society Islands not to be Observable by all; but he himself long before that time knew that his lungs were affect’d ... he foretold for a year before his death the different stages of his disorder, & knew the time nearly of his Existence ...

King went on to praise Anderson for his unaffected behavior and “equality of temper” in spite of his illness, and regretted that his important work would remain unfinished, there being no proper substitute for a naturalist on board either of the ships. He concluded:

If we except our Commander, he is the greatest publick loss the Voyage could have sustaind. The Island which we saw 3 hours after his death the Captain calld after the deceas’d ... (Beaglehole III, Part 2, Appendix III, King’s Journal, pp. 1429–30).

CORRECTING THE PRINTER’S MISTAKES

When the Cook volumes from the Third Voyage were finally published in 1784, the printer, apparently unaware of the pronunciation guide to the Tahitian vocabulary, and without either Anderson or Cook to explain the importance of the diacritics, deleted them entirely, producing the strange spelling that has so confused everyone who has tried to understand the list.

Knowing this, we can now look at Anderson’s work in a new light, making some educated guesses at where the diacritics might have been. Not that his list is entirely accurate, but a knowledge of his intentions changes many confused-looking forms into words that more closely resemble those in today’s spelling. This analysis gives us a better look at the kind of Hawaiian spoken on Kaua‘i over two hundred years ago.

First, it shows us that *t* and not *k* was spoken on Kaua‘i as well as on Ni‘ihau, where that pronunciation is concentrated today. Moreover, the *t* pronunciation was consistent: at least as Anderson chose to represent it, it did not alternate with *k*.

The same holds for *r*, as opposed to the *l* that is written today. The *r*, by the way, was not like the *r* of American English, but a careful reading of the missionary correspondence in the 1820s and later reveals that it was a tap—rather like the *r* in Spanish (as in *pero* ‘but’, not *perro* ‘dog’), Tahitian, or Māori.

As you saw in CH 3, one of the ways in which Hawaiian has changed over the years is that unlike some other Polynesian languages, it no longer has an *ng*

with the dots over the vowels in the word for ‘you’ (kōe), which constitute separate syllables.

sound [ŋ] (see figure 3.3). However, Anderson wrote three words with *ng* (and in one of these he clearly noted that *ng* alternated with *n*), showing the Hawaiian spoken then (at least on Kaua'i) still had remnants of that pronunciation.

These three features show us that in the late eighteenth century, the pronunciation of Hawaiian on Kaua'i was somewhat closer to that of Proto-Polynesian than it is today.

RETRACING ANDERSON'S FOOTSTEPS

After over two centuries, information about the Waimea *heiau* visited by Cook, Webber, and Anderson seems as shadowy as Anderson's reputation, showing that blocks of stone cannot guarantee immortality.



FIGURE 5.5: HONPA HONGWANJI MISSION. ARE THE STONES IN THE FOREGROUND THE ONLY REMNANTS OF THE EARLIER HEIAU?⁴

First of all, even the exact location has been disputed. Samwell wrote in his journal that it was about a mile up the Waimea River; another report said a half mile. In the 1930s, archaeologists were cautious about making a positive identification, but singled out Ke'a'ali'i *heiau*, said to be behind “the first

⁴ Photo: AJS.

Japanese temple.” More recent studies state that Ke'a'ali'i was definitely the site.

It is difficult to stretch the imagination far enough to step into a Webber engraving and relive Anderson's walk up the Waimea River. Even the river itself has changed: frequent flooding made it necessary to build protective dikes along the banks near the estuary. Along Ala Wai Rd. on the way to the *heiau*, the scattered thatched houses sketched by Webber have been replaced by modern ones spanning several periods and styles. An occasional abandoned store hints at a slightly commercial past, contrasting with the current residential nature of the outskirts of Waimea.

Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i occupies a level grassy area, perhaps 80 x 100 ft., closed in by buildings on two sides. On the *ma uka* side of the main area are a Japanese garden and a stone that commemorates the dedication of the new temple in October 1970.

This new temple is said to sit directly on the *heiau* site; apparently it was built slightly behind the old one. A few large stones lie near the entrance, but otherwise, no trace of the original foundations or walls remains. In 1907, Thomas Thrum wrote that the *heiau* was destroyed “years ago” and the stones used for fences.

Houses and trees now block the view of the river, but the high bank on the opposite side is still visible. The trees also nearly obscure the outline of the hills that Webber sketched, so that it is difficult to match them with the somewhat softened profiles of his drawings (compare figures 5.1 and 5.5).

An overlay of other cultures seem to pervade the whole area.. The temple itself reflects the drastic change in population from late nineteenth-century immigration. To the right of the entrance is a more contemporary symbol of a different culture: the grounds of Waimea Headstart—a small playground with, as its focal point, a bright green playhouse decorated with a yellow lion.⁵ Even the vegetation is dominated by imports: plumeria, *Nandina domestica*, hibiscus, and ornamental pines and other conifers greatly outnumber the native plants.

Nor does closing the eyes help the imagination: the afternoon quiet is punctuated by the crowing of a nearby rooster and the sound of an occasional car or moped roaring by. The present obliterates the past, intruding through all the senses.

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By the time there was much written or printed in Hawaiian, certain features of the language had been somewhat altered. For example, the standardized writing system eventually contributed to reducing much (but not all) of the

⁵ This may have changed since the 1990s.

variation that existed before, and many aspects of the indigenous culture (along with their words) were replaced by alien ones.

Ideally, we should like to stock up on batteries and disks, grab our recording devices, step into a Wellsian time machine, and hear and record the language for ourselves. But because that is possible only in the realm of science fiction, we have to make do with what the earliest observers wrote. The important thing—and this is no easy matter—is to try to see through their eyes and hear through their ears. Each piece of evidence is important in some way; even the things that were misheard or misinterpreted can tell us something.

This is why Anderson's pioneering work on Hawaiian is so important. But he has all but faded from public knowledge. No gravestone marks his resting place, for he was buried at sea. Even "Anderson Island"—the gesture made by Cook just after Anderson's death—was a short-lived memorial, having already been discovered and named by Vitus Jonassen Bering fifty years earlier. Only the botanical genus *Andersonia* bears his name. William Anderson's reputation seems as impermanent as his final resting place, perhaps because the quality of his scholarship was distorted by a printer's seemingly innocent—but unfortunate—decision to print pages uncluttered by extra symbols.

VERBATIM

The following passages are excerpts from Cook's account of the trek up the Waimea. The source is Beaglehole III(1): 269–72, and the spelling is as in the original.

... As soon as every thing was settled to my satisfaction, I left the command to M^r Williamson who was with me and took a walk up the Vally, accompanied by D^r Anderson and M^r Webber; conducted by one of the Natives and attended by a tolerable train. Our guide proclaimed our approach and every one whom we met fell on their faces and remained in that position till we had passed. This, as I afterwards understood, is done to their great chiefs. Our road lay in among the Plantations, which were chiefly of Tara, and sunk a little below the common level so as to contain the water necessary to nourish the roots. As we ranged down the coast from the East in the Ships, we observed at every Village one or more elevated objects, like Pyramids and we had seen one in this vally that we were desirous of going to see. Our guide understood us, but as this was on the other side of the river, he conducted us to one on the same side we were upon; it proved to be a Morai which in many respects was like those of Otaheite ...

Cook continued, giving a detailed description of the *heiau*, images contained therein, and some customs connected with the site. He did not say

how long the party stayed, but it was time enough for Webber to make his drawing and Anderson to collect his word list.

After having seen every thing that was to be seen about this Morai and M^r Webber had taken a drawing of it, we returned to the beach by a different rout to the one we came. Besides the Tara plantations before mentioned we met with some plantations of plantain, Sugar cane and the Chinese paper Mulberry tree or cloth plant, as it is more generally called by us, there were also a few low cocoanut trees, but we saw but one bread fruit tree and but very few of any other sort.

Because we are reading this account from a language-centered point of view, it is unfortunate that Cook mentioned Webber's activity, but not Anderson's. Are artists always more interesting than linguists?

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