

## **Deriving a description of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Tahitian diphthong through an analysis of contemporary poetic texts**

Poetry generally incorporates many patterns of linguistic elements, such as the repetition of like phonemes and syntactic pause in the case of end-rhyme. Other elements that could be grouped into poetic patterns might include a word's syllable count, stress characteristics, part-of-speech, etc. The choice of elements thus poetically employed can be expected to differ from language to language, or between the poetic conventions of a single language.

When incorporating elements into a pattern, a poet provides evidence of native speaker intuition. Analysis of such patterns, then, could be expected to assist in the pursuit of Boas's goal for a native speaker to be able to provide the linguistic description of his or her language (Boas 1911).

This study applies a poetic pattern analysis to texts of early 19<sup>th</sup> century Tahitian oral tradition. The various linguistic reference works that exist for Tahitian demonstrate great inconsistency in their definition of the diphthong, and by extension the Tahitian syllable. However, it is possible that phonological changes have occurred since Contact that would account for inconsistency. Syllable-count happens to be one of the linguistic elements used poetically in these oral texts. The information gleaned from the analysis is presented as a kind of pseudo-native-speaker description of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century diphthong.

### Reference:

Boas, Franz. 1911. *Handbook of American Indian Languages, Part I*. Washington D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology.