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What Future for Kanak Languages? Size and Geographic Distribution

13

Isabelle Leblic

Abstract

New Caledonia has 28 Kanak languages in addition to the languages brought by colonial immigration. There is remarkable linguistic diversity, and the recognition of Kanak languages has always been central to independence claims. Since the mid-2000s, about ten of them have been taught from primary school to university (about ten of them are taught as options in primary schools and only four in universities), and it is important to ask what future Kanak languages have among today's younger generations. The heavy impact of the colonial system, and the Nouméa Accord of 1998, means questions of language are still relevant today. Kanak languages and cultures are at the centre of the decolonisation process.

Keywords

Kanak languages · Linguistic diversity · Geographic spread · Decolonisation · Teaching

13.1 Introduction

80.3% of Kanak people aged 14 and older indicate that they fluently speak one or several Kanak languages, 12.6% that they do not speak but understand at least one language, and 7.1% that they neither speak nor understand a Kanak language. (Rivoilan 2020, p. 5)

After nearly 170 years of colonisation and domination of Kanak languages, they still exist. What are the reasons for this? And how will they continue to find their place in Kanaky-New Caledonia of tomorrow? This overview of Kanak languages should allow us to answer these questions.

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13.2 Recognition of Kanak Languages and Pro-independence Demands

The above excerpt from the first available analysis of the latest general population census, in 2019, shows that Kanak languages are still very much alive (92.9% of all Kanak people over the age of 14 have knowledge of at least one language), even though these claims are purely declarative. This shows that Kanak people wish to keep their languages alive and consider them a very strong symbol of their identity, especially as the political debates over self-determination continue. There are indications that the vernacular languages on the whole are vibrant, with 28 languages spoken by over 75,000 people, out of a total of 271,407 inhabitants (2019 Census). In fact, Kanak languages have always been at the heart of pro-independence activism, notably during the last quarter of the twentieth century, and more particularly in the 1980s, during the revolutionary period known as the “*Événements*” [Events]—which began with the boycott of local elections and the Lemoine status on 18 November 1984. Notably, this led to the boycott of so-called colonial schools and a movement in favor of Local Kanak Schools (EPK, *Écoles Populaires Kanak*) between February 1985 and 1988, the first real attempt to provide instruction in Kanak languages.

No language policy favourable to the Kanak was developed before the colonial order was challenged in modern times. (Rivierre 1985, p. 1691)

If we take up in a few lines the colonial history in connection with Kanak languages, the prohibition of their use at school goes back to the decree of Governor Guillain in 1853. This prefigured “the constant attitude of the authorities: the refusal to grant rights to local languages, their banishment from teaching and public life” (Rivierre 1985, p. 1693). As a result, as early as 1921, a decree forbade all use of indigenous languages, even in school playgrounds. According to Rivierre (1985), these repeated bans (the last one in 1923) had little real effect on the daily life of Kanak

people, who nevertheless continued to speak their languages and pass them on to their children. If Kanak children have had access to the French language, it was for a long time only through missionary action, Catholic or Protestant, and this, only after the first world war (more than 70 years after colonisation).

In this context the use of vernacular languages as the first language of instruction for young children was one of the Kanak demands within the pro-independence movement FI (*Front indépendantiste*) and then by FLNKS (*Front de libération nationale kanak socialiste*) to obtain recognition of their cultural legitimacy and their right to independence. Experiments in Local Kanak Schools (EPK) beginning in February 1985 made use of the vernacular languages for teaching the “traditional” and “school” knowledge that all Kanak children should know (see Chap. 14 by Wadrawane in this book). In contrast to so-called “colonial school,” the children learned through participation rather than observation. Nevertheless, Nechero et al. (2015, p. 82) note: “The movement quickly started losing steam: out of the 40 EPK that were set up after school started in 1985, only nine were left 3 years later, following the signing of the Matignon-Oudinot Accords. Only two schools remained in the 1990s.”

This demand for local language instruction nonetheless served to ensure that Kanak languages and cultures were factored into the political agreements that followed (the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988, and then the Nouméa Accord in 1998) and established their importance in the school curricula in New Caledonia (Salaün 2017). We will return to this issue after presenting the Kanak languages.

13.3 Linguistic Diversity and a Remarkable Geographic Spread

The numbers of languages spoken in New Caledonia over time are difficult to quantify. According to Moyses-Faurie et al. (2012, p. 119; see also Baudchon 1997), there are currently upward of 30. In addition to the Kanak languages, there are those of people who migrated as part of colonization or settlement (Wallisian, Futunian, Tahitian, Indonesian, Javanese, Vietnamese...). There is also Tayo, a Creole language spoken in the region of La Conception Saint-Louis, in Greater Nouméa (including the municipalities of Nouméa, Mont-Dore, Dumbéa, and Païta), developed by Kanak populations from various regions attending the Marist Roman Catholic mission station, mostly from the main island Grande Terre. French became the only official language upon colonisation, but the diversity of Kanak languages has endured. These languages are as much a marker of Kanak identity,

reaffirmed to a greater or lesser extent depending on the period in colonial history, as they are a means of communication (see also Vernaudon 2013). Across the New Caledonian archipelago, which includes the main inhabited islands of Grande Terre (450 km long and 50–70 km wide), the Loyalty Islands (Lifou, Maré, Ouvéa and Tiga), the Bélep Islands, Isle of Pines and Ouen Island, about 30 languages were noted at the beginning of colonisation (Leenhardt 1946a, p. XIV).¹ According to Ihage (2014), there are currently 40 languages and dialects spoken in New Caledonia. Among them, 28 languages are divided into three main groups. Twenty-four languages on Grande Terre and four in the Loyalty Islands thus still exist after more than a century and a half of French presence (see also Rivierre 2003). The number of speakers remains high: 75,853 speakers in 2019² as compared to 70,428 in 2009, with between 36,309 and 40,115 speakers, respectively, within their own linguistic area, that is, nearly half (47.87%) or three fifths (56.96%). Therefore, the proportion of speakers outside the linguistic area of the languages has increased (see Tables 13.5 and 13.6 and Fig. 13.1).

According to Rivierre (1985, p. 1689), “there are no natural borders between languages and the linguistic communities are closely linked through matrimonial and political alliances. Their social and geographic proximity maintains multilingualism which is more or less pronounced depending on the region.” Rivierre (2003, p. 347) specifies: “This linguistic fragmentation can be explained both by the fact that settlement took place over 3000 years ago, and by the structure of traditional Kanak society, broken down into multiple ‘chiefdoms’ and political configurations striving to be distinct.”

Rivierre (2003) establishes a finely grained geographic distribution of the Grande Terre Kanak languages. This served to inform our ISEE map of Kanak languages based on the 2014 general population census data (see Fig. 13.1), the details of which are provided in Table 13.1.

Of remarkable diversity and complexity as compared to other Oceanic languages, these 28 Kanak languages belong to the Austronesian language family (Oceanian subgroup of the eastern Malayo-Polynesian branch). They have grammars

¹Based on inquiries carried out before the 1930s, Leenhardt (1946b, p. X-XIV) listed 36 languages, although he notes that forty languages or dialects are currently spoken in the New Caledonian archipelago by 29,000 indigenous people. Four have been set by translating the bible (De’u on Lifou 1890, Iai on Ouvéa 1901, Nengone on Mare, 103, Ajié on Houaïlou [...] 1923 [...] 1939). I have respected the author’s spelling.

²For 2019, a number of people who declared speaking a language did not say which one; thus, in Table 13.6 below, there are only 66,122 speakers, of which 36,309 are located in their own linguistic area and 29,813 outside.

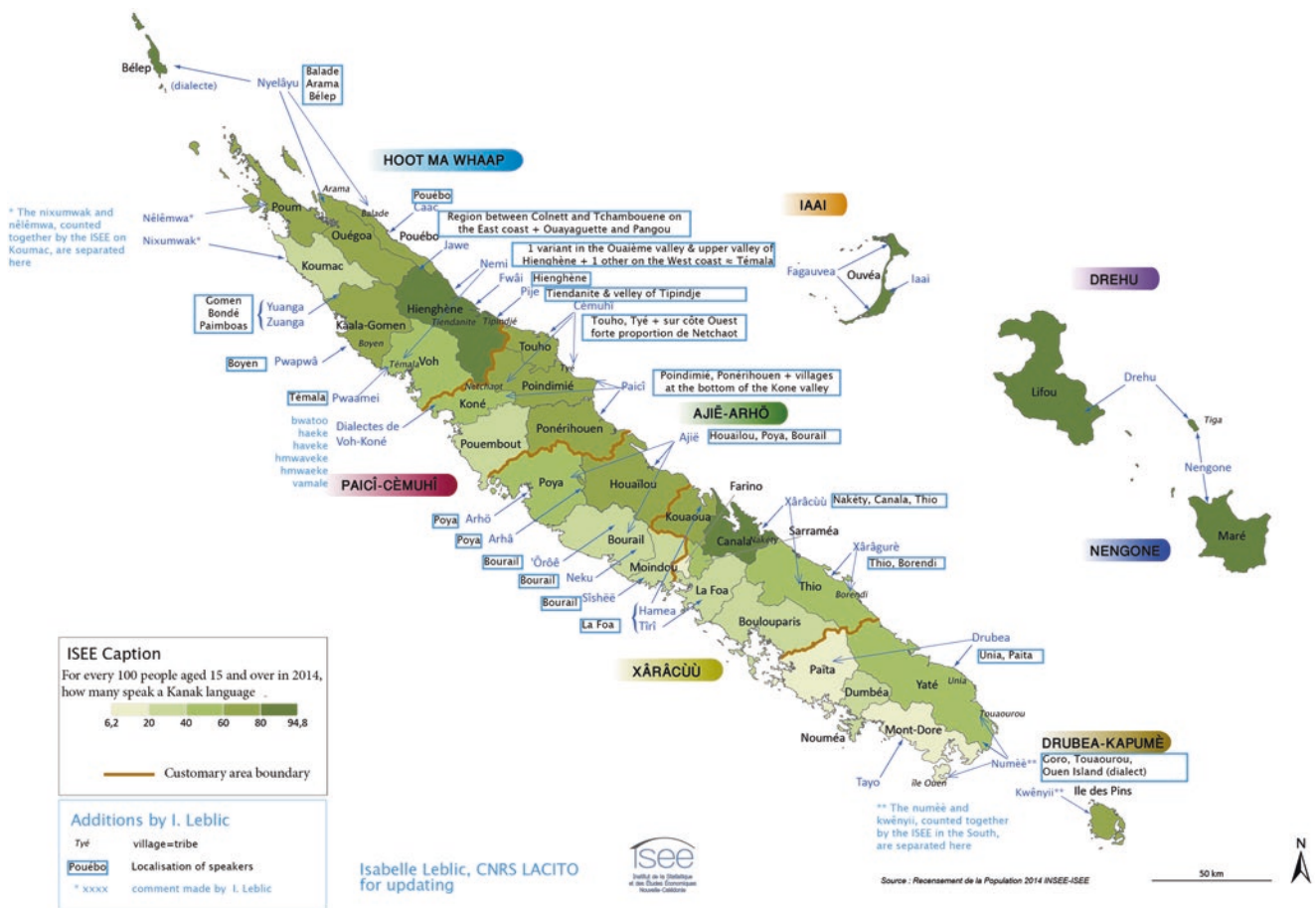


Fig. 13.1 Distribution of the Kanak languages by customary area, municipality and number of speakers. (Based on the ISEE 2014 Census “Les langues kanak,” completed by Leblic based on data on the geographical distribution of languages established by Rivierre 2003)

that are almost as differentiated as their phonological systems.

All [Kanak languages] belong to the “New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands” sub-group, directly stemming from distant Proto-Oceanic, with the exception of Fagauvea which belongs to the “Nuclear Polynesian” sub-group, a language which was introduced to Ouvéa a few centuries ago following east-west Polynesian migrations from various islands, most probably Wallis, Samoa, Futuna, and Tonga according to oral traditions and the comparative study of the Polynesian languages. (Moysse-Faurie et al. 2012, pl. 26, 120)

Generally speaking, Kanak people were multilingual. Many of them could understand their close neighbours’ languages, and alliances beyond their linguistic area made it easier for the children of mixed parentage to speak the languages of both parents and even those of the grandparents if different. Today, the situation is no longer so clear-cut, French having become for many the priority language of communication. The data available from the New Caledonian census nonetheless attest the ongoing importance of local languages.

13.4 Comparative Analysis of Data Contained in the General Population Census (from 1996 to 2019)

The 1996 general population census totalled 86,788 Kanak people (44.1%) and 67,151 Europeans (34.1%), out of a total population of 196,836. According to this census, New Caledonia had a total of 53,566 speakers of vernacular languages, with slightly more women than men and roughly half belonging to the 15–34 age group. The languages with the highest number of speakers were Drehu (a Lifou language) with 11,338 speakers, Nengone (a Maré language) with 6,377 speakers and Paicî (a central Grande Terre language) with 5,498 speakers.

The data in Table 13.2 show constant growth in the number of speakers, probably proportionate to demographic growth,³ but with two significant increases, 14.5% between 1996 and 2004 then 10.9% between 2014 and 2019. These

³Unfortunately, I do not have information on speaker population changes by age group.

Table 13.1 Geographic language distribution (see Rivierre 2003)

| Areas ^a | Languages | Geographic distribution |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Hoot ma Waap | Nyelâyü | Balade, Arama, Bélep Islands (dialect) |
| | Nixumwak | Koumac |
| | Nêlêmwa | Poum |
| | Caac | Pouébo |
| | Yuanga | Gome, Bondé, Paimboas |
| | Jawe | East coast: region between Colnett and Tchambouene; inland: Ouayagette, Pangou |
| | Nemi | Variant in the Ouaième valley and the upper Hienghène valley |
| | Fwâi | Hienghène |
| | Pijé | Tiendanite and Tipindjé valley |
| | Pwaamei | Témala |
| | Pwapwâ | Boyen |
| Paici-Camuki | Voh-Koné: Bwato, Haeke, Haveke, Hmwaveke, Hmwaeke, Vamale (Waamwang) dialects | Voh-Koné region Vamale, a variant of Hmwaveke, is spoken in Téganpaik and Tiouandé, on the East coast dialects |
| | Paicî | Ponérihou, Poindimié, villages in the Koné region |
| Ajie-Aro | Cèmuhi | Touho, Tyé and on the West coast a high proportion of Netchaot village |
| | Ajië | Houilou region, Poya, Bourail |
| Xaracuu | Arhâ | Poya region |
| | Arhö | Poya region |
| | ‘Ôrôê | Bourail region |
| | Neku (Sîshëë) | Bourail region |
| | Xârâcùù | Nakéty, Canala, Thio |
| | Tîrî | La Foa region |
| Djubea-Kapone | Xârâgurè | Thio, Borendi |
| | Drubéa | Ounia, Paita |
| | Numèè | Goro, Touaourou, Ouen Island (dialect) |
| Nengone | Kwényii | Isle of Pines |
| | Nengone | Maré |
| Drehu | Drehu | Lifou |
| Iaai | Iaai | Central region of Ouvéa |
| | Fagauvea | North and south of Ouvéa |

^ain the official spelling of New Caledonia)

languages continue to be spoken, with variations depending on the language and the year.

Today, according to the 2019 census, the number of speakers varies from a few (ten for Sîchëë (Sishë), a language spoken in the centre of Grande Terre) to several thousand (Drehu with 15,875 speakers is still the most widely spoken Kanak language).

Now that a large number of Kanak people live in Greater Nouméa (see Chap. 11 by Pantz in this book), approximately

one out of three speakers (1996–2009) to approximately two out of five (2014–2019) live in the capital or its suburbs, outside their original linguistic area (see Table 13.3). Indeed, Greater Nouméa is where most jobs are found. Regular trips back to the community for school vacations have prevented language loss in favour of French among children. Some Kanak children don’t speak their languages properly, but I have the impression that once they are adults their mastery is sufficient to ensure the future of these vernacular languages. And the fact that for the past 20 years, many Kanak languages have been introduced in school teaching in Greater Nouméa, although for a very few hours (wholesale 1/2 hour per week), means that many children could be introduced to Kanak languages and culture. Is this enough to make them fluent in the mother tongues? Nothing is less certain.

Jacqueline de la Fontinelle (2014, p. 8) notes: “The disinterest of a generation signals the disappearance of a language. Can the disappearance announced for the Sishë language be further postponed?”

This is indeed a question that arises regularly with announcements about the extinction of Kanak languages, but the evidence suggests that it is premature. I have witnessed this on the Isle of Pines and around Goro upon returning 20 years after my first fieldwork, and also in Ponérihouen. It is true, however, that some languages are officially endangered (see the documentation of endangered languages at www.sorosoro.org).

Some 84.6% of Kanak between the ages of 14 and 29 declared, in the 1996 Census, continuing to speak a vernacular language, as compared to 94.9% for those over the age of 30. Certainly, in community areas—there are 341 Kanak communities where 28.7% of the population resides—the language spoken daily at home is usually the vernacular language of the region, even if one of the parents if one comes from a different linguistic area. Even though French is used at school, children nonetheless continue to speak their language outside school. Similarly, in daily life, as I observed in Ponérihouen, Kanak people mainly speak to each other in their local tongue. It is only on occasions bringing together people from different linguistic areas that French is used as a lingua franca.

There were 18,528 Kanak language speakers in 2019 in Nouméa, rising to 33,505 if one takes into account the metropolitan area of (Greater Nouméa). This equates to 44.2% of all the territory’s speakers declared in the 2019 general population census. By comparison, back in 2009, Greater Nouméa was already home to 90% of Kanak language speakers living outside their linguistic area. The Loyalty Islands languages (Drehu, Nengone, Iaai, and Fagauvea by number of speakers) are a majority with 12,432 speakers in Greater Nouméa. The high number of speakers of Kanak languages outside their linguistic area is noteworthy, and in the 2019 Census, they still amounted

Table 13.2 Changes in the number of speakers aged 14 and older per vernacular language

| | | 1996 | 2004 | 2009 | 2014 | 2019 |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Number of speakers per language spoken ^a | | | | | |
| Extreme Northern group | Caac | 800 | 1,005 | 1,165 | 1,072 | 847 |
| | Nyelâyu | 1,522 | 1,694 | 1,956 | 2,005 | 1,871 |
| | Nêlêmwa-Nixumwak | 847 | 739 | 1,090 | 946 | 798 |
| | Yuanga | 1,992 | 2,124 | 2,401 | 2,504 | 1,975 |
| Northern group | Jawe | 729 | 635 | 990 | 892 | 746 |
| | Nemi | 768 | 911 | 908 | 845 | 825 |
| | Pwapwâ | 16 | 84 | 39 | 79 | 27 |
| | Fwâi | 1,131 | 1,550 | 1,859 | 1,690 | 1,561 |
| | Pwaamei | 219 | 210 | 292 | 299 | 223 |
| | Pijé | 161 | 184 | 183 | 160 | 114 |
| | Voh-Koné dialects | 993 | 980 | 1,212 | 1,081 | 952 |
| | | | | | | |
| Central group | Cèmuhi | 2,051 | 2,139 | 2,602 | 2,400 | 2,234 |
| | Paicî | 5,498 | 6,056 | 7,252 | 6,866 | 6,530 |
| Southern group | Ajië | 4,044 | 5,051 | 5,358 | 5,019 | 4,449 |
| | Arhâ | 35 | 59 | 166 | 135 | 19 |
| | Arhö | 62 | 264 | 349 | 291 | 186 |
| | ‘Ôrôê | 587 | 355 | 490 | 429 | 373 |
| | Neku | 221 | 320 | 125 | 86 | 115 |
| | Tîrî | 558 | 481 | 619 | 472 | 393 |
| | Sichëë | 4 | 3 | 19 | 20 | 10 |
| | Xârâcùù | 3,784 | 4,816 | 5,730 | 5,287 | 5,645 |
| | Xârâgurè | 566 | 632 | 758 | 751 | 589 |
| Extreme Southern group | Drubéa | 946 | 1,154 | 1,211 | 1,268 | 1,022 |
| | Extreme Southern dialects | 1,814 | 1,582 | 2,184 | 1,943 | 1,618 |
| | Tayo | 609 | 376 | 904 | 1,033 | 1,052 |
| Loyalty Islands group | Nengone | 6377 | 7,958 | 8,721 | 8,940 | 9,356 |
| | Drehu | 11,338 | 13,249 | 15,586 | 15,949 | 15,875 |
| | Iaai | 1,562 | 2,464 | 4,181 | 3,821 | 3,714 |
| | Faga uvea | 1,107 | 1,614 | 2,219 | 2,062 | 2,066 |
| Total number of distinct speakers | | 53,566 | 62,648 | 65,510 | 67,589 | 75,853 |
| Changes in number | | | 9,082 | 2,862 | 2,079 | 8,264 |
| Changes in % | | | 14.50 | 4.37 | 3.08 | 10.89 |

Source: New Caledonia population census, INSEE-ISEE, data updated on 28 September 2021

^aA single person may declare speaking one or several languages. Furthermore, some people declared speaking a Kanak language without specifying which one, which is why the total per language does not necessarily correspond to the total number of distinct speakers

to 88.1% in Greater Nouméa. And, as in 2009, speakers of Loyalty Islands languages are more numerous in Greater Nouméa than on their islands of origin: 59.1% for Drehu, 56.2% for Iaai, 55.6% for Fagauvea, and 52.9% for Nengone. But this is not the case for Grande Terre languages.

Analysis of data provided by successive censuses shows that the proportion of 15 years and older peoples who declare speaking or understanding a Kanak language is increasing (Table 13.3). The last census (2019) establishes that 97.7% of Kanak people from the Loyalty Islands (95.5% of men and 95.9% of women) speak or understand a Kanak language. The figures are 76.2% in North Province (76.6% of men and 75.9% of women) and 31.7% in South Province (30.9% of men and 32.6% of women). In total, 92,794 people declare that they speak or understand a

Kanak language, that is, 44% of inhabitants aged 15 and older. The percentage was 38.8% in 2014, 41.3% in 2009 and in 2004, and 37.9% in 1996. Should this revival of vernacular languages of people aged 15 and over be linked to political demands for independence? This is a question that must be asked in light of the recent history of Kanak claims and the results of the 2018 and 2020 referendums (see Leblie 2022).

13.5 The Use of Kanak Languages in Teaching

Before specifying the use of Kanak languages in the school system (Anonymous 1989), we should recall that French remains the main language of instruction in schools.

Table 13.3 Changes in the number of speakers of a vernacular language aged 15 and older per municipality

| | Municipalities | 1996 | 2004 ^a | 2009 | 2014 | 2019 |
|---|-------------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| North Province | Bélep | 586 | 612 | 607 | 582 | 665 |
| | Canala | 1,888 | 2,267 | 2,240 | 2,484 | 2,555 |
| | Hienghène | 1394 | 1710 | 1597 | 1596 | 1724 |
| | Houaïlou | 2,320 | 2,708 | 2,402 | 2,313 | 2,276 |
| | Kaala-Gomen | 885 | 922 | 904 | 935 | 824 |
| | Koné | 1,512 | 1,713 | 1,785 | 2,197 | 2,533 |
| | Kouaoua | 708 | 857 | 779 | 767 | 776 |
| | Koumac | 566 | 539 | 802 | 832 | 820 |
| | Ouégoa | 982 | 996 | 1,035 | 1,249 | 1,078 |
| | North Poya ^b | 951 | 936 | 1093 | 1135 | 1093 |
| | Touho | 1,201 | 1,224 | 1,327 | 1,127 | 1,274 |
| Voh | 858 | 1063 | 1042 | 1154 | 1138 | |
| Total North Province | | 15,847 | 15,547 | 17,622 | 18,385 | 18,775 |
| Loyalty Islands Prov. | Lifou | 5,970 | 6,291 | 5,559 | 6,194 | 6306 |
| | Maré | 4,042 | 4,703 | 3,484 | 3,195 | 4,023 |
| | Ouvéa | 2,366 | 3,038 | 2,304 | 2,172 | 2,363 |
| Total Loyalty Islands Province | | 12,378 | 14,032 | 11,347 | 11,561 | 12,692 |
| South Province | Bouloupari | 391 | 522 | 491 | 539 | 584 |
| | Bourail | 988 | 1,020 | 1,094 | 933 | 1,075 |
| | Dumbéa ^c | 1,686 | 2,777 | 3,859 | 5,538 | 7,324 |
| | Farino | 18 | 36 | 34 | 29 | 58 |
| | Isle of Pines | 992 | 1,053 | 1,207 | 1,074 | 1,200 |
| | La Foa | 492 | 455 | 673 | 570 | 607 |
| | Moindou | 200 | 178 | 220 | 190 | 187 |
| | Mont-Dore ^c | 2,155 | 2,465 | 3,083 | 3,590 | 4,549 |
| | Nouméa ^c | 11,577 | 14,206 | 16,523 | 16,039 | 18,528 |
| | Païta ^c | 818 | 1,328 | 2,290 | 2,208 | 3,104 |
| | Poindimié | 2,285 | 2,615 | 2,611 | 2,741 | 2,857 |
| | Ponérihouen | 1,486 | 1,684 | 1,426 | 1,437 | 1,431 |
| | Pouébo | 1,394 | 1,518 | 1,551 | 1472 | 1,479 |
| | Pouembout | 239 | 282 | 448 | 514 | 500 |
| | Poum | 654 | 626 | 749 | 715 | 761 |
| | South Poya ^b | 951 | 936 | 1,093 | 1,135 | 1,093 |
| | Sarraméa | 252 | 339 | 268 | 229 | 273 |
| Thio | 1,078 | 1,207 | 1,202 | 1,102 | 1,147 | |
| Yaté | 632 | 758 | 821 | 737 | 741 | |
| Total South Province | | 28,288 | 34,005 | 39,643 | 40,792 | 47,498 |
| Total Greater Nouméa (***) | | 16,236 | 20,776 | 25,755 | 27,375 | 33,505 |
| Relative number of speakers in Greater Nouméa (°) | | 30.3% | 33.2% | 39.3% | 40.5% | 44.2% |
| New Caledonia | | 53,566 | 62,648 | 65,510 | 67,589 | 75,853 |

Source: New Caledonia population census, INSEE-ISEE, data updated on 29 October 2020

^aPopulation 14 and older (see Table 13.4 for an example of breakdown by age in 2019)

^bTotal for Poya municipality

^cFor municipalities part of Greater Nouméa

Table 13.4 Breakdown by age of Kanak population (2019)

| Community | Under 10 | 10–19 | 20–29 | 30–39 | 40–49 | 50–59 | 60–69 | 70–79 | 80 and above |
|-------------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Kanak total | 17,488 | 18,763 | 18,520 | 17,402 | 15,429 | 11,855 | 7,475 | 3,671 | 1,253 |

Source: 2019 Census



Figs. 13.2 Teaching of Kanak languages and cultures in public secondary schools as of 14 March 2018 (the 2022 map is currently available on the following website, but is less clear). (Source: <https://www.ac-noumea.nc/spip.php?article3161>)

Up to 1984, the Kanak languages were “officially excluded from the educational system” (Moyses-Faurie et al. 2012, p. 122). Following the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988 and the previous EPK experiments, the Deixonne law⁴ entered into force in New Caledonia (decrees of 20 October 1992) at the end of the 1990s (May to August 1998). This sanctioned some teaching in local languages—and some are now even taught in high school, for example, Drehu, Nengone, Ajië, and Paicî. Article 1.3.4 of the Nouméa Accord signed on 5 May 1998, stipulates that Kanak culture must be valued, and Deliberation No. 106 of 15 January 2016, on the future of the Caledonian school system specifies in Article 10.1 that “teaching of the fundamental elements of Kanak culture must be compulsory for each student” and thus enjoins the school system to include them in the curriculum (see also Chap. 14 by

Wadrawane in this book).⁵ Moreover, Article 10.2 requests New Caledonian schools, enriched by the country’s cultures, to train students at all levels in the values and practices of citizenship in order to promote the development of living together in the spirit of the Nouméa Accord.⁶ In fact, the structuring of the teaching of Kanak languages and culture (LCK) has aimed to establish compulsory teaching of the fundamentals of Kanak culture as well as an offer of teaching Kanak languages in LV2. To do this, resources and teaching tools for the LCK were produced to create a documentary fund. The last point is the improvement of LCK teacher training with the implementation of the authorization and certification processes (2018).⁷

⁴Law 51-46 on teaching regional languages and dialects (Official Gazette, 13 January 1951).

⁵<https://denc.gouv.nc/ressources-pedagogiques/ecole-maternelle-domaines-dactivites/langues-et-culture-kanak-ecole>.

⁶<https://denc.gouv.nc/sites/default/files/documents/deliberationpenc.pdf>.

⁷https://denc.gouv.nc/sites/default/files/documents/charte_dapplication-papage-2.pdf.



Figs. 13.3 Teaching of Kanak languages and cultures in private secondary schools as of 14 March 2018 (the 2022 map is currently available on the following website, but is less clear). (Source: <https://www.ac-noumea.nc/spip.php?article3161>)

Since 1992, four languages can be chosen as electives for the Baccalaureate (the French high school diploma): Drehu, Nengone, Ajië and Paicî. In 1997, six vernacular languages were taught in middle school and high school: Iaaï and Xârâcùù, and then, from 2013, Djubéa (23 in public middle school in 2013) and Fwâi (in 2013 and 2014 at the Hienghène middle school), and Yuanga with a single pupil in private middle school in 2012 at the Baganda middle school in Kaala Gomen. Therefore, beyond the six main vernacular languages, the others are only taught sporadically and are localized within their geographic area. Depending on the year, the total number of pupils receiving instruction in vernacular languages varies from 3014 in 2005 to 1879 in private establishments, that is, two thirds, with 655 in high school and 2359 in middle school to 778 in 2011, in public schools only (data from private schools being unavailable), and rising to 3365 in 2005. Out of these, 2931 were in middle school and 434 in high school, and in total, 1537 pupils or almost half were in private establishments.

The New Caledonia territorial government acquired jurisdiction over teaching in private primary schools and in public and private secondary schools on 1 January 2012.

The fact that at least four Kanak languages are taught in New Caledonia, from primary school to university, supports the view that the loss of indigenous languages is premature. Moyses-Faurie et al. (2012, p. 122) highlight: “The public primary school curricula in New Caledonia [since 2000], voted in 2005, provides the teaching of Kanak languages and cultures to students whose parents have expressed the wish, in the amount of 7 hours weekly. [...] In 2009, about 1900 pre-elementary public school pupils (out of 9200 pupils at this grade) received instruction in a dozen of Kanak languages.” But there is a wide variation. According to data collected for the New Caledonia Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (ISEE), sourced by the Vice-Rectorate in 2005 and between 2010 and 2015, ten Kanak languages were taught

over the period. These were Ajië, Drehu, Iaaï, Nêlêmwa (in 2005 and 2010 with slightly over 130 pupils at the Boaouva Kaleba private middle school in Poum), Nengone, Paicî, Xârâcùù, and then, from 2013, Djubéa (23 in public middle school in 2013) and Fwâi (in 2013 and 2014 at the Hienghène middle school), and Yuanga with a single pupil in private middle school in 2012 at the Baganda middle school in Kaala Gomen. Therefore, beyond the six main vernacular languages, the others are only taught sporadically and are localized within their geographic area. Depending on the year, the total number of pupils receiving instruction in vernacular languages varies from 3014 in 2005 to 1879 in private establishments, that is, two thirds, with 655 in high school and 2359 in middle school to 778 in 2011, in public schools only (data from private schools being unavailable), and rising to 3365 in 2005. Out of these, 2931 were in middle school and 434 in high school, and in total, 1537 pupils or almost half were in private establishments.

Teaching locations in the New Caledonian archipelago are also diversified (see Figs. 13.2 and 13.3). For teaching Kanak languages and cultures, various pedagogical materials have been developed, for example, a webpage for primary schools to learn Nengone,⁸ a textbook “I learn A’jië/Drehu/Nengone/

⁸<http://nengone.univ-nc.nc/>.

Paici” for middle school students (first level) and a comic book “*P’ti mec*” by Bernard Berger in Numèè and Drehu, in collaboration with the mining company Vale NC, the ALK (Academy of Kanak languages) and Tetemba Production. There is also a document designed for teachers of high school seniors presenting the four notions to be covered with pupils: myths and heroes, areas and trade, places and forms of power, the notion of progress, with, for each of the four themes, bibliographical references and online resources.⁹ One must also note, following the Nouméa Accord in May 1998, the official creation of ALK, under the aegis of Déwé Gorodey, Minister of Culture at that time, as a public New Caledonian establishment charged with “setting the rules of usage and participating in the promotion and development of all Kanak languages and dialects” (deliberation n° 265 of 17 January 2007, on the creation of the ALK). Their website¹⁰ offers downloadable documents on 32 languages and dialects, and at the request of the government of New Caledonia, the ALK provides subjects for the civil service examinations (Ihage 2014). It thus promotes Kanak languages and cultures alongside the rectorate, the university and the Tjibaou cultural center (CCT, see below). The Matignon-Oundinot Accords specify that the ADCK must promote Kanak cultures “namely by capitalizing on our heritage – whether cultural, artisanal, archeological or linguistic. Languages are at the heart of our missions, because they are one of the privileged instruments for the transmission of oral traditions” (Tjibaou 2014, p. 5; see also Salain 2017).

Since 2002, in partnership with the Customary councils, the CCT department for Heritage and research has been collecting oral data, namely, clan narratives, from some 15 languages, as well as putting them in writing (Tjibaou 2014). These local institutions add to the research that has been carried out since the second half of the twentieth century by teams of linguists and ethnolinguists, namely, from the CNRS LACITO research unit in France, beginning with the foundational works of André-Georges Haudricourt (see, e.g., Leblic 2020). Many recordings made of these languages are available online in the Pangloss Collection and in speech corpora.

But in fact, according to the hourly volume specific to each level of education, which breaks down as follows, this teaching of the fundamental elements of Kanak culture is very limited. No real recommendations for kindergarten and elementary schools, 1 hour per fortnight in sixth grade of middle school starting in 2017, gradually extended to other grades from 2018. Indeed, the reform of the secondary schools provides for compulsory interdisciplinary practical

teaching (EPI) on the fundamental elements of Kanak culture, in the cycle four course (fifth, fourth, and third grades).

In the general and vocational training high schools, it is recommended to have 1 h fortnight in the second grade of secondary school starting in 2017, which will be progressively extended to other levels in 2018 (first grade or junior) and 2019 (last grade or senior); in vocational training high schools (CAP), 1 h fortnight in first year, which will be extended to second year in 2018. However, the lack of qualified teachers for these courses means that there is often a big difference between the norm and the practice. Therefore, French remains, almost exclusively, the language of instruction at all levels.

13.6 Conclusion

In the field of Kanak languages, as in many others, demands of Kanak people led to changes to the legal framework for language instruction and recognition. Languages that preceded colonisation by France persist, even though their speakers have been displaced in the past, or today because greater movement is possible and often linked to occupational opportunities. The constant increase in the number of speakers shows that Kanak languages, including the “languages of culture and teaching,” present in the Nouméa Accord initially as a symbolic recognition, are persistent (Leblic 2022). This is despite the various macroeconomic effects and socioeconomic readjustments which fall far short of being ideal arrangements for nurturing different cultures and languages (Leblic 2018). Although the long colonisation period favours French in terms of effective linguistic practices in society as a whole, it no longer necessarily impedes to the use of the Kanak languages, thanks to the fact that Kanak people themselves have taken an interest in the matter, and also to research carried out over more than half a century on Kanak languages and cultures (Leblic 2022). Today, this has been taken over by local institutions, among others by the Academy of Kanak languages and the Tjibaou cultural centre, in conjunction with academics from metropolitan France. It is too early to say however whether this growth tendency of Kanak languages will endure.

Acknowledgments This article partially reproduces, with significant updates and the addition of more recent data, a manual I wrote for the *Agence universitaire de la francophonie* in 2000 (Leblic 2000). For more linguistic data, which I do not delve into here, see among others Moysse-Faurie et al. (2012) and the research by the linguists at the CNRS LACITO: Isabelle Bril, Françoise Ozanne-Rivierre, Jean-Claude Rivierre, Claire Moysse-Faurie. I thank the ISE for allowing me to use their map, which I added to the chapter, and Jacques Vernaudeau and Caroline Graille for personal communications. I also thank Margaret Dunham for the translation from French into English and Martha Macintyre for English proofreading.

⁹https://www.ac-noumea.nc/IMG/pdf/cycle_terminal_lck-final.pdf.

¹⁰<http://www.alk.gouv.nc/portal/page/portal/alk>.

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