

Tobian Language Use Survey  
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The Tobi language survey (see Appendix II) revealed that the Tobian language is very important to those surveyed, all of whom considered themselves to be Tobians. They fear the language will disappear soon and expressed a willingness to help preserve and maintain it. Consensus existed that one way to save Tobian is to write it down.

**Characteristics of the sample**

Fifteen adults completed the survey—7 women and 8 men, ranging in age from 23 to 73.

Almost twice as many respondents were born in Koror as in Tobi and all but one has children. Residence was weighted heavily toward Echang and Malakal with a small number living in Koror.

About half had attended college while the other half were split between those who had attended high school and those who had only attended elementary school. Most were employed and of those about half worked for state or national government.

All respondents considered themselves to be “Tobi persons.” Responses to this question ranged from “sure” to “110 percent” to “99 percent” (given by a person of mixed ancestry). Nine people were of mixed ancestry.

**Language abilities**

Fourteen of the fifteen respondents named Tobian as their language. (One young woman who had recently returned from a lengthy stay in the U.S. named English as her language.)

Respondents’ reported abilities in each of their languages is shown in Appendix I, Table A, while Tables B and C show language use by location and by relationship. Table D shows languages used by elders in addressing the respondent and Table E shows languages used by the children of respondents when addressing them.

Most respondents were fluent in understanding Tobian, Sonsorolese, and Echangese and a majority was also quite fluent in English. Understanding of Palauan lagged behind these other languages. At least one person reported ability in each of Japanese, Indonesian, Filipino, Outer Island Yapese, and Pohnpeian.

## **Language use**

Most respondents reported commonly using more than one language at a time.

Tobian was commonly used at home and in the neighborhood and with children, elders, and siblings.

Only four respondents believe that one must speak Tobian to be Tobian. Tobian was viewed favorably by 12 of the respondents and about half said it was their preferred language.

All but two respondents feel that Tobian is changing—one said that real Tobian (Old Tobian) had not changed but that people make mistakes with it. The changes in Tobian were seen as coming from its being mixed up with Sonsorolese, English, and Palauan; the emergence of Echangese; and the need to borrow words because of the paucity of terms in Tobian.

The changes in the Tobian language were said to be also a result of the young people who commonly speak Sonsorolese and Echangese and then are unable to understand their Tobian elders. Change is thought as well to come from people moving away from Tobi and from Echang.

Almost half the respondents feel that the ability to speak Palauan and/or English is necessary for success in Palau.

Eight of the respondents feel that Tobian will soon disappear and nine will be bothered if it does disappear (no one replied that they would not be bothered). People used terms including “hurts,” “angry,” “110 percent,” “for my whole life,” and “a lot” in describing how the disappearance of Tobian would affect them.

Overwhelmingly respondents felt that Tobian should be written down and that children should learn it.

Everyone surveyed said that they want to help save Tobian. Ideas put forth for saving Tobian included: education; dictionary; move back to Tobi; rebuild the community; make recordings; speak Tobian at home with children; and get married to a Tobian and have some Tobian kids.

# Appendix I

## Language Use Survey of 15 Tobian Speakers\*

### Results of Part II (Language Use, Competency, and Attitudes)

**Table A: Abilities in each language**

	Understand				Speak				Read				Write			
	Not at all	A bit	Well	Very Well	Not At All	A bit	Well	Very Well	Not at all	A bit	Well	Very well	N	A	W	V
Tobian		1		14	1	1		14	1		1	9	1		2	11
Sonsorolese	1	2	1	10	1	1	2	9	1		2	5	1	1	2	8
Echangese		1		8	1			8	1			3	1		2	3
Palauan		3	2	9	1	3	2	7	2	4	2	6	2	4	1	5
English		1	1	11		1	4	9	1			10	1	1		11
Other		2	1			1		1	1			1	1			

**Table B: Language use by location**

	Home	Neighborhood	School	Church	Work	Writing
Tobian	13	9		4	3	
Sonsorolese	2	1		2		
Echangese		4		3		
Palauan	1	4	5	9	6	
English	3	2	4	6	7	
Other						

**Table C: Language use by relationship**

	With Children and Grandchildren	With spouse	With siblings	With elders	With Tobian Friends	With Other Echang People	With Palauan Friends	At Community Meetings
Tobian	12	7	14	11	12	8		11
Sonsorolese	1	3				7	1	1
Echangese		1				2		1
Palauan	2	1	1	1			12	1
English	4	3	2	2	1	2		1
Other								

**Table D: Languages used by elders in addressing respondent**

	At Home	In Public
Tobian	13	12
Sonsorolese	1	
Echangese	4	
Palauan		
English		
Other		

**Table E: Languages used by own children in addressing respondent**

	At Home	In Public
Tobian	8	7
Sonsorolese	1	1
Echangese		
Palauan		
English	4	5
Other		

\* Not all rows and columns total 15 because not everyone answered every question and some people provided more than one response.

## Appendix II

### Survey

February 4, 2009

We're trying to help the Tobian community with Ramari Hatohobei. We are especially interested in what you'd like to see happen to the language, and how FOTI can help.

#### Part I. Demographics:

Name

Age

Gender

Place of birth

Married to

Children

Residence

Education

Employed

Do you consider yourself a Tobian person?

**Part II. Language use, competency, and attitudes:**

- \*What is your language?
- \*What languages do you

	Understand				Speak				Read				Write			
	Not at all	A little	Well	Very well	Not at all	A little	Well	Very well	Not at all	A little	Well	Very well	Not at all	A little	Well	Very well
Tobian																
Sonsorolese																
Echangese																
Palauan																
English																
Other																

- \*What languages do you use at
  - Home
  - Neighborhood
  - School
  - Church
  - Work
  - When writing
  
- What languages do you speak with
  - Your children and grandchildren?
  - Your spouse
  - Your siblings
  - Your elders
  - With Tobian friends
  - Other Echang people
  - With Palauan friends
  - At community meetings
  
- What languages do elders use when they speak with you
  - at home?
  - In public?
  
- What languages do your children use to talk to you
  - at home?
  - In public?
  
- Do you ever use more than one language at once? Can you give an example?

### **Part III. What does the community want FOTI to do about Ramari Hatohobei?**

- \*Does a person have to speak Tobian to be considered a Tobian, in your opinion?
- How do you think Tobians see their language?
  - Is it viewed favorably?
  - Is it the preferred language?
    - In which situations?
- Do you think Tobian is changing?
  - If so, how is it changing?
  - Why is it changing?
  - Who is leading shift from Tobian? (e.g., Is it young people? Women? Outsiders?)
- If a person does not speak Palauan or English, could they be successful here?
- Do you think Tobian will disappear soon?
- \*How much would it bother you if Tobian disappeared?
- Do you want Tobian to be written down?
- Should children learn Tobian?
- \*Do you want to help save Tobian?
- \*What do you think should be done to save it?