

# **Cultural and Linguistic Preservation in Diasporic Rotuman Communities**

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## **The Survey**

This paper is a report of results from an online survey conducted by Matthew Bray, who initiated a Survey Monkey on 23 June 2012; it remained open until 30 January 2013. Announcements of the survey were posted on Facebook groups “Rotumans on Facebook,” “Rotumans Overseas,” “Rotuman Pride,” and on the Bulletin Board page of the Rotuma Website, with the following statement:

Noa‘ia te‘ne gagaj atakoa ne hat rogrog me‘amea‘ he te‘is. ‘Ih tē te‘is leuof se famör Rotuam tutu ‘e rān te, la figalelei, nono ka ‘äe pō ma ‘au la tög oto‘ saio‘ ‘e “survey”: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RotumanCultureLanguageSurvey>

The global Rotuman community is now spread far and wide, with most of the population living off of the home island. According to the 2007 Fiji Census, only 19% of the 10,137 Rotumans in Fiji lived in Rotuma. It is estimated that a further 2,000 to 3,000 live beyond Fiji. We are proud of our unique heritage and identity, and have taken our language and culture with us wherever we have moved.

Continuing on the important research by Alan Howard, Jan Rensel, Marit Vamarasi, Agnes Hannan and others, this survey seeks to take a global snapshot at the status of Rotuman language and cultural maintenance for those who’ve moved away from the island. Understanding the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, families and communities will give us a sense of how people feel about their Rotuman culture and what is being done to preserve this.

For those who are passionate advocates for the continued vibrancy of our unique language and culture, the results will serve to demonstrate those factors and resources which enhance maintenance. This will hopefully prove useful to parents, teachers and communities as they decide whether and how to go about passing on our culture to the next generation.

The online survey is completely confidential, to be filled out only once and should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. We are particularly keen to have Rotuman youths and young adults participate as their knowledge and attitudes will give some insight into how Rotuman cultural communities will look in the future. Please encourage your family and friends to participate, as the more responses we get, the clearer our picture of the global Rotuman family, and the future of our precious language and culture.

The survey included 35 questions that were responded to with various degrees of completion by 236 participants. Seventy-three participants abandoned the survey after answering very few of the questions, forty-two others responded selectively to most of the questions, and one hundred nineteen persons provided complete, or nearly complete protocols.

Readers should be fully aware of the limitations of this report. To begin with, the results cannot be considered representative in so far as the number of respondents is only a tiny portion of the Rotuman population as a whole. Also, because Internet access on the home island is very restricted, the results can only be considered applicable to Rotumans abroad (including Fiji). Furthermore, the very willingness to participate in such a survey likely biased the sample toward individuals with a strong interest in issues of Rotuman identity and a concern for the perpetuation of the language and culture.

In addition to limitations of the sample, interpreting and categorizing open-ended responses involved making judgments that may not always have been consistent. Survey Monkey provided a spreadsheet showing individual responses as well as well as a pdf document containing a survey summary that includes both tabulated results and individual responses, a copy of which is linked to this report. In order to construct tables with cross tabulations, we copied the data from the spreadsheet to a database application (Filemaker), which may have introduced errors. Finally, because many respondents only answered some of the questions, discrepancies were sometimes introduced into the tabulations. Anyone wishing to do their own analysis or wanting to see the total range of responses to individual questions can consult the survey summary at [http://www.rotuma.net/os/Publications/Bray\\_Survey\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.rotuma.net/os/Publications/Bray_Survey_Summary.pdf). Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the results of the survey are suggestive of the attitudes, participation in cultural activities, and concerns of diasporic Rotumans.

Ages of the respondents ranged from 15 to 71, with the majority falling into the 30–49 age range (Table 1 below<sup>1</sup>). This in itself suggests that Rotuman participation on the Internet is not limited to youths, but includes a significant number of middle-aged individuals. The numbers also indicate a higher degree of female participation, particularly in the 20–39 age range.

<b>Table 1</b>			
<b>Age and Gender of Respondents</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
15-19	10	10	20
20-29	23	33	56
30-39	26	42	68
40-49	22	23	45
50-59	6	11	17
60+	5	4	9
Total	92	123	215

The majority of participants (56.3%) were born in Fiji, followed by Rotuma (25.5%), Australia (13.0%), New Zealand (3.0%), and other Pacific Islands (1.3%). One person listed Canada as their birthplace, another the United Kingdom (total N=231).

Of responses to the question **“4. Where do you currently live for most of the year?”** Australia accounted for 41.1%, Fiji for 27.4%, New Zealand 10.5%, the United States and United Kingdom 7.3% each, and Canada 4.1%. Five persons (2.3%) listed Rotuma as their usual place of residence (total N=219).

To the question, **“6. Which of your parents identify as being ‘Rotuman’?”** 62.5% answered both, 19.4% mother, and 16.4% father. Four persons (1.7%) who responded to the questionnaire reported that neither parent identified as Rotuman (total N=232).

### **Self-Identity**

As one might expect, when both parents identify themselves as Rotumans, individuals were more likely to strongly agree with the statement **“9. Being Rotuman is a large part of how I see myself.”** However, the majority of persons with only one Rotuman parent also strongly agreed with the statement (Table 2). Only seven persons disagreed with the statement; interestingly, six

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<sup>1</sup> The table includes all participants who provided both age and gender information. Sixteen people did not indicate their age and five persons skipped the question regarding gender.

of them claimed both parents identified as Rotuman, while all three of those with no Rotuman parent agreed with the statement.

<b>Rotuman Parents</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
Both	82 (67.2%)	34 (27.9%)	1 (.01%)	5 (4.1%)	122
Mother	24 (54.5%)	19 (43.2%)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.3%)	44
Father	17 (54.8%)	14 (45.2%)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	31
Neither	1 (33.3%)	2 (67.7%)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3
Total	124 (62%)	69 (34.5%)	1 (.05%)	6 (3.0%)	200

The statement “**10. I feel a strong sense of welcome and belonging within the Rotuman community**” drew overwhelming agreement, with 41.3% agreeing and 46% strongly agreeing (total N=213). Most of those who disagreed lived in Australia or New Zealand, with 17.2% disagreement, followed by Fiji with 11.6% disagreement). Only one person in the United States disagreed, while there was total agreement in Canada and the United Kingdom. This suggests that a sense of community is well developed and inclusive in most countries with substantial Rotuman populations, although in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji, where Rotuman cultural groups have experienced schisms at times, alienation has apparently occurred among a small portion of the population.

The lowest level of disagreement occurred among individuals who identified both parents as Rotuman (9.1%). Those with only a Rotuman mother or only a Rotuman father showed substantially higher rates (18.2% and 25.8%, respectively). This may well be the result of persons with only one Rotuman parent being less knowledgeable about Rotuman language and cultural norms, which tends to impact levels of incorporation in Rotuman groups. That cultural and Rotuman language competence play a role in generating feelings of inclusion or exclusion is supported by tallying agreement and disagreement responses against measures of self-reported cultural competence (question #13) and Rotuman language competence (question #25). Thus, whereas 19.1% of respondents whose self-description of their cultural competence was “poor” or “basic” disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement, only 10.5% of those who chose “intermediate” or “expert” were in disagreement (total N=173). The linguistic data is somewhat more compelling, with 29.0% of those we categorized as having low or intermediate competence

disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, while only 3.6% of those categorized as highly competent disagreed or strongly disagreed (total N=157)

### **Social Engagement**

Four of the questions were measures of social engagement with other Rotumans. First was a question, **“7. In your local community or country, where do you interact with other Rotumans?”** Extended family gatherings drew the highest affirmative response (91.5%), followed by ceremonies such as weddings, baptisms, birthdays, funerals (84.2%), and Rotuma Day functions (79.8%), suggesting that kinship is at the heart of social cohesion in Rotuman communities abroad. However, most Rotuman-centered activities also received an affirmative response by the majority of respondents, as follows: Rotuma Day functions (79.8%), Rotuman ceremonial events (66.9%), island nights (62.3%), local Rotuman club or association meetings (61.6%), and Rotuman dance practices (52.1%). Attendance at Rotuman-language church services or prayer meetings was only slightly below half (47.2%) as was attendance at local Fijian community gatherings (47.0%). Unsurprisingly, involvement with Rotuman language lessons was low (20.5%), since formal lessons are offered only sporadically in a few of the larger communities (total N=209).

An additional indicator of social engagement were responses to the question, **“8. Do you regularly interact with other Rotumans (including family) via social media websites like Facebook?”** In addition to networks of friends on social media, there are over 40 groups with Rotuman memberships on Facebook alone. Nearly three-fourths (73.3%) of respondents reported that they participated in the Facebook group “Rotumans on Facebook.” As of this writing (9 April 2014), there were 4,783 members of this group, not all of whom are Rotuman or Part-Rotuman, but the numbers are nevertheless indicative of the enthusiasm with which Rotumans have embraced the Internet as a medium for communication. Although “Rotumans on Facebook” is by far the most popular group, 38.6% of respondents participated in other Rotuman Facebook groups as well. Aside from participation in groups, 72.3% indicated that they communicated with Rotuman friends on Facebook. A smaller portion of respondents indicated that they used Bebo to

communicate with Rotuman friends (4.5%) or used other social media, including Twitter, Skype, and Linked In (8.4%)(total N=202).<sup>2</sup>

Visits to Fiji and Rotuma to visit relatives and friends is also an important indicator of engagement within the transnational Rotuman community. The frequency of visits to Fiji, where the majority of Rotumans now reside, was probed by the question, **“11. If you live away from Fiji, how often do you visit your relatives there?”** We have divided the responses into three segments: respondents living in Australia, those living in New Zealand, and those living elsewhere (Canada, USA, United Kingdom, continental Europe, the Middle East, and Pacific Islands other than Fiji).

The results are reported in Table 3. With the exception of a slightly higher frequency of visits from respondents residing in New Zealand, the rates are quite comparable regardless of where Rotumans live abroad. It’s rather remarkable that over 60% of respondents reported visiting Fiji more at least once every four years, with a third of them reporting annual visits or more. This is a clear indication of the retention of commitment to relatives transnationally, as well as testimony to the financial well-being of Rotumans abroad.

<b>Table 3</b>						
<b>If you live away from Fiji, how often do you visit your relatives there?</b>						
<b>Residence</b>	<b>Annually*</b>	<b>2-4 years</b>	<b>5+ years**</b>	<b>Rarely***</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Total</b>
Australia	20 (30.3%)	18 (27.3%)	11 (16.7%)	13 (19.7%)	4 (6.1%)	66
New Zealand	7 (33.3%)	10 (47.6%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	21
Other	15 (38.5%)	10 (25.6%)	7 (17.9%)	6 (15.4%)	1 (2.6%)	39
Total	42 (33.3%)	38 (30.2%)	21 (16.7%)	20 (15.9%)	5 (4.0%)	126

\* includes response “very often”

\*\* includes responses like “every few years,” “every now and then”

\*\*\* includes responses like “not often,” “not as often as I would like,” “only once”

While visits to Fiji are quite frequent, visits to Rotuma are less common for three main

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<sup>2</sup> These figures should not be regarded as indicative of the entire Rotuman/Part-Rotuman population as the questionnaire was online, so only people with access to the Internet were able to respond to it. Also, that segment of the population without Internet access would not be able to participate in social media like Facebook.

reasons: difficulty of access, the costs involved, and a dwindling population on the island. Getting to and from Rotuma is often problematic because of irregular air and shipping schedules. Although flights to the island are supposed to be weekly, they are often cancelled, leaving passengers stranded. Air fares are also excessively expensive given the relatively short distance involved. And while travelling to Rotuma by boat is cheaper, sailings are highly irregular; it's not uncommon for the island to go 6 weeks or more without a vessel coming. Finally, according to the 2007 Fiji census, of the 10,137 Rotumans in Fiji as a whole, fewer than 2,000 were living in Rotuma at the time. This means that people abroad are likely to have more close relatives in Fiji than on the home island, making visits to Rotuma less of a draw as far as maintaining kin networks is concerned. Visits to Rotuma are most common during the Christmas season, a six-week time of celebration when groups from abroad often make pilgrimages together and when transportation is more frequent and reliable. The questionnaire concerning visits to Rotuma as phrased this way: **“12. How many times have you visited Rotuma? When was your last visit?”** For this tabulation we made a simple distinction between respondents living in Fiji and those living abroad. As expected, visits to Rotuma were less frequent by Rotumans abroad, with 33.9% reporting that they had never visited the island since leaving Fiji. Of those who had visited, 27.7% reported one visit, 15.2% reported two visits, and 23.2% reported three or more visits (total N=112). Among respondents from Fiji, 28.1% reported never visiting Rotuma, while 12.5% reported one visit, 12.5% reported two visits, and 46.9% reported making three or more trips to the island (total N=32). The higher frequency of visits among Fiji residents is a reflection of the greater flexibility they have in making arrangements for travel to Rotuma, given the irregularities in transportation. Of all respondents reporting at least one visit to Rotuma, 35 (34.0%) had made their last visit within the past five years, 30 (29.1%) within the last 6–10 years, and 38 (36.9%) more than 10 years ago (total N=103).

In general, these responses suggest that most Rotumans abroad go to considerable lengths to keep their links to relatives active both by taking advantage of digital media like e-mail and Facebook, and by making visits to Fiji and Rotuma.

### **Cultural Maintenance**

A series of ten questions probed attitudes toward and competence in Rotuman cultural activities. In response to the question, **“14. How important is it to know about Rotuman culture?”** 72.0% chose five (very important) on a five-point scale, 23.3% chose four (important), 3.2%

chose three (neither important nor unimportant), and 1.6% chose one (very unimportant)(total N=189). The overall average score was 4.64. This result constitutes strong affirmation of the desire among migrant Rotumans to maintain Rotuman cultural knowledge.

Likewise, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that **“19. Doing Rotuman cultural activities is an important part of being a Rotuman,”** with 54.8% strongly agreeing, 40.5% agreeing, and 8 4.8% disagreeing. None of the respondents strongly disagreed (total N=168). The average rating on this four-point scale was 3.50.

The question **“16. What do you think are the top three most important aspects (parts) of Rotuman culture?”** elicited a range of responses, with the Rotuman language, customs, and heritage showing the highest frequency (Table 4).

<b>Most important aspects of Rotuman culture</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
language, fae‘ega	132
customs, culture, way of life	85
history, heritage, folklore, myth, legend, tradition, hanuju, origins	59
dance, music, taumaka, songs	43
kinship, family, blood, kainaga, genealogy, relatives	43
behaviour, respect, manners, caring, morals, value, hai‘hanisiga, agfak hanua, hospitality	38
community, friendship, people	19
rituals, ceremonies, weddings, celebrations, gatherings	18
food	14
religion, church, god, faith, beliefs, Christianity	13
identity, pride, roots	9
arts, crafts, tefui (garlands)	8
dress, costumes	2
humour, teasing	2
land	2
medicine	1
education	1

Since the question was open-ended, some individuals elaborated their answers. The following two responses are examples:

1. “**Language**—learning the language helping identify oneself within the community to understand more aspects of the culture, passing on generations; **family**—extended and immediate—kainaga system and the role each member has within the village life; **traditions** in the form of art, dance, superstitions, handing down stories from generation to generation.”
2. “**Culture** (values, language, song and dance); **Traditions** (sense of community, food prep, contribution & cuisine, faras); **Stories and Legends** (listening, document and sharing with elders).”

The majority of participants in the survey did not respond to the question “**17. What do you think are some of the least relevant aspects (parts) of Rotuman culture to your life?**” and among those who did, 47.1% indicated that there were no least relevant aspects or replied that they didn’t know or were not sure. Among the least relevant aspects referred to were religion or church (10.3%), food items and preparation (8.0%), and traditional ceremonies (8.0%). Also mentioned by four or fewer respondents were tradition, land issues, kava drinking, home brew, chiefly protocol, superstition, politics, language, and dress (total N=121). Here are some illustrative responses:

1. “None, as every aspect of Rotuman life is very necessary and is part and parcel to our culture.”
2. “From the perspective that we are Rotumans wherever we are, we enrich our new homeland by bringing our own unique values and traditions here.”
3. “Its all relevant if you want to be recognized as a Rotuman regardless of where you are situated. If I had to pick one though it would be religion because it is something that separates our people into different categories.”
4. “Tradition- we should be able to adopt positive and influential ideas from other cultures or adapt to positive changes that uplift the Rotuman ways of living. Right believing leads to right living!”
5. “Traditional ceremonies are expensive.”

In contrast, the question “**20. What three cultural activities feel most Rotuman to you?**” elicited extensive responses. Music and dance was the most frequent category of

response, followed by ceremonies, preparing and eating Rotuman foods, and speaking the Rotuman language (total N=139) (Table 5).

<b>Cultural activities felt to be most Rotuman</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
music, dance, songs	90
ceremonies (e.g., mamasas, weddings, hapagsu)	55
cooking and eating Rotuman foods	36
speaking Rotuman	35
socialising (e.g., Rotuma Day, family gatherings)	27
history, tradition, hanuju	23
arts & crafts, weaving mats, making tefui	19
church, religious activities	13
sports, playing cards	2
all	2

Some illustrative responses:

1. “1. Cooking or preparing ‘Koua’ or ‘Fekei’ or any Rotuman food. 2. Getting together with the Rotuman community in Sydney and enjoying a nice ‘Rotuman Day’ with all the Rotuman food & Rotuman entertaining, especially watching the ‘Tautoga’! 3. Teaching my children the Rotuman language, alphabet, numbers or reading the Rotuman Bible (a big part of me renewing my mind & maintaining my knowledge of the language :).”
2. “Dancing, preparing Rotuman food, participating in Rotuman gatherings like island nights, gathering of family members at home. etc.”
3. “1. Tautoga - the chants, tiap hi’ and dance movements are unique. The dances make me feel so Rotuman. 2. Traditional food preparations and serving/presentation of the feast (koua); the prep, cooking style and the etiquette/serving of the feast makes me stand apart as a Rotuman. 3. The pre-wedding (sok ta, suf hanta, fuar su ta, fe’ asta, fao te), wedding (teran ne su ta, a’lel ta) and the post-wedding (haihouag ta) ceremonies: these ceremonies are no longer being practised outside of Rotuma (because of economics/timing/space/cross cultural marriages etc) - these series of ceremonies are unique to us.

4. “Speaking the language fluently and correctly, knowing how to write it and knowing how to sing Rotuman songs (fara songs).”

5. All. This is because each has its own purpose. You can’t separate them into groups. How can you gauge which activity feels most Rotuman when all within the culture are? Rotuman is Rotuman. It is not a temperature gauge where you can say at which point it feels colder or hotter.”

The question “**21. What three Rotuman cultural activities do you enjoy the most?**” elicited similar responses, with music and dance, preparing and eating Rotuman foods, ceremonies, and socialising the four most popular responses (total N=137)(Table 6).

<b>Cultural activities felt to be most Rotuman</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
music, dance, songs	88
cooking and eating Rotuman foods	43
ceremonies (e.g., mamasas, weddings, hapagsu)	37
socialising (e.g., Rotuma Day, family gatherings)	27
language, speaking Rotuman	20
arts & crafts, weaving mats, making tefui	12
history, tradition, hanuju	8
church, religious activities	6
watching Rotuman videos or dances	5
sports, playing cards	3
all	3
farming, crop competitions	3

Some illustrative responses:

1. “Dancing, learning the language in a supporting environment and listening to hanuju [stories].”
2. “1. Singing and Dancing (Tautoga and Fara) 2. Traditional ceremonies 3. writing poems about my experiences over the years about Rotuma and my upbringing etc.”

3. “Cooking Rotuman food at home, Interacting with others in Rotuma language and participating in tautoga for island nights or weddings.”
4. “1. Carving Rotuman artifacts, I have carved all Rotuman crafts well polished and displayed in my living room. 2. Gardening the Rotuman way- I have planted in my backyard nearly all Rotuman plants... taro, cassava, yams, sweet potatoes, bananas (9 types of bananas) kao hu, rau ji, tantane, maliha, sasa, fakmaru, sugar cane, vati or bele, coconut trees and many others... 3. Making Rotuman Fekei - I do all sorts of fekei ... starts with the common mar ma ‘a‘ana, fakakai, herhere, nuafo‘ou, fekei ‘uhi.”
5. “1. Preparation/making of fekei: e.g. for each fekei there is a different style of grating the coconuts (different rhythm for each fekei). 2. Serving the feast: the he‘ak koueta signifies: welcoming, rank, generosity and abundance. 3. Building of a traditional house: the sharing of the tasks/labour is all about involvement.”

While the questions above concerned attitudes toward cultural activities, the question **“22. At home or in your local community, which of these activities have you been involved in?”** elicited reports of actual involvement (Table 7). Respondents were presented with a list of 12 activities, plus the opportunity to choose “other” and write in what it was. The list of activities included: (1) Speaking Rotuman; (2) Reading Rotuman language; (3) Participating in Rotuman dances, particularly tautoga; (4) Participating in Rotuman ceremonies (o‘jaki, mamasa, hapagsu, hotakhafu, etc); (5) Watching videos (*The Land Has Eyes*, home videos etc.); (6) Learning Rotuman songs; (7) Learning how to prepare Rotuman foods (eg. koua, fekei); (8) Studying Rotuman history; (9) Making use of books available on Rotuman culture, history, or myths and legends; (10) Being taught Rotuman myths/legends; (11) Learning about behaving according to Rotuman values; (12) Being taught to make Rotuman handicraft (making tefui, weaving mats); (13) other.

The vast majority of the persons who responded to this question reported being involved in multiple activities.

<b>Cultural activities participated in</b>	<b>Number of Responses*</b>
Watching videos ( <i>The Land Has Eyes</i> , home videos, etc.)	130 (82.3%)
Learning Rotuman songs	118 (74.7%)
Learning how to prepare Rotuman foods (e.g., koua, fekei)	112 (70.9%)
Learning about behaving according to Rotuman values	110 (69.6%)
Making use of books available on Rotuman culture, history, or myths and legends	93 (58.9%)
Participating in Rotuman dances, particularly tautoga	91 (57.6%)
Being taught Rotuman myths/legends	88 (55.7%)
Studying Rotuman history	87 (55.1%)
Participating in Rotuman ceremonies (o'jaki, mamasa, hapagsu, hotakhafu, etc)	86 (54.4%)
Being taught to make Rotuman handicraft (making tefui, weaving mats)	58 (36.7%)
Reading Rotuman language	47 (29.7%)
Speaking Rotuman	23 (14.6%)
Other	4 (2.5%)

\* Percentages indicate number of responses divided by total number of individuals (N = 158) providing that answer to the question.

It's interesting that despite the importance attributed to language as a part of Rotuman culture, less than a third of the respondents (29.7%) reported reading Rotuman and less than a quarter (14.6%) reported speaking it in activities that have involved them.

That knowledge of the Rotuman language, and its transmission to the younger generation of Rotumans abroad, is an issue of concern is confirmed by responses to the question **“18. What do you think are the major challenges to maintaining Rotuman culture where you live?”**

Only a shortage of fellow Rotumans to interact with was mentioned more frequently than the problem of maintaining the Rotuman language; transmission of cultural knowledge, including language, to the younger generation was mentioned in 19 responses (total N=147)(Table 8).

<b>Table 8</b>	
<b>Major challenges to maintaining Rotuman culture</b>	<b>Number of Responses*</b>
Shortage of people, dispersed population, lack of community	45 (30.6%)
Language deficiencies, literacy in Rotuman	37 (25.2%)
Modernisation, Westernisation, competing cultural modalities	25 (17.0%)
Time constraints, competing priorities, costs involved	19 (12.9%)
Generational differences, teaching younger generation	19 (12.9%)
Deficient knowledge of Rotuman culture	10 (6.8%)
Organizational difficulties, politics	9 (6.1%)
Personal differences, religious beliefs, value issues	8 (5.4%)
Intermarriage	4 (2.7%)
Communication problems	4 (2.7%)
Lack of interest or willingness to engage	3 (2.0%)
None	2 (1.4%)

Some illustrative responses:

1. One of the major challenges is the language i.e. speaking and understanding. I have to say that a lot of Rotuman parents do not teach their children the basics. You can't expect your kids to learn the language and the culture if parents do not speak and practice the language and culture at home. As a half Rotuman, I learnt the language through my grandparents. I first learnt the language by listening to mum talking to relatives on the phone. I learnt more (pronunciation etc) through attending the Rotuman church in particular singing.
2. Lack of contact with other Rotumans. Lack of influence. Lack of knowledge. Lack of time - any time spent here needs to have a high return on investment.
3. Trying to learn and practice Rotuman culture whilst living in a country with its own and various other cultural influences.
4. Me and my Mum are the only Rotumans (we know of) south of Auckland so maintaining the Rotuman culture is very difficult for us. I cant speak the language so Mum has to ring Fiji when she wants to speak Rotuman. There are no Rotuman clubs or organisations down here.

5. Mixed race families. If you are not within a Rotuman community group it is very hard to learn culture. Culture needs to be learnt not only from within your immediate family but from a wider community. I feel as though when outside of a community the culture is taught with biases from the one that teaches you and therefore there is an opportunity to miss out on certain aspects. Especially in a mixed race family.

6. There are a lot of little quarrels amongst the Rotuman people and because we are so little in numbers, people get divided and we aren't able to come together in strength to share the culture. As a young person I fear that my children will not be able to understand the Rotuman culture or language because I only have half knowledge. Also, being taught at home is probably not a priority. Rotuman was my first language, and I was fluent until I was about 10 years old. We need to band together and create workshops or something like that to teach young people like me. And also, another factor that I think is distance between each other. In Fiji everyone is so close, but its harder to have things together when everyone lives scattered around Sydney.

When asked, “**13. How do you rate your knowledge of Rotuman culture?**” 4.8% chose poor, 32.8% chose basic, 50.8% chose intermediate, and 22 11.6% chose expert, for an average rating on a four-point scale of 2.69 (total N=189). However, as one might expect, age, place of birth, and parentage made a difference (Tables 9–11).

<b>Cultural Knowledge by Age</b>					
<b>Age</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Expert</b>	<b>Totals</b>
15-29	4 (6.9%)	24 (41.4%)	24 (41.4%)	6 (10.3%)	58
30-49	5 (5.4%)	31 (33.7%)	45 (48.9%)	11 (12.0%)	92
50+	0 (0.0%)	4 (16.7%)	17 (70.8%)	3 (12.5%%)	24
<b>Total</b>	9	59	86	20	174

Thus, whereas 83.3% of those over 50 years old rated their knowledge of Rotuman culture as intermediate or expert, only 51.7% of those in the 15–29 age group rated their knowledge at those levels. The 30-49 age group were in-between at 60.9%.

<b>Table 10</b>					
<b>Cultural Knowledge by Place of Birth</b>					
<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Expert</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Rotuma	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	24 (58.5%)	17 (41.5%)	41
Fiji	3 (3.0%)	39 (38.6%)	53 (52.5%)	6 (6.0%)	101
Elsewhere	6 (18.2%)	18 (54.5%)	9 (27.3%)	0 (0.0%)	33
Total	9	57	86	23	175

Whereas 100% of respondents who were born in Rotuma rated their knowledge of Rotuman culture as intermediate or expert, only 27.3% of those born abroad, outside of Fiji, claimed such knowledge. Those born in Fiji were in-between at 58.5%. Being born in Rotuma appears to greatly increase the likelihood of people rating themselves as having expert level knowledge of the culture. [It should be noted that bragging is strongly discouraged in Rotuman culture, so many of those who rated their knowledge as intermediate may have been motivated to be modest in their assessment.]

<b>Table 11</b>					
<b>Cultural Knowledge by Parentage</b>					
<b>Rotuman parents</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Expert</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Father	7 (26.9%)	12 (46.2%)	7 (26.9%)	0 (0.0%)	26
Mother	1 (2.6%)	18 (47.4%)	18 (47.4%)	1 (2.6%)	38
Both	1 (0.1%)	28 (25.9%)	60 (55.6%)	19 (17.6%)	108
Total	9	58	85	20	172

Whereas 74.2% of respondents whose parents were both Rotuman rated their cultural knowledge as intermediate or expert, only 26.9% with only a Rotuman father, and 50% of those with only a Rotuman mother rated themselves that knowledgeable.

If we combine the three variables of age, place of birth, and parentage, the extremes are striking, with 20 of 21 (95.2%) of those respondents over 50 years old, who were born in Rotuma to a mother and father who were both Rotuman rating their knowledge as intermediate or expert,

while only 8 of 31 (25.8%) of those in the 15–29 age range who were born abroad, away from Fiji, to only one Rotuman parent rated their knowledge that high.

To summarize this section regarding cultural maintenance, the importance of knowing about and participating in Rotuman cultural activities was strongly affirmed by over 90% of the respondents. That language is at the heart of Rotuman culture was also overwhelmingly confirmed, yet speaking Rotuman was named less frequently than music and dance, participating in ceremonies, and cooking and eating Rotuman foods when it came to activities respondents feel are most Rotuman and which they enjoyed the most. Likewise, reading and speaking Rotuman were at the bottom of a list of cultural activities participated in. Not surprisingly then, given the discrepancy between the importance placed on language and the lack of participation in its usage, language deficiencies, along with the dispersion of Rotumans abroad, were regarded as the most frequently mentioned challenges to maintaining Rotuma culture. To gain a more nuanced understanding of the role of the Rotuman language in the lives of the respondents, a series of nine questions were included focusing on linguistic competence and usage.

### **The Role of Language**

The evidence in the previous section confirms what we have learned in our discussions with Rotumans and Part-Rotumans living in New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere in the world outside of Fiji, about the importance of the Rotuman language for maintaining cultural identity. Yet for those who have had little exposure to the language as children, learning to speak and read it is a daunting task, in large measure because of the complexity of its phonetic and grammatical structures.

Rotuman utilizes metathesis, the inversion of word-final vowels with immediately preceding consonants, which produces a vowel system with umlauts, shortened vowels, and diphthongs. The result is that an original system of five vowels has increased to ten. In addition, the different forms of words that result from metathesis has grammatical significance, further complicating the language (see Churchward 1940; Wikipedia article on Rotuman Language).

Another impediment to learning the language as an adult is a lack of available resources, including opportunities to hear the language spoken in some localities. A further problem is the absence of a consistent orthography, with one based on French, one based on English, and a third

that uses linguistic diacritics. As a result, informally written Rotuman is generally subject to the whims of sounding out words and phrases as one hears them.

That **“24. Speaking the Rotuman language is an important part of being Rotuman,”** was overwhelming confirmed, with 69.4% of respondents strongly agreeing and 27.6% agreeing. Only 5 of 170 persons (3%) answering the question disagreed (total N=170). Yet, when asked **“23. What languages are spoken in your home?”** only 18.6% answered mainly Rotuman, and 1.2% said they spoke only Rotuman. Some Rotuman was spoken in 54% of the homes and only English in 26.1%. Fijian, Maori, and Tongan were mentioned as additional languages by 5 respondents (total N=161).

When place of residence is considered, the effects of living abroad can be clearly seen. While 44.1% of those living in Rotuma or Fiji favoured the Rotuman language, only 12.1% of those abroad did, and whereas nearly a third (29.3%) of those abroad spoke only English in their households, this was the case for only 8.8% of respondents in Rotuma/Fiji (Table 12).

<b>Language Spoken in Home by Place of Residence</b>					
<b>Residence</b>	<b>Only Rotuman</b>	<b>Mainly Rotuman Some English</b>	<b>Mainly English Some Rotuman</b>	<b>Only English</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Rotuma/Fiji	2 (5.9%)	13 (38.2%)	16 (47.1%)	3 (8.8%)	34
Elsewhere	0 (0.0%)	14 (12.1%)	68 (58.6%)	34 (29.3%)	116
Total	2	27	84	37	150

Parentage, too, quite naturally affects the languages spoken in households. Rotuman is least likely to be spoken in homes where only the father is Rotuman (36.4%); in contrast, when only the mother is Rotuman, the language is spoken in nearly three-quarters (74.2%) of households, and when both parents are Rotuman, the language is present in 85.4% of households (Table 13).

<b>Language Spoken in Home by Parentage</b>					
<b>Rotuman Parents</b>	<b>Only Rotuman</b>	<b>Mainly Rotuman Some English</b>	<b>Mainly English Some Rotuman</b>	<b>Only English</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Father	0 (0.0%)	2 (9.1%)	6 (27.3%)	14 (63.6%)	22
Mother	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	21 (67.7%)	8 (25.8%)	31
Both	2 (2.1%)	23 (24.0%)	57 (59.4%)	14 (14.6%)	96
Total	2	27	84	36	149

When asked, “**25. How do you rate your language ability?**” respondents were presented with nine options, comprising a scale of competency. For purposes of comparison, we have divided the nine options into three clusters that we have labeled low, medium, and high with regard to competence in the Rotuman language.

Low competence includes the following responses: (1) I've never spoken, sung, read or been taught any Rotuman; (2) I can sing lyrics to Rotuman songs without knowing the meaning of anything; (3) I know the meaning and pronunciation of very few words; and (4) I know some basic phrases (eg. greetings, counting etc). Medium competence includes (5) I can carry out a very basic conversation; (6) I can understand most Rotuman spoken to/around me, but can't respond; and (7) I can understand most Rotuman spoken to/around me, and can respond although not fluently. High competence includes (8) I can speak enough to get by living in Rotuma, but struggle to write with correct spelling and diacritics; and (9) I can speak, read and write fluently like Rotumans on the island, with a local-sounding accent.

Using these designations 19.1% of respondents were in the low competence category, 46.27.2% were of medium competence, and 53.8% were highly competent (total N=169). Our expectations that competence varies by place of birth, place of residence, and parentage are confirmed by Tables 14–16.

<b>Table 14</b>				
<b>Language Competence by Place of Birth</b>				
<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Rotuma	1 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)	36 (97.3%)	37
Fiji	13 (14.0%)	32 (34.4%)	48 (51.6%)	93
Elsewhere	17 (60.7%)	10 (35.7%)	1 (3.6%)	28
Total	31	42	85	158

<b>Table 15</b>				
<b>Language Competence by Place of Residence</b>				
<b>Residence</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Rotuma/Fiji	2 (5.6%)	11 (30.6%)	23 (63.9%)	36
Elsewhere	28 (23.1%)	31 (25.6%)	62 (51.2%)	121
Total	30	42	85	157

<b>Table 16</b>				
<b>Language Competence by Parentage</b>				
<b>Rotuman Parents</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Father	16 (72.7%)	4 (18.2%)	2 (9.1%)	22
Mother	11 (32.4%)	12 (35.3%)	11 (32.4%)	34
Both	1 (1.0%)	27 (27.3%)	71 (71.7%)	99
Total	28	43	84	155

The data show that individuals born in Rotuma are nearly all (97.3%) highly competent in the language, as one would expect, while those born abroad show the least competence, with 60.7% at the lowest level. Parentage also shows a strong association with competence. If both parents are Rotuman, 71.7% of respondents rated themselves at a high level, with only 1% at a low level, whereas if only their father was Rotuman, 9.1% rated their competence at a high level while 72.7% were at a low level. Having only a Rotuman mother resulted in an intermediate position with nearly identical percentages in each category of competence. While current residence

showed the expected distribution, with those in Rotuma or Fiji showing a greater level of competence, the effect is significantly less than place of birth or parentage.

That Rotuma and Fiji are the primary breeding grounds for learning Rotuman was verified by responses to the question, **“28. Where have you learnt the Rotuman language?”** “Mainly in Rotuma” accounted for 40.8% of answers, “mainly in Fiji” 46.3%, and “mainly in other countries” 19.7% (total N=147). If we look at the results for Rotuman respondents living abroad, away from Fiji or Rotuma, we still find that the great majority—84 of 103 (81.6%)—learned the language in Rotuma or Fiji. Of the 19 individuals who learned the language abroad, 9 said that they learned either as a teenager or adult, while the remaining 10 said that they learned Rotuman as their first language, simultaneously with another language.

The question **“29. How have you learnt the Rotuman language?”** (multiple answers permitted) understandably favored “at home with family” (94.0%). However, 16.7% indicated “at taumaka (dance practices)”; 14.0% “using Rotuman texts”; 10.7% “at local Rotuman language lessons”; and 5.3% “using the Rotuman language lessons website at [www.neiu.edu/~Rotuman](http://www.neiu.edu/~Rotuman)” (total N=150). Family also figured prominently in responses to the question **“30. With whom do you communicate in the Rotuman language?”** with the majority listing extended family (79.5%), parents (62.3%), and siblings and cousins (55.5%). Grandparents and “senior Rotumans in your community” were selected 43.2% and 47.9%, respectively, while “Rotuman friends your age” and “Rotuman friends online” were selected by 48.6% and 41.1%, respectively (total N=146). One expects that grandparents would have been selected more often had they been alive and present, but that would not be the case for most older adult respondents.

Answers to the question **“27. When did you start to learn Rotuman language?”** were revealing insofar as for 27.7% of respondents learning Rotuman began in primary school (10.3%), as a teenager (10.3%), as a young adult (5.2%), or as an older adult (1.9%). The majority (66.5%) learned it either as their first language or as a first language simultaneously with another language (usually with English or Fijian). Only 9 individuals answered that they had not begun to learn the language (total N=155).

Among respondents born in Rotuma or Fiji (N=119), 73.9% learned Rotuman either as a first language or as a first language simultaneously with another language, 16.8% learned prior to adulthood, and 6.7% learned as adults; only 2.5% answered that they had not yet begun to

learn the language. In contrast, among those born abroad (N=26), only 38.0% answered that they had learned Rotuman as a first language (always in conjunction with another language), 26.9% had learned prior to adulthood, 11.5% learned as an adult, and 23.1% answered that they had not yet begun to learn the language.

The main conclusion to be drawn from these data is that children born abroad are far less likely than those born in Rotuma or Fiji to learn Rotuman as a first language. Learning the language for them therefore requires a conscious effort. This raises the question of motivation, which was posed by the question, “**26. How interested are you in learning the Rotuman language?**” While the great majority (87.4%) of those who responded to this question answered that they were either motivated or very motivated (total N=167), our interest is in those whose competence is low and those who haven’t begun to learn the language. Of the 30 individuals who met these criteria and who answered this question, 66.7% indicated that they were very motivated, 23.3% responded that they were motivated, and 10.0% responded that they were slightly motivated. None of these respondents indicated that they were not at all interested.

When asked “**31. What are some of the challenges to you using the Rotuman language to speak with other Rotumans?**” 37.6% of respondents (all of whom were fluent in Rotuman) answered “no challenges.” A rank ordering of the challenges is listed in Table 17.

<b>Rank Order of Challenges to Using the Rotuman Language</b>	
I don't know enough Rotuman language to use it at all	26.2%
I know some Rotuman but I'm too shy to speak Rotuman to anyone other than my close family because I'm worried I'll make a mistake and embarrass myself	19.1%
Nobody in my household speaks Rotuman	17.7%
Rotuman grammar is really hard	12.1%
Nobody in my community uses the Rotuman language to communicate	10.6%
Rotuman pronunciation is really hard	7.1%
I have no formal teacher to correct my mistakes and encourage me	7.1%
My family doesn't think its important and don't encourage speaking Rotuman	6.4%

In general, these results suggest that lack of knowledge and lack of opportunity are the chief obstacles to proficiency in the language (total N=141).

### Learning More

The final four questions in the survey had to do with activities and resources that are being used and desired in order to learn more about Rotuman culture and language. The first question was “**32. Have you spent time trying to learn more about Rotuman culture on your own?**” to which 72.7% of respondents answered in the affirmative (total N=165), suggesting that the motivation expressed in response to previous questions translates into behavioral initiatives. That the Internet provides a significant resource, along with videos and books, is attested to by responses to the question “**33. Which of these resources have you used to learn about Rotuman culture and language?**”, which are rank ordered in Table 18 (total N=126).

<b>Rank Order of Resources Used to Learn About Rotuman Culture and Language</b>	
Archives and articles on Rotuma.net	53.2%
Home videos of Rotuman dances or ceremonies	49.2%
Videos on Rotuma.net	40.5%
Online English-Rotuman dictionary on Rotuma.net	39.7%
Videos on YouTube	38.1%
Book of myths, legends, history and ceremony <i>Seksek ‘e Hatana</i> , by Aubrey Parke	32.5%
<i>Kato‘aga: Rotuman Ceremonies</i> book by Elizabeth Inia on Rotuma.net or book	31.0%
Book of proverbs <i>Faeag ‘es Fuaga: Rotuman Proverbs</i> , by Elizabeth Inia	30.2%
<i>A New Rotuman Dictionary</i> , by Elizabeth Inia, Sophie Arntsen and others	28.6%
Book of myths and legends <i>Tales of a Lonely Island</i> , by Mesulama Titifanua	27.8%
Rotuman Language Lessons website (www.neiu.edu/~Rotuman)	23.8%
Rotuman language textbooks from Fiji Department of Education	11.1%
Rotuman Grammar book by Marit Vamarasi	7.1%

Responses to the question “**34. What activities would you like your local Rotuman community to offer to help you increase your confidence and knowledge about Rotuman language and culture?**” were quite varied, with classes teaching language and/or culture mentioned most frequently (30.7%), followed by more get-togethers or community activities (21.8%). Dance, arts & crafts, and ceremonies were mentioned by 14.9% of respondents (total N= 101). Some illustrative answers:

1. Rotuman Language classes continuing with focus on innovative ways of getting students engaged in learning a little more, perhaps this could be achieved by having the class divide up into smaller groups with a mix of adults, and younger folk focusing on a specific theme etc, then coming back & presenting to the class etc, including homework - Weekly group Rotuman language study / homework sessions - Organised community events (e.g., annual community camp over a weekend at the south coast?) where members of the Rotuman community demonstrate cultural practices e.g, making a koua, tefui etc, to show how these things are actually done, and having the learners engage in this process, have a go in actually doing it, with guidance from the demonstrators.
2. Regular Rotuman classes even if it is generated online or as a smart phone App. As you would learn French or Spanish, the Rotuman App would be ideal.
3. There is only 3 small families where i live and they are quite far. so its difficult to say. However classes would be great., or clubs.
4. I believe that the community should attract youths to participate in traditional practices for Rotuma Day because when in taumaka we learn alot of important aspects of rotuman culture.
5. Access to Rotuman literature. Use of Rotuman language in church, there is more focus on sense of church community than Rotuman community in church these days.
6. We need to speak more rotuman, be more rotuman wherever we are, because our race is dwindling and we spend more time speaking other languages etc....also support or build a strong rotuman cultural organ in our local towns or countries where we can maintain the dances, cultures and at the same time entertain.
7. themes centered around Social gatherings involving Dances, Songs, Music, Language & Food, Crafts.

The final question in the survey was “**35. What Rotuman cultural resources would you like to see more of online?**” This question also elicited a wide range of responses with language resources the most requested (21.2%), followed by information (including videos) regarding Rotuman activities such as dance and ceremonies (15.4%), and history (4.8%) (total N=104). Some illustrative responses:

1. 1) Language particularly grammar and spelling of Rotuman vocabs 2) The ways in which cultural ceremonies are to be performed 3) The rotuman dances from all over the world during Rotuma Day.
2. Different cultural ceremonies e.g. mamasa, hot‘ak hafu and other traditional ceremonies of Rotuman culture.
3. I would like to see more educational books and videos about Rotuman cultural practices and history available for viewing online.
4. More language lessons/ materials to support language studies. As my kids will grow up between Australia and Fiji, I'm concerned about how they will learn to read and write in Rotuman. I can teach them to speak fluently but will need support and resources to help them learn proper grammar. My wife is Australian and is also learning Rotuman, but she would like to have access to more comprehensive language learning resources. The ones on neiu.edu are great to get started, but then there is not much available to progress past beginner knowledge.
5. Songs and lyrics and how they are sung even dance moves so rotumans can learn from any part of the world. Rotuman songs without all the remix which spoils the whole song. A guitar would be best.

### **Summary**

Overall, the results indicate that, among those who responded to the survey, the great majority consider their identity as Rotumans to be of great importance to their self-concept and express an interest in being an integral part of the now-global Rotuman community. Correspondingly, most of those who are abroad go to considerable lengths to keep their links to other Rotumans, including relatives and friends, active, both by taking advantage of digital media like e-mail and Facebook and by visits to Fiji and Rotuma. The data also indicate that for Rotumans away from the home island, whether in Fiji’s urban centres or abroad in Australia, New Zealand, or elsewhere, maintaining proficiency in the Rotuman language and transmitting it to the younger

generation is of primary concern. Thus, there seems to be a strongly felt need to improve access to activities and resources for teaching the language to those for whom Rotuman is not a first language. Likewise, considerable interest was expressed in maintaining knowledge of Rotuman customs, history, and cultural practices such as dance and ceremonies.

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