

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLICE MOTU

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For an undetermined period prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Port Moresby area in the 1870s, the people of the Motu villages had mounted an annual trading expedition - the Hiri - to the villages of the Papuan Gulf, where they traded pots and other commodities for sago and canoe logs. This custom produced a trade language, consisting of a vocabulary predominantly Motu in content put together in forms approximating to the sentence structures of the languages of the villages visited. Most of the numerous words and affixes indicating tense, aspect, mode, person and number used in Motu were discarded, while the Motu method of indicating the negative mode was replaced by one resembling that used in the Gulf languages.

I have been told by elderly Motu that the trade language of the Hiri included in its vocabulary a number of words from the Gulf languages. If so, it must have existed in several dialects, as the villages visited included not only those of the people speaking the closely allied Toaripi and Orocolo languages, but also the villages of the Purari Delta, such as Maipua and lai, where the local languages are quite different from those just mentioned. These latter people are those commonly known in Port Moresby as Koriki, though strictly speaking the name Koriki should be applied to one of their groups only.

The trade language being already existent, it was natural that the Motu of the 1870s should regard it as a suitable channel of communication with the barbarous Britishers who landed on their shores at that time, and who obviously had little natural aptitude for learning native languages. So the language the Motu taught to the first white men to arrive amongst them, missionaries, administrators and traders alike, was the trade language. In fact, there was a definite feeling that the foreigners should not be encouraged to learn the true Motu language, and even as late as the 1920s there were a few old men in Hanuabada who insisted on speaking to me in the trade language, to the great embarrassment of their grandchildren, who were my pupils and who had been teaching me their mother tongue while I taught them mine.

Actually the break-through appears to have been made by the children of early missionaries and administrators who learned the true language from their Motu

playmates, and sometimes annoyed their parents by telling them that they couldn't speak it properly. By the 1920s all but the oldest men were happy that Europeans should learn their true language.

To revert to the 1890s: the trade language having been established as the proper medium of communication with foreigners, it was natural that it should be adopted as the lingua franca of Sir William MacGregor's police force, which at first comprised a variety of South Sea Islanders with no common mother tongue and later drew its recruits from all parts of Papua. The language thus acquired the name "Police Motu".

If the vocabulary of the original trade language contained items from the Gulf languages, they have disappeared almost entirely from Police Motu. I do not know of any Toaripi words in common use in present-day Police Motu, and I know of only one Koriki word - nakimi, meaning strictly "brother-in-law", but used for any relative or close friend. The only other common word of non-Motu Papuan origin, I know is kiki, "story", which I am told comes from the Tufi area of the Northern District.

On the other hand, modern Police Motu has a considerable English content. Out of approximately 2000 vocabulary items in the S.I.L.'s excellent Dictionary of Police Motu, roughly 200 are derived from English. A score or so are borrowings from the languages of the early Polynesian mission pastors, though some of these cannot have been originally Polynesian words, e.g. auri for "iron", while others are clearly of mission origin, e.g. basileia (from Greek) for "kingdom". Pidgin and Police Motu have come in contact with each other only since 1942, and Pidgin borrowings are very few indeed. I have heard pidgin didiman used by Police Motu speakers in the Goilala area for "agricultural officer". The Summer Institute of Linguistics team lists sikuru for "joint" and Dr. Wurm lists balusi for "aeroplane". I myself have never heard either of these used in Police Motu, but they well may be.

It is possible of course that some of the English items in Police Motu may have come in via Pidgin, but this seems unlikely in view of the fact that Police Motu has been in contact with English for almost a century, while it has been in contact with Pidgin for less than 30 years. Anyway, the vocabulary of present-day Police Motu is nearly 90% Motu in content.

Perhaps the oddest thing about the transformation of Hiri Motu into Police Motu is the fact that the part of Papua in which it is now used with greatest reluctance is the part in which it originated - the Papuan Gulf. With the passing of the Hiri the Toaripi seem to have developed an allergy towards Motu, even to the extent sometimes of pretending not to know it. At the same time they have developed a loyalty to their own tribal

tongue which has created Toaripi-speaking enclaves in every Niuginian town.

On the other hand, the Koriki have continued to use Police Motu, and indeed show such a propensity for its use that one of the tenets of the post-war Tommy Kabu movement was the abandonment of the tribal tongue and the promotion of Police Motu as a national language.

What is the future of Police Motu as a lingua franca? It has been suggested by some that Pidgin is displacing it, but I think that this is a misunderstanding of the situation. It is true that Papuans exposed to Pidgin learn it easily and show readiness to use it when they are in the company of New Guineans or pisinophile Europeans. It is also true that Papuan M.H.As make speeches in Pidgin in the House of Assembly but, the constitution of the House being as it is, this is just political realism. But I have never heard Papuans using it among themselves except jokingly. Well-educated Papuans will generally talk to one another in English; otherwise in Police Motu.

Ten years ago, when I was involved in primary education at Koke, English was the language of the classroom and Police Motu the language of the playground. This was so not only in my own school, with its large proportion of Central District children, but also in the Anglican School next door, the majority of whose pupils came from the Northern District. There has been some trend since that time towards the use of English as a playground language, but I have noticed that pupils from the Kifakila school complex passing my house at Kaugere can still be heard talking among themselves in Motu, and this applies to High School as well as Primary School pupils. One only has to stand in Musgrave Street on Saturday morning and listen to the talk of the passing groups of Papuans to realise how extensively Police Motu is still used.

I believe that for a long time to come Police Motu will continue to be the lingua franca most acceptable to the majority of Papuans, and that as time goes on it will be displaced by English rather than by Pidgin.

In passing I would point out that while it is true that Papuans exposed to Pidgin readily learn it, it is equally true that New Guineans exposed to Police Motu learn that language with equal ease. I know a number of New Guineans in Port Moresby who can speak Police Motu very well indeed.

Assuming that Police Motu will have a continuing usefulness as a lingua franca in the foreseeable future, the question of finding a more suitable name for it arises, especially as, following the post-war amalgamation of the Papua and New Guinean police forces, it has largely dropped out of use as a lingua franca within the police force, though

of course, used extensively by police in their contacts with Papuans. I hope that in the discussion which follows this paper someone will come up with a bright idea for a new name for this language.

In their study of Motu and Police Motu made in 1962-63, the Summer Institute of Linguistics team distinguished between two dialects of Police Motu, which they named "central" and "non-central" respectively, and recommended that the type of Police Motu spoken in the Western District of Papua should be adopted as standard in preparing material for use by mass media. I am inclined to disagree, and to suggest that the best form of Police Motu to use as a standard is the form spoken by the people of the Purari Delta, commonly known as the Koriki.

I advance this view for the following reasons:-

1. It is a lineal descendant of the Hiri trade language, as the Police Motu of the Western District is not.
2. As has been pointed out, the Koriki people like it and may therefore be expected to have evolved a likeable form of it.
3. It is in effect an intermediate form between the "central" and "non-central" dialects.

With regard to this latter point, it is interesting to find that Mr. Ron Lean, who has prepared material in Police Motu for the Bible Society, has endeavoured to strike a happy medium between "central" and "non-central" dialects, and in doing so has arrived at a form very like "Koriki" Motu.