

BENEFITS OF A UNIFIED PIDGIN ORTHOGRAPHY

FOR

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Tingting bilong mi i olsem. Planti manmeri ol i save Tok Pisin na ol i save toktok wantaim pren bilong ol na ol pren i harim gut. Tasol, insait long dispela lain manmeri i no gat planti manmeri ol i save gut long rait, nogat. Ol i save bihainim tingting bilong ol yet na raitim pas na salim i go long ol pren, na ol pren i no inap kaunim na save gut, nogat tru.

Orait, mi gat tripela tingting bilong stretim dispela hevi. Namba wan i olsem. Long yia 1956 ol i makim pasin bilong raitim Tok Pisin na mi tingim olsem. Olgeta manmeri ol i mas bihainim wanpela rot bilong raitim Tok Pisin. Mi tingim gavman i mas stretim dispela rot na ol tisa i mas skulim gut ol sumatim long dispela rot.

Namba tu i olsem. Tru, em i gutpela samting gavman i pulim Tok Pisin i kam insait long praimer skul. Tasol, mi tingim em i gutpela moa ol i ken skulim bikpela manmeri wantaim. Tok Pisin inap long helpim ol long save gut long olgeta kain kain samting.

Namba tri i olsem. Insait long dispela kantri i gat planti tok ples na planti lain manmeri. Tasol, Tok Pisin inap long bungim yumi olgeta na yumi kamap olsem wanpela lain tasol. Em tasol.

What can a unified Pidgin orthography do for us? This paper evaluates this question in relation to three goals toward which the use of Pidgin may take us. First, we have a great deal of general information to communicate to people throughout the country and Pidgin is a chief vehicle of such communication. Second, we see possibilities for further use of Pidgin in education. Third, language is a major vehicle of nationalism, and as the major language of the country, Pidgin will surely function in this way. My general conclusion is that a unified Pidgin orthography will improve the usefulness of Pidgin.

In considering this topic, we are talking about written communication. Someone has a message to get across in written form to another person. He takes pencil and paper in hand and a mental process begins through which he transfers the message into written symbols. The Pidgin writer knows Pidgin primarily as a spoken language. A written form of the language is to him shadowy or even non-existent. It certainly is not primary to him; rather the spoken form of the language is basic and primary.

The Pidgin writer impatiently scratches out the best approximation of his spoken form of the language using whatever orthography he knows. Little thought is given to similarity or difference between his present spelling and any previously used. If all his writing experience is in English his written Pidgin will look very much like English. If he first became literate in a vernacular or some other lingua franca his written Pidgin will be strongly influenced by this. He feels that he is writing Pidgin of necessity, not because it was intended to be written.

I have slightly overdrawn this picture to develop the point that our disunified orthography is based on a feeling about the language more than on any lack of official action. Official action was taken in 1956 but the problem is still with us, though there has been improvement.

The time is ripe for reconsideration of the 1956 orthography and for implementation of an agreed upon standard. Still we ask ourselves: Are the benefits sufficient to outweigh the expense and work of standardising? Are the confusions generated by our present non-conformity really that bad? If we standardise, how can the idea be sold to those publishing materials and to the general populace? My answers to these vital questions follow.

#### General Communication

With a unified orthography used for general communication we anticipate that there will be more clarity and less mixing-up of one word with another. More of the intended message will get through at the other end. With a unified orthography any person or office that is seeking to communicate in Pidgin may then refer to a standard. Spelling consistency will gradually reduce our present confusion.

Here are a few examples of the kind of confusion which we have at present. The letters *b*, *v*, and *w* are commonly interchanged so that there is confusion with such words as: *vaea* or *baia*, *giwim* or *givim* and *bokim* or *wokim*.

The letters *l* and *r*, and sometimes *d*, are interchanged in confusing fashion: *lespera* or *dispela*, *rip* or *lip*, *siteletim* or *stretim*, *tulu* or *tru*, *rigrig* or *liklik*, *rong* or *long* and *riwai* or *diwai*.

Vowels are placed within consonant clusters in inconsistent fashion: *Febuluali* or *Februari*, *bulukim* or *brukim*, *siteletem* or *stretim*, *tulu* or *tru* and *stolong* or *strong*.

The letter *h* is omitted or added: *ap* or *hap*, *askim* or *haskim*, *biain* or *bihain* and *sotpela* or *sohotopela*.

The letters *k* and *g* are interchanged: *megim* or *mekim*, *liglig* or *liklik* and *bigpela* or *bikpela*.

Special letters and symbols from other languages are used: *bâsman*, *tiŋtiŋ* and *migiŋ*.

The letters *y* and *w* are written inconsistently: *iet* or *yet*, *anem* or *wanem*, *ovanfala* or *wanpela* and *inday* or *indai*.

English spelling creeps in even among those who do not speak it: *Jeal* or *yar*, *jou*, *you* or *yu*, *quik* or *kwik*, *bigfala* or *bikpela*, *house* or *haus*, *prease* or *ples*, *Deal* (Dear - salutation of letter) and *loat* or *rot*.

Here are a few examples of words which may easily be confused because of these problems:

<i>ret</i>	'red'	<i>let</i>	'belt'
<i>rait</i>	'write'	<i>lait</i>	'light'
<i>wel</i>	'oil'	<i>bel</i>	'stomach'
<i>wasket</i>	'chin'	<i>basket</i>	'basket'
<i>dai</i>	'die'	<i>lai</i>	'lie'
<i>daun</i>	'down'	<i>raun</i>	'round'

When I receive a letter in Pidgin I usually have to read it out loud in order to make sense out of the confused spelling. The flow of speech gives clues to individual words that are difficult. But this is a slow and inefficient means of getting information. If general communication by means of Pidgin is going to increase as we expect it to, then the standard of writing must keep pace.

There is a great diversity of dialects and idiolects of Pidgin. Everyone speaks it a little differently. This problem is apparent in the examples given above. Because of this, dictionaries and official spelling lists are extremely important. The translator or writer will be able to refer to these lists and dictionaries and immediately have at his fingertips the country-wide standard. The person who writes Pidgin only occasionally may easily forget how to spell some of those troublesome words on which at present there is tremendous diversity.

With consistency of spelling in published materials people will become more conscious that there is a standard which is being conformed to. Once a unified orthography is attained, I would like to see it given some publicity in order to gain interest and support. The benefit to be gained at this point is a general upgrading of the standards of writing and a change away from the idea that anything goes. By this increase of precision Pidgin will become an infinitely more useful means of communication. I think that this upgrading will take place at a snail's pace unless Pidgin writing is taught in schools.

#### Education

We are in the middle of a great debate on the possible use of Pidgin in primary education. I believe that this is an extremely vital question deserving continuing discussion and research from a number of points.

There are many potential educational uses for Pidgin among those who speak it: vocational training, basic literacy, general adult education, orientation to government policy and law, religion, and possibly primary education. A unified orthography makes it possible to have country-wide standards and materials in each of these.

Capell (1962: 89) notes the disagreement over orthography which existed in regard to Tolai (Kuanua) between the Methodist and Catholic missions: "A conference called by the Education Department arrived at agreement on spelling, as a result of which it became possible for the Department to issue reading matter that could be used equally well in the schools of either Mission. The language now offers a wide field for educational work as a result of this agreement. The remaining languages of the group have been written, in practically every case, in the orthography already adopted for Kuanua." In this case the

standardisation of the orthography brought a wider usefulness for the language as a direct consequence.

In suggesting standardisation for materials such as this we imply not only orthography and spelling but also a standard dialect as well. A standardised spelling assumes that a particular dialect is taken as the norm and that where there is diversity the norm prevails

With technical education in particular, a standardised spelling will avoid using the same spellings for different technical terms. It is difficult enough even with every advantage to communicate technical material. An unnecessary overlap in spelling certainly does not help.

A standardised orthography will make it possible to teach spelling in Pidgin with more certainty. If there is a standard to refer to, then students in school may learn to refine and correct their Pidgin spelling under guidance to a country-wide standard. Otherwise teachers are using a multiplicity of standards wherever Pidgin literacy is being taught. At present there is a marked tendency to regard English as the upcoming standard of spelling for Pidgin. I believe this idea needs to be vigorously combatted in order to avoid total confusion in Pidgin spelling. Translators and writers need help and training on this.

Everyone knows that when it comes to printing books there is financial advantage in standardisation and consolidation. The larger the run, the less the cost per book. One would hope also that a book which was scheduled for widespread use would be able to attract the best people for writing, illustrating, and editing. Obviously any government publication is going to be printed in only one orthography and dialect and the choice of these is important.

#### Nationhood

Pidgin is an important part of nationhood for many people of the country. Though it has many diverse dialects and will continue to have these for many years to come, it is basically one language. A unified writing system for Pidgin will strengthen this oneness even though pronunciation will continue to vary.

There is a real sense in which the writing of a language gives it prestige in the eyes of those who read it and with those on the outside looking on. I think that this is no less true with Pidgin as with other languages. Hall (1955: 57) notes: "Some of its critics have held this against Pidgin as if it were somehow not a real language because its spelling is not fixed." The standardised orthography has had a good effect especially through its adoption by Mihalic in his Pidgin grammar and dictionary.

I believe that one benefit of the unification of Pidgin orthography could be the establishment of a national language office to promote and unify the development of the language. Such an office could seek to maintain some consistency in the introduction of new terms to the language and the spelling used for them and could assist writers and translators by suggesting means within the language for expressing new concepts. Such an office would, of course, not devote itself just to Pidgin since a number of our languages have national significance. Such an office would need to take a multifaceted view of language development concentrating on assisting journalists and writers to express

things in various ways.

It is important, I feel, to distinguish the situation as it is from what we would like to see. We would all be extremely pleased if all the adults in the country were thoroughly bilingual in English. We would also be pleased if this goal were attainable within a short period of time. We are all interested in communication. We want to get extremely important things across to people now so as to achieve development goals. Ten years from now will be too late. The children who are in primary school now are not the ones we are most interested in communicating with. We must get things across to the total adult leadership of this country in order to help them participate in building a nation. We could wish that Pidgin were not now bothered by dialectal differences and interference from local languages. Since this is not the case we must start where we are to draw diverse strands together. I feel that a unified orthography will have at least some effect in unifying the spoken language. Pidgin is not the whole answer to our country's needs, but it is an extremely vital part of the communications picture. Because Pidgin has a future, it is important to spend time now improving its usefulness. A unified written Pidgin will be like a sharp tool to those who use it.

My specific recommendations are:

- (1) that the orthography be standardised.
- (2) that as many teeth as possible be put in this through
  - (a) publicity efforts and distribution of spellings lists,
  - (b) the establishment of a national language office, and
  - (c) action within the administration to ensure its use.
- (3) that adult literacy programmes in Pidgin be vigorously pursued where this is possible.
- (4) that Pidgin spelling be taught in the school system.
- (5) that anglicised spelling of Pidgin words be avoided.
- (6) that the training of translators be upgraded.
- (7) that Pidgin be utilised extensively as a means of public and official communication.

#### References

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