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TOK PISIN STANDARDISATION AND LANGUAGE ENGINEERING

CAN ENGLISH AND PIDGIN BE KEPT APART?

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Mi gat wanpela askim: olsem manmeri bilong Papua Niugini bai ol i miksim Tok Pisin na Tok Inglis o nogat? Mi laik tingting long dispela na mi laik tok piksa olsem.

Ating tupela lain manmeri bai i stap. Wanpela lain i bikpela na bungim olgeta man husat i no go long hai skul. Na dispela lain em i lain bilong ol wokman. Ating bihain Tok Pisin i karamapim planti manmeri bilong dispela lain. Tasol narapela lain manmeri ol i pinisim hai skul na yunivesiti na kisim bikpela wok bilong gavman na bisnis, ating bihain Tok Pisin i no karamapim dispela lain. Ating bihain Tok Inglis i kamap olsem namba wan tok ples bilong ol.

Tasol sapos dispela lain wokman bai ol i lukim kako na sidaun gut long lain manmeri ol i bin mekim Tok Inglis, ating bai ol wokman i laik bihainim pasin na nek bilong dispela lain hia na ol i kisim sampela Tok Inglis na miksim wantaim Tok Pisin. Olsem bihain Tok Inglis Tok Pisin i miks.

Tasol bihain, taim Tok Inglis Tok Pisin i miks, yumi no ken makim manmeri i go long tupela lain tasol. Nogat. Sapos ol i mekim olsem, bai planti lain i kamap. Olsem sampela mekim long Tok Inglis tasol. Na narapela ol i save miksim liklik Tok Pisin wantaim Tok Inglis. Na narapela ol i save miksim hap Tok Inglis na hap Tok Pisin. Na narapela ol i save miksim liklik Tok Inglis wantaim Tok Pisin, olsem olsem. Na las bilong ol, ol i save mekim Tok Pisin tasol. Em sotpela tok piksa bilong Papua Niugini mi autim hia.

Tasol dispela pasin yumi makim long tok piksa hia ol manmeri bilong planti kantri bilong Aprika ol i bin mekim pinis long tok pisin bilong ol yet. Ating no gut sampela saveman na man bilong gavman ol i mekim nating na senisim Tok Pisin o makim sampela lo bilong Tok Pisin. Ol i mas save gut long ol pipel bilong wanpela wanpela kantri ol i bin mekim pinis. Olsem na mi autim tok.

The present moment, as I need hardly remind anyone here, is a critical one for language planning in Papua New Guinea. Decisions that will be taken in forthcoming months will inevitably have a far-reaching effect on the linguistic future of the nation. It is of the greatest importance, therefore, that those concerned in these momentous

decisions should be fully aware of the many factors that are involved. Of course, most of these factors are well known to all concerned and have been extensively debated. In this talk, I would like to touch upon one factor which has not perhaps had such wide consideration.

The critical issue in language planning for Papua New Guinea is, of course, the relative roles to be played by English and Tok Pisin--to give what is sometimes called Neo-Melanesian or Pidgin or Niuginian the name which most of its speakers use. Since there are powerful arguments in favour of retaining English as at least the language of higher education, and since there will doubtless be powerful political pressures to retain it for other purposes also, one of the likeliest results of the present 'national language question' is that, while Tok Pisin will inevitably remain the principal medium of popular discourse, and while it may well be accepted as the official national language, a large measure of English will continue to be taught, and actively used, on the higher social levels of the new society.

Under such circumstances, can English and Tok Pisin be kept apart? At first sight, this may seem a naive question. The English or American diplomat who learned French when French was the language of diplomacy did not thereby affect his English; the Dutch or German businessman who nowadays may require a fluent command of English does not thereby affect his native German or Dutch. Why, then, should not the future citizen of Papua New Guinea acquire and use English while retaining his native Tok Pisin as his primary language in its pristine form?

In fact, there are a variety of reasons why the Tok Pisin-English situation is different from the English-French or Dutch-English ones.

In the first place, one can hardly compare a situation involving old established national languages with one which involves an old established language on the one hand and a vigorous but very recently developed language on the other. Established languages carry with them the accumulated weight of centuries, even millenia of tradition. They are loaded with the culture of the societies which use them; and just because they are so intimately involved with all that the native holds dear and all that he uses to define himself and distinguish himself from members of other societies, they generate tremendous language loyalty. The individual is the best guardian of the purity of his language; no matter how many other languages he may know, he will actively resist any encroachment of the foreign. Yet even against such resistance, alien influences can make headway. No one is prouder of his language than the speaker of Spanish; and yet, if you read the sports page of any Latin-American newspaper, you will see how far, in this sphere at least, he has allowed his tongue to be eroded by English.

The cultural content of Tok Pisin is inevitably much less than that of established languages, simply because it remains, for the vast majority of its speakers, a second language. For such speakers, the repository of their culture is their own vernacular. It seems reasonable to suppose that language loyalty, like political or patriotic loyalty, is indivisible; if you remain loyal to your vernacular, as most Tok Pisin speakers must for the foreseeable future, then that is what you will try to preserve intact, and you will have precious little energy or desire left over to preserve intact the form of your contact language.

One could argue that language loyalty must inevitably develop among the small but growing body of Papua New Guinean citizens who speak it as their native tongue. This may be so; but we must remember that such native speakers are, in the nature of things, likely to appear only in those sectors of society where traditional influences are weakest and where the speaker is most exposed to the forces of European culture, including the English language.

This leads us naturally to the second reason why the present situation must differ from the situation of bilingualism in developed countries. Under colonial regimes, there is relatively little class differentiation among the indigenous peoples; all are characterised by their relative powerlessness vis-a-vis the expatriate bureaucracy that handles the bulk of administrative tasks and the expatriate business class which controls the commanding heights of the economy. When political independence is achieved, social changes take place with very great rapidity; new indigenous business and administrative classes spring into existence, and a society which was formerly unstratified, or stratified only along traditional lines, suddenly assumes the class-based hierarchy characteristic of the more industrially developed nations. This virtual creation of new classes is accompanied not only by a progressive differentiation of life-styles--cars, refrigerators, TV sets, air-conditioning--but also by a progressive differentiation in forms of speech. In extreme cases (as, for example, some African countries) this process has led to the creation of indigenous elites totally separated from the traditional culture of the masses, neglecting or disparaging the vernacular tongues, speaking only English or French or Portuguese even among themselves, and thus, inevitably, indifferent or even hostile towards many of the aspirations of those they govern.

There can be no doubt that the possession of a vigorous and relatively prestigious contact language--something which most areas of West and Central Africa lack--will go a long way to prevent the development of any such extremes in Papua New Guinea. However, the fact remains that English, as a world language, as the language of New Guinea's nearest developed neighbour, and as the language of one of the world's three current superpowers, must continue to retain high prestige. The danger is that the newly developing middle and upper classes in Papua New Guinea, who will have had an extensive education in English, may well decide to make the use of English among themselves the badge of their own social distinctiveness from the urban working class and the masses of the rural population.

The basic reason why English-speaking Dutchmen or French-speaking Americans do not corrupt their own languages is that they do not use the foreign language to converse with their fellow countrymen. The typical Western bilingual keeps his languages in separate compartments, so to speak; each is associated with a completely different set of interlocutors, manners, customs and expectations, so that there is relatively little interinfluence. Provided that the citizens of Papua New Guinea categorically insist on using Tok Pisin with one another, reserving English exclusively for contacts with native speakers of English, then the danger suggested in the title of this paper can hardly arise. But the experience of literally dozens of developing nations over the past twenty-five years indicates that Papua New Guinea will be indeed fortunate if she can escape their fate. For in almost all these countries, there have developed groups who, rightly or wrongly, seem to feel more

at home in a European language than they do in any of the vernacular or contact languages which the mass of their fellow citizens speak.

Again, it could be argued that the mere fact of using a foreign language on one's home ground does not automatically corrupt one's local language. It is well known, for instance, that eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russian aristocrats used French with one another without seriously affecting the Russian language; similarly, the elite of Haiti traditionally use standard French among themselves and reserve Creole French for their contacts with the monolingual Creole masses. Such situations, where a 'high' and a 'low' language co-exist side by side have been described by Ferguson as *diglossia*. Diglossia can be a very stable phenomenon, persisting for centuries; such persistence, however, depends entirely on the persistence of a rigidly stratified, quasi-feudal social structure. If that structure begins to break up, *provided that at the same time the old norms are retained* (obviously, Lenin and Trotsky didn't talk to one another in French!) then the two languages begin on the path of mutual influence which, if unchecked, will one day lead to a bridge of what Jack Richards has called "interlanguages" between them--in other words, a linguistic continuum. There is evidence that this process has already begun in Haiti, and it would surely be much further advanced but for the economic stagnation into which that country has fallen.

For it must be emphasised that it is social mobility that breaks up distinctions between languages. In a stratified society, where everyone knows his place and knows that nothing he can do will change that place, the speaker has no motivation whatsoever to imitate the speech of his social superiors--indeed, any such behaviour may invite negative sanctions from those superiors. But wherever there is the chance of upward mobility, the mobile speaker will attempt to acquire the manners, including the speech manners, of the group to which he aspires.

If that group habitually uses English in its everyday life, then he will attempt to acquire English. But the probability is that he will have had a much less extensive training in English than those he seeks to emulate; inevitably, therefore, what he speaks will be a kind of English heavily flavoured with Tok Pisin. This in turn will become the target of speakers a little lower down the social ladder, who will speak a variety of English yet more admixed with Tok Pisin. By this time, the accumulation of features which are neither truly English nor truly Tok Pisin will be so considerable as to form a sizeable part of the input to the language acquisition device of any child growing up in an urban area; and since the input mix of English, Tok Pisin and the hybrid varieties will vary proportionately for every such child, it will not be long before we have an urban spectrum containing all linguistically possible varieties intermediate between Tok Pisin and English. The process will then filter back into the country along the lorry routes, and airlines, and the continuum situation will be complete.

I would like to emphasise that the picture I have drawn is in no sense a hypothetical or a speculative one. It simply describes a process that has already taken place in a large number of societies where a pidginised or creolised language originally based on English exists alongside standard English. But the remarkable thing is that it is a process to which language planners have paid very little attention.

On second thought, though, this perhaps is not so very remarkable.

The responsibility lies with professional linguists. Linguists in general have simply ignored these processes. Believing, as so many of them have done, in the individuality and unmixability of languages, they have simply written off the kind of thing people actually speak as parole, or performance error, or interference--anyway, something that could not be and fortunately need not be described. And they have continued to write monolithic grammars of idealised pidgin or creole languages (such as Beryl Bailey's grammar of Jamaican Creole, or Schneider's grammar of Cameroons Pidgin), even where it was obvious that a continuum situation existed and that the 'pure' pidgin or creole might be spoken only by a minority within the communities concerned. The fault lies, of course, not with individual linguists, but with the series of theoretical strait jackets into which general linguistics has put itself over the past century, and from which it is only now beginning to be released.

I shall take only two examples of the process--chosen because I have extensive first-hand knowledge of one, plus a little first-hand and plenty of second-hand experience of the other, and because both have occurred in countries which, like Papua New Guinea, lie within the tropics and have fairly mixed populations. In the first, Guyana, a situation of diglossia existed, under slavery, up until the first half of the nineteenth century. The slaves spoke a creole at least as remote from English as Tok Pisin is; the planters spoke English, and that was that. With the ending of slavery, all that changed rapidly. Towns sprang up, and many of the former slaves moved to the towns where they were heavily exposed to English. By the end of the nineteenth century there had come into existence the linguistic continuum that exists in Guyana to this day. The language lying at one end of the continuum has changed little if at all from the early nineteenth century creole; it remains totally unintelligible to the native speaker of standard English unless, as is the case with Tok Pisin, he learns it like a foreign language. The language lying at the other end consists of standard international English with a slight regional accent. In between there exists an unbroken chain of intermediate varieties. The uninitiated may wonder how communication is maintained in such circumstances, but in fact it is maintained, and any person born in Guyana will acquire at least a passive competence in all the varieties of the whole continuum. However, one perhaps undesirable result is that no Guyanese can open his mouth without announcing in pretty precise terms, his social standing, education and general background. A creole continuum fits in very well with a society which is stratified, not on rigid caste lines, but into an almost infinite hierarchy of overlapping grades, and it is probably one reason why Guyana, a state which overtly proclaims a strong egalitarianism, has never come within miles of achieving this goal.

The other case I would like to put before you is that of Nigeria. In Nigeria, in the early years of the present century, there was a small handful of educated Nigerians who spoke English, a fair number of uneducated Nigerians, particularly along the coast, who spoke Nigerian Pidgin, and nothing in between. The situation there was much more similar to that of Papua New Guinea than was the Guyanese one, since in Nigeria, as distinct from Guyana, the vast bulk of the population retained its vernacular languages; moreover, the situation persisted until the end of colonial rule came in sight.

Over the last twenty years, however, there have been very considerable changes. Both English and pidgin have spread widely, the former through education, the latter both through the growing geographic mobility of the working class, and, as here, through the utility of a contact language in a country divided between many language communities. The result, once again, was the birth of a wide spectrum of varieties intermediate between Nigerian Pidgin and English. There as elsewhere this spectrum has been almost totally ignored by descriptive linguists, although its existence is patently obvious to anyone who has read the novels of Achebe or the plays of Solinka, or who has listened to Nigerian radio serials such as *Save Journey*. No matter how much these intermediate levels may be ignored or ridiculed or actively condemned by educators and linguists, they continue to thrive, since each one, at a particular social level, represents an access of prestige to the people on that level--it is 'more like English' than what they have been accustomed to speak. It is true that Nigerian Pidgin has never had the prestige that Tok Pisin has acquired--no one, to the best of my knowledge, has ever used it to make a speech in the Nigerian house of assembly, for example. But what legislators say or do does not have all that much effect on the fate of a language; it is what the aspiring electrician or salesman or lower echelon government clerk says and does that will ultimately determine the future relationship between English and Tok Pisin.

Finally, one must point out, the historic relationship between Tok Pisin and English provides another point of weakness. At least four-fifths of the Tok Pisin lexicon is quite obviously English-derived; this becomes clear once one is familiar with a few pretty regular sound changes. The bilingual English-Tok Pisin speaker is bound to reacquire the English sounds that are lost or have fallen together in Tok Pisin. Once he has done this, the connection between, say, *paitim* and *fight* is going to become obvious to him. Is he going to preserve the distinction, or will *paitim* become *faitim*, and if it does, how long before the speaker starts variably deleting the *-im* transitivity marker in selected environments? Or take a grammatical morpheme such as *ken*, which is phonetically no more remote from *can* than the *kin* or *kn* of many metropolitan varieties of English. Here already there is a possibility of merger. The construction *ken i* + verb indicates a definite future, but *ken* alone plus verb indicates permission. However, 'permissive' *ken* takes *i* before verbs of motion and location, so that *em i ken i go* is already ambiguous between 'he may go' and 'he will definitely go'. Moreover, the distinction between the different types of future expressed by *ken i*, *laik*, *klosap* and *nau* is one which is not made in English. One would therefore prophesy that the bilingual English-Tok Pisin speaker will expand the use of *ken* in two directions: (1) initially at the expense of *ken i*, which will cease to be a future marker, and (2) eventually (since permission and capacity blur even in many English contexts) at the expense of *inap*. The result will be that eventually *ken* will become much closer in range of meaning English *can*.

There is no time to discuss other similar cases, but I am sure there are many more where the distinctions between Tok Pisin and English could get progressively eroded. Moreover, each case would be only a specific instance of the working of a very general linguistic principle: the speaker's tendency to merge similar items in order to effect an overall simplification in his grammar. This tendency probably works to some

extent for all bilinguals, but here it would be reinforced by all the social and psychosocial pressures I have discussed today.

There exists, then, at least the possibility of linguistic varieties intermediate between Tok Pisin and English coming into existence, and of New Guinea developing a linguistic continuum similar to those which exist in Jamaica, Guyana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and many other countries. Whether such a state of affairs is desirable or undesirable, to be encouraged or discouraged, is a matter for the legislators rather than the linguists to decide. But it is the linguist's task to see that those concerned with language planning are fully aware of all the possible consequences of their actions. The outcome I have depicted is so common in modern societies that, at the very least, it should be carefully investigated before the future roles for Tok Pisin and English are finally decided.