

LEGITIMACY OF PIDGIN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
PAPUA NEW GUINEA TOWARD NATIONHOOD

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Mi laik tokaut long faipela samting bilong Tok Pisin. Namba wan i olsem. Tok Pisin i no inap pinis, nogat. As bilong Tok Pisin i wankain as bilong olgeta tok ples. Na taim olgeta manmeri ol i laik autim tingting bilong ol em gutpela ol i autim long Tok Pisin. I no hatwok tumas. Yumi save long ol memba bilong Haus Asembli. Bipo, long yia 1964, sampela memba tasol ol i autim tingting bilong ol na autim long Tok Pisin. Nau i no olsem. Nau ating klostu olgeta memba ol i save autim tingting bilong ol na mekim long Tok Pisin. Na lain bilong ol minista i olsem tasol.

Namba tu i olsem. Manmeri bilong olgeta hap bilong Papua Niugini ol i save Tok Pisin. Tru, olgeta manmeri ol i no save Tok Pisin. Tasol sapos sampela manmeri i no save gut Tok Pisin, orait sampela man bilong tanim tok ol i ken tanim tok na toksave long ol long tok ples na ol i ken klia gut.

Namba tri i olsem. Tok Pisin inap bungim olgeta manmeri bilong Papua Niugini na ol i kamap olsem wanpela lain tasol.

Namba foa i olsem. Ating em gutpela samting bihain olgeta manmeri bilong Papua Niugini ol i kisim Tok Pisin na holim em olsem namba tu tok ples bilong ol. Na olsem Tok Pisin bai i kamap olsem namba wan tok ples bilong Papua Niugini.

Namba faiv i olsem. Ol i mas pulim Tok Pisin i kam insait long yunivesiti bilong yumi na ol sumatim i ken kisim save long en. Na ol manmeri na sumatim bilong yunivesiti ol i mas autim tingting bilong ol na toksave long ol pipel. Tasol ol i mas mekim long Tok Pisin na olgeta manmeri ol i ken harim gut. Em tasol.

#### Introduction

Papua New Guinea is comparatively the largest grouping of islands in the South Pacific region with a land mass of 184,000 square miles and a light average population density of about fourteen to a square mile. Density, however, varies from about 1.5 in the Western District to 60 in one of the Highland districts and is much higher in a few particular areas, especially in most parts of the highlands area. Ninety-five per cent of Papua New Guinea's population are predominantly rural dwellers who speak hundreds of dialects. Therefore the task of nation-building is especially difficult on the account of diversity of ethnic, tribal and linguistic groups and the rugged formidable terrain which has made

the movement of goods and people very much more difficult and expensive.

With that factual introductory note about the social and topographical situations in Papua New Guinea it is logical for one to assume that Pidgin as a media of communication has a legitimate and significant role in the whole country's development.

I would now like to divide the topic into five subtopics and deal with them separately. The subtopics are as follows: (1) Linguistic viability of Pidgin, (2) Medium of communication, (3) Symbol of unity, (4) National language, and (5) Position of the University of Papua New Guinea.

#### Linguistic Viability of Pidgin

The chief difficulty facing any person who has been either so 'school-up' in a linguistic analyst institution or has no appreciation of language as an art, is to be readily prepared to look at any particular language objectively. For language is something we tend to take for granted, something with which we are familiar from childhood in a practical, unreflecting way. And, as has often been observed, it requires a particularly strong effort to look at familiar things afresh. Nor is it merely our intuitive or practical familiarity with language that stands in the way of its objective examination. There are all sorts of social and nationalistic prejudices associated with language, and many popular misconceptions festered by the distorted version of traditional grammar that is frequently taught in the schools.

To free one's mind of these prejudices and misconceptions is indeed difficult, but it is both a necessary and a rewarding first step toward the realisation of an art that is conceptual and viable to exist in any one given society. The question immediately comes to one's mind--is Pidgin in fact viable linguistically? The answer to this question is obvious--Pidgin is viable linguistically for these reasons:

- (a) The fundamental elements of a language can be found in Pidgin.
- (b) An utterance can be slotted into the various componential compartments as far as the theory of transformational grammar seems to have advocated.
- (c) Phonetic structure justifies and legitimises Pidgin's existence as a linguistic contingent in the universal framework of 'lingua francas'.
- (d) Semantically speaking, Pidgin has proven to be viable in the observations made about the understanding of Pidgin in the last three national elections, the debates in the House of Assembly, and finally, the increasing meaningfulness in the Papua New Guinea Cabinet. Table A presents some rough estimates of the increasing use of Pidgin in the House of Assembly debates and the Cabinet and Ministry meetings of the Papua New Guinea Government.

The rapid growth of Pidgin usage as indicated by the rising percentages in this schedule implies that Pidgin is becoming a more meaningful media of communication. Whilst on the topic of semantics, I would add that the news media in Papua New Guinea, particularly the radio network (ABC and Government Radio Stations) have accepted the meaningfulness of Pidgin.

Table A

## House of Assembly

|         |     |
|---------|-----|
| 1964-68 | 40% |
| 1968-72 | 60% |
| 1972-73 | 95% |

## A.E.C., to Cabinet and Ministry

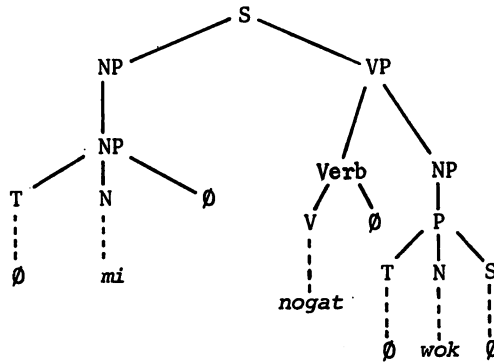
|         |                 |     |
|---------|-----------------|-----|
| 1964-68 | Under Secretary | 25% |
| 1968-72 | A.E.C.          | 45% |
| 1972-73 | Cabinet         | 85% |

(e) The general ability of Pidgin to be flexible has an extra linguistic advantage of constant growth. The challenge put to the linguists is this; whether or not standardisation of a particular language's terminology and expressions is in fact a set-back in the science of linguistics which should be a descriptive and not a prescriptive science.

As a feedback to the first two points outlined above, I would like to diagram a Pidgin sentence or utterance using transformational grammar and sector analysis techniques.

Sentence: *Mi nogat wok*

Transformational Generative Grammar:



Sector Analysis



I would like to leave that part of the paper at this stage and proceed on to the next subtopic.

Medium of Communication

Beyond all doubts, the wide coverage of the use of Pidgin amongst its speakers has established a firm ground for bridging the communication gap between the existing classes or categories of people in Papua New Guinea. Whilst it is true to say that the majority of the country's

population do not speak or understand Pidgin, nevertheless those who speak Pidgin seem to communicate reasonably well with the 'have-nots' through an interpreter. It is not surprising for one to realise that politicians, administrators and churchmen during the last decade in the history of Papua New Guinea have used Pidgin with confidence and sometimes with local humour integrated into the whole dialogue. At large, it has been proven that Pidgin as a medium of communication, has a semantic foundation.

The need for Pidgin to be taught in schools, particularly at primary level, has been indicated by the Minister for Education and supported by the Church Mission Agencies of education. The two opening statements of the Church Mission Committee on Pidgin Curriculum for Primary Schools said this:

"(1) The committee of indigenous church leaders recognises the amount of basic education being given to some 40,000 children by about 1,000 teachers in Pidgin and other vernaculars. It recognises that such basic education is a vital contribution to the development of Papua New Guinea, and seems to be within the scope of present educational thinking as indicated by statements of the Minister for Education.

"(2) The present situation demonstrates the great need for developing a common four year primary curriculum in Pidgin which can also be translated into other major vernaculars and adapted to regional needs."

At this point I would like to turn to some of the interviews I have made with various groups in relation to the use of Pidgin. My classification is a very general one indeed, therefore I will be using only the average percentage in this illustration. There are four categories I have established as grounds of generalisation: (1) Field Situation, (2) Headquarters Situation, (3) Home Situation, and (4) Others.

#### *Field Situation*

In this section the interviews have been concentrated mainly on the Government field officers due to the fact that the majority of field workers are employed by at least one of the eighteen Government departments. Table B presents the percentage schedule for the average use of Pidgin in a day.

Table B

|   | <i>Duty</i> | <i>Off Duty</i> |
|---|-------------|-----------------|
| <i>Labour Officers--12</i>                  | 80%         | 20%             |
| <i>Kiaps--45</i>                            | 95%         | 5%              |
| <i>Didiman--30</i>                          | 95.5%       | 4.5%            |
| <i>Business Extension Officers--6</i>       | 95.5%       | 4.5%            |
| <i>P.W.D. Officers--10</i>                  | 80.5%       | 19.5%           |
| <i>Local Government Council Advisers--8</i> | 90%         | 10%             |

Table B cont.

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <i>D.I.E.S. Extension<br/>Officers--10</i> | 90% | 10% |
| <i>Government Liaison<br/>Officers</i>     | 80% | 20% |
| <i>Police</i>                              | 95% | 5%  |

*Headquarters Situation*

The use of Pidgin in the Government headquarters is not as great as in the field situation for the very simple reason that English is used for official dealings. On the other hand, Pidgin in such circumstances is mainly used by the *ti-bois* and others in the lower ranks of the Public Service.

*Home Situation*

Most Papua New Guineans in urban centres speak a great deal of Pidgin at home. The rural areas in the country vary the usage of Pidgin due to the fact that Motu, English or local languages are used in those circumstances.

*Others*

The concept of identity becomes a reality when one is overseas. The above sentence is a mouthful, but to summarise, it must be said that both Papua New Guineans and expatriates who go to other countries in most instances proudly speak Pidgin to stand out from the crowd.

The discussion of the whole concept of identity, appropriately leads me to my next subtopic with a cautious note on the element of racism and other sociopolitical implications.

## Symbol of Unity

"That this House declares that national unity is essential to the progress of Papua New Guinea as a modern state with enough resources and population to sustain a developing economy; resolves to support national unity and in particular calls upon the Administration and holders of Ministerial office through the use of field staff, Administration radio and lessons in schools, to tell the people what they will gain by keeping together as a single country."

*"Dispela Haus i tok haut long bung wantaim, em wanpela bikpela samting long Papua New Guinea bai kamap olosem arapela bikpela kantri, na bai gat inap manmeri na wantaim ol samting bilong giraun long kamapim ekonomik developmen na strongim bung wantaim. Na dispela Haus singaut ken long gavman na ol Minista, wantaim ol wokman bilong ol, i mas halivim bung wantaim i kamap gut tru. Na, tu, dispela gavman redio na wantaim ol tok save ol ilainim long skul bai halivim pipol long sindaun bilong ol i kamap gutpela, sapos ol i bung olsem wanpela kantri."*

This motion was adopted by the House of Assembly on the 21st November, 1968. The Pidgin translation of the motion is an outstanding expression of the concept of unity. As I travel around Papua New Guinea one thing

seems to be very obvious--the very fact that people communicate with each other in Pidgin and their facial expressions indicate an immediate sense of *wantok* or at least people who could get along with one another. The wide communication gap that has existed in the last twenty or thirty years is gradually being narrowed by many component elements of unity, but the one that seems to stand out is the use of Pidgin as a means of communication in most parts of Papua New Guinea, uniting the regional people, and on a larger scale fostering national unity.

Whether we like it or not the symptoms of 'nationalism' are already evident in varied forms under the slogan of *Bung Wantaim*. The political education branch of the Department of the Administrator in 1969 put out a leaflet stating: "*Haus ov Asembli em i nek bilong Papua Niugini. Ol toktok bilongen ol i harim long Australia na arapela ples istap long we tru. Dispela nek em i tok Papua Niugini i mas kamap wanpela kantri, wanpela pipol na wanpela neisen*". Like any other developing country, Papua New Guinea would need to work out its own strategy for development. By the same token the question of a national language has to be settled as well. The experience of history has proven that one of the unifying factors in any country is a common language. Individual items of unity, such as Pidgin and many others ought to be given a chance to develop quickly and in turn foster the general development of Papua New Guinea.

As I have already mentioned earlier, the people of Papua New Guinea unite through the use of Pidgin.

#### National Language

It has often been said that a leader who can talk to his people in the language they understand in any developing nation has a sufficient guarantee for commanding their respect and trust. This is true of Tanzania and Indonesia when Nyerere and the late Sukarno could get up on a platform and address a crowd with little or no difficulty with language communication. Whether both of these men were successful in their careers as politicians is outside the scope of this paper, but the very fact that Nyerere and Sukarno could communicate with their people has a great deal of influence in the bridging of the language barrier between the leaders and the ordinary people. In Tanzania, when Swahili became the national language, an effort was made by the experts and the people to learn the language. The question which seems to be bothering people is, would Pidgin have the technical terms, as English does, to accommodate some difficult technological and industrial concepts? The answer to this question is not for some time to come.

However, the same sort of question was in the minds of a lot of people. For example the early moves by Dr Sukarno to make Bahasa Indonesian the national language of Indonesia. The attitude that Pidgin may not be able to provide equivalents for the technical terms in the technological and industrial sphere is what I call *colonial nostalgia*, an attitude maintained by the colonisers. Apparently Bahasa Indonesian has stood the tests of the colonialists and proven that as a national language of Indonesia it has been able to adopt new terms where the equivalents cannot be provided in Bahasa vocabulary.

Therefore it is essential for the Government of Papua New Guinea, with its available assets for development, to devise a method that will engender the formation of a national language. In my own mind, Pidgin

as the national language would be the best choice. Before the Government of Papua New Guinea makes any move toward announcing Pidgin as a national language, the existing institutions, either directly or indirectly must initiate and cultivate an interest in Pidgin amongst the students and staff and the community at large.

For Papua New Guinea to have Pidgin as a national language is not only for identification purposes but also an affirmation of the right and capacity of (a) the black people to determine their future and to achieve equality in the modern world, and (b) the legitimacy of Pidgin in the development of the country as a whole.

#### Position of the University of Papua New Guinea

The first part of the terms of reference for the Currie Commission on Higher Education states that the Commission was required to "...enquire into and report on the means for further developing tertiary education to meet the present and prospective needs of the Territory and to serve the best interests of its people and enable them to take an active part in social, economic and political advancement of their country".

Once one begins to examine the implications of the above quotation more closely, the immediate reciprocal responsive QUESTION almost predictably is, to what extent do the institutions of tertiary level encourage the form of education or nature of learning oriented toward the 'present and prospective needs' of Papua New Guinea? The answer for that question would require a great deal of research of facts before anyone can justifiably answer it. However, despite the complexity of the question, one does not have to look far to find the answer. The University of Papua New Guinea has in the last four or five years done very little in terms of promoting Papua New Guinea's heritage. Instead the form of education in the U.P.N.G. is basically geared to the so-called political and economic priorities. Therefore the products of this University are worth nothing more than carbon copies of the colonial *mastas*.

One may ask, why does such a situation come about? The answer is twofold. Firstly, the general university administration and academic infrastructure has been too colonially rigid for any infiltration of legitimate change. Peter Hastings describes the Australian colonial regime in Niugini in the following terms:

"For most of the period of its stewardship Australia has been a neglectful colonial power and fifty years or more of metropolitan indifferences has resulted in a very precarious basis for indigenous participation in the administration and economy of the country."

Because of the intentional negligence of the Papua New Guinea culture and identity by the colonial administration, the tertiary institutions throughout the country in most respects have been oriented toward foreign development. Secondly, the absence of what I call 'imaginary courses' (basically more liberal arts courses and Niugini Studies) in the U.P.N.G. teaching syllabus has given rise to the situation where (a) there is very little creative outlook toward Papua New Guinea development; and (b) U.P.N.G. is seen by both outside critics and the 'by-products', as being a mere large brain-washing institution set up to cater for the needs of the few intelligentsia educated in the western ideology who provide the link between colonial power and the masses and

who would do anything to safeguard the present U.P.N.G.'s courses pro-forma.

The question now is, what can U.P.N.G. do to meet the changing needs of Papua New Guinean society? A national institution and the instrument of the governing authority of the country is on the first count not only to be aware of what goes on, but creatively and committedly involved as an integral ingredient of the whole evolution of Papua New Guinean society. The latter is perhaps the basis of the second main objective of the conference. I will endeavour to dwell on this in the next few paragraphs.

Before the U.P.N.G. can use Pidgin as a "medium for contact with a wider community" in this country there needs to be a solid foundation established in the existing university curriculum and governing body infrastructure so as to avoid any unfounded academic rationale of maintaining the scholastic status quo. In other words, the chair of Papua New Guinea Studies should be promoted for reasons I have already tried to imply in the immediate paragraph, and perhaps the preceding sentence emphasises that point more.

However, Eric Ashby seems to beautifully pre-empt the concept of the P.N.G. Studies by adding: "...that the study of traditional societies and the way they change under impact should be at the core of university teaching...and the contemporary art". Pidgin, incidentally, would be in the category of contemporary art.

I am aware of the fact that Pidgin can be encouraged and even taught at the U.P.N.G. without having to establish a Chair of P.N.G. Studies, but the point I am making here is that it is about time that courses offered at the U.P.N.G. regarding P.N.G. ought to be given a special status and every effort made to coordinate various fields of disciplines, at the same time encouraging the 'nationals' to play an active role at that level. Therefore at this point I would like to digress a little and list a few points as suggestions of possible approach toward meeting part of the second object of this conference, and these are:

- (1) Pidgin should be formally included in the U.P.N.G.'s undergraduate and diploma courses (possibly post-graduate).
- (2) The matter of the establishment of P.N.G. Studies is at this stage a necessity, therefore the University Council should be informed accordingly at the earliest date possible.
- (3) The Church/Missions Committee on Pidgin Curriculum for Primary Schools and the Government should be formally invited, through the Education Department to assist the U.P.N.G. action oriented persons to prepare and run courses in Pidgin.
- (4) More ought to be done in terms of allocation of certain portion of the University budget towards the development of (a) establishment of P.N.G. Studies, (b) Creative Arts, (c) Drama, (d) writing in general, and (e) Scientific Studies and projects of various staff-student groups to pursue.

(5) Large scale induction courses should be conducted to re-educate the 'traditionists' in most if not all faculties including the administration personnel in the Gunther Building.

With these suggestions in mind, I would like to stress one point. The success of this conference in terms of achievement of the two basic



aims, namely, (1) 'to make the University of Papua New Guinea a forum for the discussion of Pidgin and its role in Papua New Guinean society and culture', and (2) 'to suggest ways in which the University could use Pidgin as a medium for contact with a wider community' places a great deal of onus on the part of those interested and willing to encourage the P.N.G. Studies at this university.

Pidgin as a viable linguistic entity, media of communication, symbol of unity and possible national language of Papua New Guinea warrants academic scholastic study in the University of Papua New Guinea as a contemporary art of this country.