

THE PIDGIN LANGUAGE AND PUBLICATIONS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Orait planti lain manmeri ol i save bihainim nek bilong ol tasol na raitim Tok Pisin. Bipo, long yia 1955, wanpela komiti ol i makim wanpela rot bilong raitim Tok Pisin, tasol planti manmeri ol i no bihainim. Olsem na dispela hevi bilong raitim Tok Pisin istap yet.

Nau gavman i laik pulim Tok Pisin i kam insait long skul. Tasol yumi mas stretim dispela hevi bilong Tok Pisin pastaim. Orait stretim pinis na ol i ken wokim sampela buk bilong skulim ol pikinini long Tok Pisin. Ol i bin makim rot bilong raitim Tok Pisin pinis. Tasol nau yumi mas skulim ol manmeri long dispela rot na ol i mas bihainim em tasol.

I gat narapela hevi bilong Tok Pisin istap. Ol i save raitim planti buk na niuspepa long Tok Pisin. Tasol ol i no tingim i kamap long Tok Pisin. Nogat, ol i kaunim Tok Inglis tasol na tanim tok i go long Tok Pisin na i no kamap stret.

Orait mi autim narapela tok. Mipela laik save haumas manmeri ol i laik kisim niuspepa Our News (long Tok Inglis) na haumas ol i laik kisim niuspepa Nius Bilong Yumi (long Tok Pisin). Orait mipela askim na ol i bekim tok olsem: Namba bilong manmeri ol i laik kisim Nius Bilong Yumi i dabolim namba bilong ol manmeri i laik kisim Our News.

Orait planti manmeri moa i laik kisim long Tok Pisin na ating yumi mas skulim ol long rit na rait long Tok Pisin. Na yumi mas bihainim wanpela rot tasol bilong raitim Tok Pisin. Na yumi mas tok save long sampela manmeri ol i save bihainim nek bilong ol yet na raitim Tok Pisin na ol i mas bihainim dispela rot wantaim. Na gavman i mas makim wanpela komiti bilong stretim Tok Pisin na lukautim dispela wok.

The use of a language as an effective medium of communication is directly related to the number of people who can speak it. The use of a language in published material as an effective medium for the distribution, storage and retrieval of information is also directly related to the number of people who can understand it in its written form.

The use of the work 'understand' rather than 'read' is important, as many people can read but not so many can understand what they read.

Pidgin English, Neo-Melanesian, Niuginian or whatever you care to name it, is the spoken lingua franca of an increasing number of people in Papua New Guinea. Historians and linguistic experts tell us it has

been used in the general area of Papua New Guinea for more than a century.

Originally it was a language of trading parties from outside Papua New Guinea on the one hand and the native people of the country on the other. Its introduction was restricted to coastal areas of New Guinea and the Islands. It was virtually unknown in Papua until recent years.

The traders had no need to write this language down as the native people knew no form of writing and the foreigners were probably largely illiterate in their own language anyway. Simple words of the one language were combined with simple words of the other to make a mutually intelligible lingua franca to both parties.

It was not until the advent of the missionary that a need was recognised to record the 'language' in print. Even then the need was mainly that the missionary, or his catechist, have a reference in print so he would read the religious books and conduct standard forms of religious service amongst a wider section of the community.

The first schools were also run under mission auspices and the language of tuition in areas where Pidgin English was the lingua franca was naturally Pidgin. The goal of education was a better understanding and wider distribution of the Gospel.

Each mission was faced with the problem of how this 'new' language was to be written down. The missions were widely scattered and communications were difficult or non-existent, so no standard orthography was established or used.

In the mid-1950's when Father Mihalic published the first edition of his *Grammar and Dictionary of Neo-Melanesian* he tabled ten orthographies in use at that time. Some of these had been originated by missions, others by government departments.

The tenth had been 'officially' recognised and publicised by the Australian Administration after a committee, consisting of the government linguist, Mr Tom Dietz, and Rev Louis Luzbetak of the Anthropos Institute, had been set up to examine the problem and make recommendations for a standard orthography.

A significant fact common to all the 'writers' of Pidgin English was that they all believed that the language should be fostered so that the final transition to English could be made more easily. No one at this stage was in any doubt that English would finally supercede it.

The Committee set up by the Administration examined the work of Dr Robert A. Hall Jr., Professor of Linguistics at Cornell University. He had recently made a study of Pidgin English in New Guinea and amongst other things had coined the name Neo-Melanesian for it.

The work the Committee did in their investigations is well documented elsewhere and went well beyond academic linguistics. Their recommendations were accepted by the then Director of the Department of Education, W.C. Groves, and the Administrator of the Territory, Brigadier Cleland. It also received the official blessing of the Minister for Territories.

The orthography the committee produced was based on Hall's 'A Standard Orthography and list of suggested spellings for Neo-Melanesian' (Department of Education, Port Moresby, 1955.) It may be interesting to note that only two copies of Hall's paper could be traced in Port

Moresby recently. One in the Research Library of the Department of Education and the other in the New Guinea Collection at the University.

Even though Dietz and Luzbetak worked hard to produce their orthography it was obvious that the various factions in the 'Pidgin coop' would not be satisfied. They noted in the official text of their report that although copies of Dr Hall's orthography and word list were circulated for comment and criticism, the response was very poor and disappointing. Even though Neo-Melanesian had arrived--officially--there could have been little consistent follow up and 'policing', even of Official Publications.

Shortly thereafter, Father Mihalic wrote his Grammar and Dictionary following the rules set down in the official orthography. In later editions of the work he made minor alterations where he considered these were warranted and had been brought about by usage.

Today, 18 years later, we are faced with a similar situation that faced the committee in 1955. At a time when new words are flooding into the language one can pick up publications, notices, posters, etc., and see glaring inconsistencies in spelling, syntax and grammar. The fact that the language itself is known by at least three different names points to a need for standardisation, in the printed word at least.

We will never achieve a uniform spoken Pidgin. Indeed, the language would lose much of its character if this happened. What would English be without its dialects? But in the same way that English (not to be confused with American) has a largely standard written form we must achieve a standardisation of written Pidgin.

A base already exists to do this. The officially recognised orthography of the 1950's has never been rejected or superceded. At least one of the major publishing houses apart from the Government, uses it - with minor modifications. It is unfortunate that others have produced their own 'official' orthographies and that still others do not follow either but rather follow their own particular whim.

BUT--orthographies, word lists, dictionaries and conferences are useless unless there is an education programme to promote and teach 'correct' Pidgin English. Pidgin English will remain only as a lingua franca for as long as there is no programme to put it on a sound educational basis. A few years ago it seemed that the Department of Education had reversed its 1955 thinking and was willing to see this happen, with the policy that English should be the only language of education. It would appear that the present Government is now having second thoughts about this policy. There is talk that in some areas Pidgin English may be used as the language of education in early primary grades, not only Pidgin but vernaculars as well.

If this is to come about, a considerable amount of effort and money will have to be put into the preparation of texts in both Pidgin and the vernaculars to be used. Whether the Government has the resources to mount such a programme is not the subject of this paper, though it must be a major factor in its implementation.

All other things being available, a standard orthography will be needed to prepare these publications. We already know that such an orthography is not only available but has been officially approved. It only needs a programme of promotion, education or re-education.

It matters very little to a Broadcast Officer speaking from a Regional Broadcasting Station whether his Pidgin conforms to a standard orthography. He is only concerned with his spoken word and that the people listening to him can understand what he is saying. But as soon as this officer is required to write down what he is saying so that it may be used for general distribution he must conform to the standard.

In the Department of Information and Extension Services we are faced with the same problems as others. The problem is the dearth of good translators. Of necessity we have to use Pidgin speakers from many different areas. Their levels of education also vary considerably. At times we must use people who are mainly concerned with the spoken word to translate and/or write down the language.

The editor of a magazine or paper may not have an excellent command of Pidgin himself, but nevertheless he is forced to spend much valuable time checking copy for inconsistencies. At a time when more and more Pidgin publications are needed and being produced this is a ridiculous and impossible situation.

This experience points up a major shortcoming of most present Pidgin publications: that they are not original works in Pidgin. In most cases the texts were originally written in English and have been translated into Pidgin. We all know that translations generally lose something in the translating. Unfortunately there are few Pidgin translators who are capable of accurately transcribing the sense of a text as well as conforming to a standard orthography.

Pidgin English is a rich language in its originally conceived form. Many Pidgin expressions describe a situation or feeling far more expressively than in English--specially to a Pidgin-speaking Papua New Guinean. It is a great pity that more original literature in Pidgin is not forthcoming. Fortunately there are signs too that this is changing.

The lack of original Pidgin texts can be traced to a lack of education in Pidgin and partly to an education in English. A student proficient in English tends to write in English because the language has more possibilities for expression. A man educated in English tends to introduce English concepts and expressions into his Pidgin whenever he has to write that language.

This also gives rise to an incorrect orthography in his written Pidgin. He has been trained to write in English. The habits he has learned are naturally transferred to his written Pidgin.

It is also interesting to study the reverse situation. Many Pidgin writers have received no more than a rudimentary education, never progressing out of primary grades, and some not even achieving the upper levels of these grades. Yet some of these people are able to write a communicable form of Pidgin. Most of their writings are letters to each other and to papers such as *Wantok* and *Nius bilong Yumi*. A study of these letters shows a lack of knowledge of sentence construction and grammar but their ideas are communicated and their spellings are basically phonetic.

English has been the official language of education for a number of years. It is obvious that the people writing these letters have never grasped enough English to be able to write it. They must have received some education to know the English alphabet and its symbols to be able

to write at all. It seems therefore, that in their own minds they are able to associate the basic letter sounds with the sounds they speak and call Pidgin. This appreciation is sufficient to write the letters down in an intelligible order to form words. Many could not have been taught to write Pidgin.

This thesis is more interesting when related to the few figures that are available concerning English and Pidgin literacy. Based on adjusted statistical figures from the 1966 census where literacy questions were included on the census forms, approximately 11% of the population over 10 years old were considered literate in English. The degree of literacy was not established but the criterion for establishing this figure indicates that this was not in all cases a functional literacy. On the basis of 50% of these people being considered functionally literate in simple English a more accurate figure of approximately 5% could be established. The same figures indicated that about 24% of the population over 10 years old were literate in Pidgin. By the same token approximately 12% could be considered functionally literate. This means that of the literate population twice as many can read Pidgin than English. In a country where the main language of education has been English this is quite significant. Before we become too enthused with these figures it is sobering to realise that including all people that are literate in all languages only about 16% of the population can be reached directly by the printed word.

These figures are borne out by a recent circulation survey of one of the Department's regular publications. The present outlets for *Our News* and *Nius bilong Yumi* were circularised to find out if the publications were in fact getting to the readers they are intended for and if any alteration to the number of copies they distributed was needed.

The ratio of English to Pidgin presently printed is approximately 2 to 1. That is twice as many English as Pidgin. From the time replies started to come back to the final analysis of the figures, it was evident that the ratio was correct--but in the wrong direction. Twice as many Pidgin to English were requested.

It is probably not generally realised that the circulation of these two publications is the largest of any news type publication in the country. It is published as a free publication by the Department of Information and Extension Services, and because of this the Department is concerned that excessive numbers are not printed.

This, of course, is not the case. We have never been able to keep up with the demand for very long. The paper is a little like Topsy, the little girl in the children's story who 'just grewed'. Originally started by the Department of Native Affairs in 1959 it was transferred to the Department of the Administrator and finally to the Department of Information and Extension Services when the Department commenced operations in 1962.

Starting out with a printing of only a few thousand copies per issue, requests have pushed the circulation to a total of 42,000 copies twice monthly. There has been no consistent effort to promote the publication or allocate fixed quotas to the districts. As requests have exceeded finances available for printing, extra allocations have been sought and granted. The circulation up to now has never been based on a systematic analysis of what each district could logically absorb. Its growth has

been governed entirely by demand. The printing stock is not even good 'smok pepa', so this has no bearing on its popularity. On this basis we feel we can legitimately say that the figures returned are a valid indication not only of its popularity but that twice as many people want to read Pidgin than English. If the implication of these figures is to be recognised then we must produce more publications in the future in the Pidgin language.

Currently our other regular Pidgin publication is *Toktok bilong Haus ov Asembli*. This has grown out of *This week in the House of Assembly*, a resume of the proceedings of the House when it is in session. It has been published since 1968.

Over the years a number of other general publications have been printed. Some have been initiated by the Department itself, others have only involved the Department as an adviser or in giving assistance to other departments on specific extension projects. Notable amongst these have been a series for the Department of Agriculture and others for the Department of Health.

This section of the Department's paper has not been primarily concerned with describing the contribution of the Department to Pidgin publications in Papua New Guinea. However, the contribution that D.I.E.S. has made in this field is not insignificant. Any organisation that has consistently published a twice-monthly news magazine in Pidgin for 14 years must be considered to have made a significant contribution to the literacy of the people in Pidgin.

From these observations five points are clear:

- (1) Literacy in Pidgin would appear to be easier to teach than English; therefore,
- (2) In a country where only 16% of the people can be reached by the printed word and people are crying out for information on many subjects, it would appear necessary that an education programme for Pidgin literacy should be mounted without delay. This is doubly valid if the government policy towards education in primary grades is to be reconsidered in favour of using the Pidgin language rather than English.
- (3) To make such a programme effective, a standard orthography is needed. This should be determined and used within all educational spheres whether government or non-government backed and by all government departments and agencies responsible for the production of written material in Pidgin.
- (4) A programme of re-education of existing Pidgin writers is needed where they are in a position of being responsible for the dissemination of information in written Pidgin so that they can conform to the official orthography.
- (5) A Pidgin language committee should be set up to determine a standard orthography. It should also have the continuing function of assessing new words as they are introduced into the language and determining their spelling and usage.