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DECREOLIZATION OF TOK PISIN:
Is there a Tok Pisin - to - English Continuum?

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the current status of Tok Pisin as it enters its decreolization stage in urban centres like Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea (PNG). The paper argues that, although Tok Pisin is now decreolizing (Romaine, 1992:31) in Port Moresby as a result of its extensive exposure to English, thus resulting in an anglicized Tok Pisin, it is still not readily intelligible to English speakers, while becoming unintelligible to Rural Pidgin speakers. Extracts, collected over a period of five years from various Papua New Guinean musicians living in Port Moresby, and other urban centres in PNG, are used to support this claim. The paper concludes that, despite the heavily anglicized Tok Pisin observed in the lyrics of the songs used in this study, thus resulting in a Tok-Pisin-English Continuum, the influence of English upon Tok Pisin does not make the latter more like English but rather results in what the author, in support of Wurm (1979:240), sees as a 'third system'.

Key Words: creole, pidgin, decreolization, anglicize, continuum, lingua franca, Melanesian Pidgins, lexifier, superstrate, substratum, borrowing, code-switching, monolectal, sociolectal

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INTRODUCTION

Tok Pisin, the English-based pidgin spoken in Papua New Guinea, has been the country's very important lingua franca since developing from a stabilized pidgin in the 1860s onwards (Smith, 2002:13).

Mühlhausler (2003:1), describes Tok Pisin as a language that is used in Papua New Guinea for a wide range of public and private functions; it is spoken across a population of 6, 187, 591 (CIA Fact Book, 2011). At the moment, Tok Pisin has an official status, alongside English and Hiri Motu, (an indigenous pidgin). However, Tok Pisin is the only national language spoken by the overwhelming majority of Papua New Guineans, in both rural and urban areas (Nekitel, 1998:50). This sets it apart from both Hiri Motu and English (the latter is spoken by a small fraction of Papua New Guinea population, mostly the educated elite and the expatriate community). Like other Melanesian pidgins (Vanuatu Bislama and Solomon Islands Pijin), Tok Pisin is widely used in everyday life, on radio and television, in Government agencies and in the Parliament; it also plays a significant role in spreading the Christian message (Tyron & Charpentier, 2004:10). According to Tyron and Charpentier (2004), what makes Tok Pisin different from

other pidgins is that it has an accepted written form, based on the Tok Pisin dictionary of Father Mihalic first published in 1957. Tok Pisin also has Austronesian language features which make its system distinct from those of English and Atlantic creoles on all linguistic levels (Holm, 2000:100). Romaine (1992:54) contends that Tok Pisin, after over a hundred years of development into a stable and expanded creole, is now beginning to decreolize.

DECREOLIZATION

According to Richards, Platt and Webber (1985:73), decreolization is the process by which a creole becomes more like the standard language from which most of its vocabulary comes. Below are some current views on decreolization;

Hall (1966) contends that renewed contact between a creole and its original lexifier language is likely to lead to a process of 'decreolization'. According to his model, this happens whenever a creole language is in direct contact with its associated superstrate language. Smith (2002:209) also believes that instead of the replacement of superstrate features with substrate patterns, the superstrate patterns are gradually re-imposed and the creole features are lost. Holm (2000:10) postulates that decreolization can result in a continuum of forms varying from those furthest from the superstrate (the basilect) to those closest to it (the acrolect), with mesolectal or intermediate varieties in between.

It cannot be denied that Tok Pisin in its current state seems to fit these descriptions. Increasingly, more and more words have been adopted and the phonology has been assimilated as well, which has created a much more anglicized variety of Tok Pisin. Examples of this are found in the section titled 'Urban Tok Pisin; the Case of Port Moresby' in this paper.

VARIETIES OF TOK PISIN

Tok Pisin is widely believed to have four main varieties. According to Mühlhausler (1979: 140-54), there are three major sociolects of Tok Pisin: 1) Rural Tok Pisin, spoken by the majority of Papua New Guineans living outside urban centres; 2) Bush Tok Pisin, spoken in areas where Tok Pisin has been newly introduced, mainly in the Highlands 3) Urban Tok Pisin, spoken in the major towns since the late 1960s and 4) a fourth variety which Mühlhausler calls, 'Tok Masta,' the unsystematic variety of 'foreigner talk' by expatriates.

What that has not been documented widely, except for Smith (2002: 57-57), is the nature of the four regional varieties of Tok Pisin, namely: 1) NGI (New Guinea Islands) Tok Pisin, spoken in the New Guinea Islands of New Britain, New Ireland, Manus, and Bougainville; 2) MOMASE Tok Pisin, spoken

in the New Guinea mainland and coastal areas namely: Madang, Morobe and The Sepik Provinces; 3) Papuan Tok Pisin, spoken in the Southern Region and 4) Highlands Tok Pisin, spoken in the five Highlands provinces of Eastern Highlands; Simbu, Enga, Western Highlands and Southern Highlands. The sentences below illustrate these regional differences.

The utterance (a) below was overheard during a quarrel at a market between a husband and wife from the MOMASE region in 2008, where the husband was issuing a threat to his wife. Samples (b), (c) and (d) are likely versions of the same threat if it was spoken by speakers from the Highlands, NGI or Southern Regions respectively:

Example 1

Yu	bai	dai	kirap	long	haus
<i>You</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>die (unconscious)</i>	<i>and get up again</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>the house</i>

- a) MOMASE Yu bai dai kirap long haus
- b) Highlands Yu bai indai kirap long haus
- c) NGI Bai yu dai na kirap long haus
- d) Papuan Yu bai dai na kirap lon haus

Note that the sentences in Examples 1 (a) – (d) are generally regional dialects which are heavily influenced by their L1, thus resulting in these differences. Wurm (1979:238) states that substratum influences on Tok Pisin are minimal and that it is often difficult to detect a speaker's regional origin. As a native speaker of Tok Pisin, the author refutes this statement because L1 and L2 speakers of Tok Pisin easily distinguish between speakers from the four different regions as illustrated in Example 1. Smith (2002:56-57), also points out that many Tok Pisin speakers claim they are able to recognize regional varieties, mainly on phonological grounds. He explains that in the three regions which he studied, (Highlands, MOMASE and Islands, (hence NGI), the phoneme inventory is basically similar with some new phonemes from English occurring in loan words, but with very little evidence that they are used contrastively with established phonemes. Smith found that the prenasalisation of stops is often viewed to be characteristic of the Highlands, although he found a few cases of prenasalised stops also in the MOMASE and Islands regions. He also found that the alternation of /t/ and /s/ is common in the Islands (and as far as the author knows, this is also found among some MOMASE speakers), whereas the alternation of the /l/ and /r/ is common in the Highlands.

Another dimension of dialectal complexity of Tok Pisin is the rural vs. urban variation in each of these

regions (which the author does not have examples of). However, from her own observations as a native speaker of Tolai (Kuanua), Tok Pisin spoken in rural East New Britain is becoming less intelligible with Tok Pisin spoken in the urban centres. A typical example of a sentence in rapid speech by a young Tok Pisin speaker in an urban setting which an old Tolai villager who speaks Tok Pisin finds progressively hard to comprehend is given in **Example 2**:

em hungs so em go l' aus lo kaiks
hence em hangere so em go long haus long kaikai
she/he hungry so he/she went to house to eat
(he/she was hungry so he/she went to the house to eat)

‘Standard Tok Pisin’:

em i hangere so em i go long haus long kaikai
he/she was hungry so he/she went to the house to eat.
(he/she was hungry so he/she went to the house to eat)

This sentence is a typical example of the reduced form of Tok Pisin spoken in urban centres in Papua New Guinea which Smith (2002:84-85), also discusses.

Although Mühlhäusler (1975), pointed out three decades ago that high regional mobility of Tok Pisin speakers led to a fairly uniform pidgin spoken everywhere in the country, this is no longer the case. It must be pointed out that although there are these different varieties of Tok Pisin, rural Tok Pisin stands out as the ‘standard’ Tok Pisin; this has also been discussed by Romaine (1992), Mühlhäusler (2003), and Wurm (1979:239). According to Wurm, rural Tok Pisin is the most widely used form, both in terms of its geographical spread and the number of speakers. Despite the regional differences, rural Tok Pisin is generally understood by virtually all speakers of Tok Pisin (though some young children growing up in urban centres are monolectal speakers of the urban sociolect and are unable to understand rural pidgin; their number will obviously increase rapidly). Wurm (1979) points out that Tok Pisin speakers generally regard rural Tok Pisin as ‘the good Tok Pisin’ and some speakers of the urban dialect will admit that their Tok Pisin is not good, and that the ‘real’ Tok Pisin is the rural sociolect. Having thus described the regional varieties of Tok Pisin, we will now turn to urban Tok Pisin.

URBAN TOK PISIN: The Case of Port Moresby

As more and more Papua New Guineans are being educated, their use of Tok Pisin becomes heavily influenced by the lexifier language, ‘English’. Hirano (2001), points out that Tok Pisin started to decreolize in the 1970s because of Anglicization evidenced in the first two published books in Tok Pisin; ‘*The Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin (1971)* and ‘*The New Testament Niupela Testamen*’ (1969) (Mühlhäusler, 1979). According to Holm (2000:100), urban Tok Pisin has

been drawing ever more heavily on English for new words, especially in the speech of the educated elite who enjoy the most prestige. Holm also points out that the variety has now become more conservative and distinct from the rural variety of Tok Pisin. Bickerton (197:25), predicted eventual emergence of a continuum between English and Tok Pisin but the practice of code-switching indicates that this has not yet occurred (Mühlhäusler, 1982:455). This is similar to the findings of Jordan (1989) in her study on Solomon Islands Pijin, claiming that the situation in the Solomon Islands is one of code-switching and not of a continuum.

Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea, is one place where the Anglicization of Tok Pisin is at its highest. Given the fact that it is the nation's capital, Port Moresby attracts massive migration from rural areas, as people seek better education and good fortune. By and large, the rural Tok Pisin variety that they bring with them diminishes as they are exposed to the highly anglicized Tok Pisin of the urbanites of Port Moresby.

In this section, the author attempts to show the much anglicized Tok Pisin that is used in and around Port Moresby by the current Papua New Guinean musician residents in Port Moresby. This variety of Tok Pisin has been the result of massive borrowing and code-switching by educated Papua New Guineans and children for whom Tok Pisin is their L1. The examples that follow show a considerable amount of borrowing and code-switching, thus resulting in a kind of 'mixed language.' The data below confirm some of Smith's (2002) findings in his study on Papua New Guinea children for whom Tok Pisin is L1.

Example 3: Song 1. *Pacific Islands* PNG Artist - 'Potts'

English translations in are italicized.

1. Olgeta island bilong Pacific *All the islands belonging to the Pacific*
2. Yumi kamap na bung wantaim *We have come to gather together*
3. Sherim culture bilong yumi *To share our cultures*
4. Long makim Festival of Arts *To mark the festival of Arts*
5. Oh Pacific Islands yumi one big family *O Pacific Islands, we're one big family*
6. No matter different countries *No matter different countries*
7. We are one tasol *We are one (only)*
8. Oh Pacific Islands yumi one big family *Oh Pacific Islands we are one big family*
9. No matter different countries we are one *No matter different countries we are one*

*** Line 7:** **We are one tasol**
***Standard Tok Pisin:** **Yumi wanpela lain tasol**

Example 3 exhibits both the borrowing and the code-switching phenomena. Potts uses code-switching in: Line 1. *Island*, Line 3. *Culture*, Line 4. *Festival of arts*; then he suddenly switches to English phrases, as

in Line 4. *Festival of arts*, Line 5. *One big family*, Lines 6 & 7 *No matter different countries we are one*. Potts also uses ‘sherim’ (*share*) in line 3 and ‘makim’ in line 4 which, according to Myers Scotton (1992), is a type of code-switch consisting of mixed constituents, as they take their root form from one language and inflection from another. The same also applies to examples 4 - 9 below. Also, in all seven examples, a line in each song lyrics is identified in bold print and is compared with standard Tok Pisin (with asterisks *). These comparisons indicate the changes Tok Pisin is now undergoing as a result of massive exposure to English.

Example 4: Song 2. Rabaul PNG Artist - ‘Potts’

1. Yu kisim bus na drive i go *You get on the bus and drive off*
2. Yu ken lukim planti kain kain samting *You can see many different kinds of things*
3. Em bai you no nap lus tingting long Rabaul. *That is you won't forget Rabaul*
4. Yu ken lukim ol big forest, blue lagoon na ol volcano. *You can see the big forest, blue lagoon & volcanoes*
5. Na Rabaul town nau i bagarap *And Rabaul town has now been destroyed*
6. Yeh kam na holiday long Rabaul *Yeah, come and spend your holidays in Rabaul*
7. Em i sweet tumas na stap *It's a sweet place to stay*
8. Yu bai raon long olgeta hap *You will be able to go to all the places*
9. Na bai you no nap lus tingting long en *And you will not forget about it (Rabaul)*

***Line 7:** **Em i sweet tumas na stap**
***Standard Tok Pisin:** **Em (Rabaul) i gutpla peles turu na i stap**

In Example 4, we see lexical items either borrowed straight from English or borrowed and integrated into Tok Pisin structure as in Line 1. bus ‘bus’, drive ‘drive’, Line 4. *big forest, blue lagoon, volcano*, Line 6. *holiday*, Line 7. *sweet*.

Example 5: Song 3. Meri Lewa PNG Artist - ‘Oshen’

1. Boys taim you stap longwe lo meri blo yu. *Boys, when you are far away from your girl*
2. Na you misim em turu *And you miss her very much*
3. Traim pleim em disla song ya *Try play her this song*

***Line 1:** **Boys taim yu stap longwe lo meri blo yu**
***Standard Tok Pisin:** **Ol pikinini man taim yu stap longwe long meri bilong yu**

Example 5 shows the following: line 1. *boys* line 2. *misim* ‘miss’, line 3. *traim* ‘try’, *pleim* ‘play’, *song*.

Example 6: Song 4. Queen Four Lane PNG Artist - ‘Leonard Kania’

1. First time you only tru lo lukim yu *The very first time I saw you*
2. Long hia long Kokopo Taon *Here at Kokopo Town*
3. Hey liklik face bilong yu *Hey, your tiny little face*

4. i paulim tingting bilong mi *Got my mind confused*
5. Na bai mi mekim wonem nau *And what will I do now*
6. Mi admairim you tasol *I'll just admire you*

***Line 6:** mi admairim yu tasol
***Standard Tok Pisin:** mi mangalim yu tasol

Example 6 contains the following words derived from English: Line 1, first time, lukim 'look', you 'you', Line 2, hia 'here', taon 'town', Line 3, face, Line 5, mekim 'make', Line 6, admairim 'admire'.

Example 7: Song 5. Ramandu Beach PNG Artist - 'Barike'

1. Mi bin sindaun long Ramandu Beach *I sat down at Ramandu beach*
2. Kol win i bloim mi gut turu *The cool breeze that blew was really good*
3. Mi lukluk i go long solwara em i nais tumas *I looked out to the sea, it was really nice*
4. Ol nambis bilong Ramandu i luk sore *Ramandu beach looked really calm*
5. Ol manmeri sindaun hamamas turu *Man & women sat very happily*
6. Ol kinkain bot i pulap long en *All kinds of boat filled up Ramandu beach*
7. Napim olgeta days *And even on all other days.*
8. Ramandu beach yu nais tumas *Ramandu beach you're really nice*
9. Kol wind blo yu i kol tumas *Your cool breeze is very cold*
10. Bilas bilong yu i stail turu insait long North Baining *Your decoration is very stylish in North Baining.*

***Line 8:** Ramandu beach yu nais tumas
***Standard Tok Pisin:** Ramandu nambis yu gutpela turu

Example 8 shows us the following: Line 1, beach, Line 2, kol 'cold', win 'wind', bloim 'blow' Line 7, days.

Example 8: Song 6. Baket (Home Brew) PNG Artist - 'Doggies'

1. Ol mangi dringim baket *The boys drank home brew from the bucket*
2. Wan kap, tu kap, tri kap *One cup, two cups, three cups*
3. Het i paul *Head malfunctioned*
4. Na ekting bikman nambaut *And they acted around like big man*
5. Mi jeles *I was jealous*
6. Spak pinis danis tulait *They were drunk already and danced till twilight (daybreak)*
7. Nogat sens na raon long bia maket *They were senseless and wandered around the beer market*
8. Swerim ol manmeri *They swore the men and women*

***Line 8:** Swerim ol manmeri
***Standard Tok Pisin:** Tok nogutim ol man na meri

Example 8 has the following: Line 1, dringim 'drink', baket 'bucket', Line 2, wan kap 'one cup', tu kap 'two cups', tri kap 'three cups', Line 3, het 'head', Line 4, ekting

'acting', bikman 'big man', Line 4. jeles 'jealous', Line 6. pinis 'finish', danis, 'dance',
Line 7. sens 'sense', maket 'market'. Line 8. swerim 'swear'

Example 9: Song 7. *Trupla Man* PNG Artist - 'Dadii Gii'

1. Yu noken bisi long ol kain toktok *Don't worry about the kind of words*
2. Long ol lain blong mi *of my family*
3. Na samting em olsem *The thing is*
4. mi save long tingting na feelings blong yu *I know what your thoughts & feelings are*
5. Olsem yu tu yu man ya na yu gat bulut *You are only human who s got blood*
6. Wonem samting you laik bai mi givim yu *Whatever it is that you want me to give you*
7. Mi tu mi man ya na mi needim presens blong yu *I am only human too and need your presence.*

***Line 1:** Yu noken bisi long ol kain toktok
***Standard Tok Pisin:** Yu noken tingting planti long ol kain toktok

Example 9 exhibits the following Tok Pisin words:

Line 1. bisi 'busy', kain 'kind', Line 4. Feelings, Line 6. givim 'give' Line 7. needim 'need',
presens 'presence'.

The above examples from songs by Papua New Guinea musicians show that Tok Pisin, currently spoken in Port Moresby and other urban centres, is heavily anglicized. Whole utterances in each Tok Pisin song suddenly switch to English as in example 3 (Song 1), where we see whole phrases and even sentences in English ('one big family' and 'no matter different countries, we are one,' etc). Example 3 also shows that there is no discontinuity between Tok Pisin and English when code-switching. English phrases are incorporated but do not interfere with the smooth flow of the Tok Pisin sentence as in 'Oh Pacific Islands yumi wan big family' and 'No matter different countries, we are one tasol'.

The examples also show situations where English phonology is retained despite the morphological adaptations in Tok Pisin as in Example 3. Line 3. Sherim 'share,' and Example 6 (Song 4) line 6. admairim 'admire,' etc. In these examples, we see some evidence of Tok Pisin forms converging with Standard English forms, particularly as more and more English words are incorporated into Tok Pisin lexicon. This seems to confirm the notion that Tok Pisin is decreolizing. Similar conclusions have also been made by Smith (2002).

CONCLUSION

In light of the above discussion, it is obvious that there is a Tok-Pisin-English Continuum which confirms Romaine's (1992) finding that Tok Pisin is decreolizing. However, the influence of English upon Tok

Pisin does not make the latter more like English, but results in what the researcher, in support of Wurm (1979:240), sees as a third system. Mühlhausler (1979:236) also shares the same view. He argues that renewed contact with the lexifier language will make a third system emerge. He points out that, in spite of heavy borrowing, urban Tok Pisin does not appear to become anymore readily intelligible to a speaker of English than the rural Tok Pisin dialect. At the same time, it becomes unintelligible to the speakers of rural Tok Pisin.

Nevertheless, if English continues to exert this strong influence on urban Tok Pisin over time, Tok Pisin's structures may also undergo Anglicization. The urban dialect of Tok Pisin may thus, eventually develop into a kind of Niuginian English, just as there is an Indian English which arose as a result of the contact between English speakers and Indians (Romaine 1989: 15).

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