

# The Inclusive/Exclusive Distinction in Tok Pisin

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## 0. Introduction

The distinction between inclusive and exclusive first person plural pronouns in pidgin and creole languages is comparatively rare outside Melanesian Pidgin English, although it does occur elsewhere in the Pacific, for instance, in Cape York Creole and Kriol spoken in Australia, where it is also found among the Aboriginal languages. It appears also in Pitcairn/Norfolk creole, which has a Tahitian input. Although Hawaiian has the distinction, it is not found in Hawai'i Creole English, presumably because Hawaiian did not exert much influence on the creole grammar. Neither is it present in Baba Malay, where both Hokkien and Malay have such systems (Lim 1981:70), nor in Pidgin Fijian or Samoan Plantation Pidgin (Mühlhäusler 1989). A brief glance outside Melanesia and Polynesia will reveal that the inclusive/exclusive distinction is also present in Mauritian Creole French (though not in closely related Reunion or Seychelles Creole French). Malagasy, also an Austronesian language, has exerted influence on Mauritian, and it has a distinction between inclusive and exclusive (Boretzky 1983:250).

We might infer from this (together with the rarity of such pronominal systems cross-linguistically) that even where the distinction exists in the substratum languages, it may not surface in the related pidgin or creole depending on varying circumstances. In the case of Tok Pisin, although the system is clearly modelled on an Austronesian pattern, it is difficult to establish whether this system was already in place by 1880. Mühlhäusler (1989:467-68), for instance, argues that the distinction between inclusive and exclusive was established much later in Tok Pisin. Keesing (1988:137,142), however, claims it is attested

from the 1880s, and takes the congruences between Austronesian substratum languages, where the distinction is widely found, and the Pacific pidgins as “the most compelling single piece of evidence of the historically primary role of Pacific Islanders in shaping a developing pidgin in the Pacific.” In this paper I will not address the question of historical origins, but seek instead to document some of the variation in the marking of this distinction in current Tok Pisin, as found in a study I conducted in 1986 and 1987. (See Romaine 1992 for further details.)

### 1. The pronominal system of Tok Pisin: inclusive vs. exclusive

In Table 1 I have sketched out the present day pronominal system of Tok Pisin. This system appears to date from the early stabilization phase and clearly distinguishes between singular and plural pronouns. The modern system is a compromise of the various systems in use earlier and common to the three Melanesian pidgins (i.e. Tok Pisin, Bislama in Vanuatu and Pijin in the Solomon Islands) today.

**Table 1: Personal Pronouns in Tok Pisin**

	singular	plural
first person	<i>mi</i> I	<i>mipela</i> we (exclusive) <i>yumi</i> we (inclusive)
second person	<i>yu</i> you	<i>yupela</i> you (plural)
third person	<i>em</i> he/she/it	<i>(em) ol</i> they

The inclusive/exclusive distinction made in the first person plural involves the notion of augmentation, i.e. the addition of one or more others either to the speaker or hearer. Thus, *yumi* can be thought of as consisting of the features [+speaker, +hearer, +other] and *mipela*, [+speaker, -hearer, +other]. There are also dual and trial forms, e.g. *yumitupela* ‘we two (inclusive)’, i.e. [+speaker, +hearer, -other], *mitripela* ‘we three (exclusive)’, etc., although these are not always made consistently. As English provides no lexical forms for the inclusive/exclusive and dual distinctions or second person plural, these are created by forming a compound from *yu* + *mi* to give *yumi* and *yumitupela* and by using the suffix

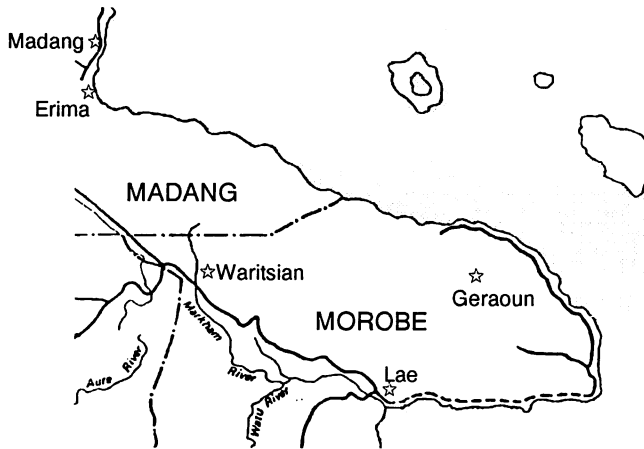
*-pela* to mark plurality in *yupela*. The transparency of the forms for the inclusive plural and dual provides confirmation for Greenberg's (1988:15,n.2) observation that there are instances in which the first person plural inclusive shows by its form that it consists of first person plus the second person, although he himself had found no instances in which the first person dual inclusive is constructed in this way. The existence of the dual and plural pronouns is also in accordance with Greenberg's (1963:94) implicational universal to the effect that "no language has a dual unless it has a plural... Non-singular number categories are marked categories in relation to the singular."

Despite the fact that the inclusive/exclusive distinction is believed to have its origins in substratum, not all of the indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea have it and the contrast is sometimes absent in some varieties of Tok Pisin, too. Although singular, dual, and plural pronouns are found in the non-Austronesian languages, the inclusive/exclusive distinction is generally absent. It is also not regularly made by Europeans, to whom such a distinction is not familiar. Thus, Laycock (1970:xviii) warns the unwary:

One must always distinguish in Pidgin whether 'we' includes the person or persons spoken to or not. If the addressee is not included, one says *mipela*, if he is, one says *yumi*. Failure to observe the distinction can lead to misunderstandings; thus a missionary must say *Jisas i-dai long yumi* Jesus died for us - that is, for Europeans and natives alike; if he said *Jisas i-dai long mipela* it would mean Jesus died for us (missionaries) (and not for the congregation).

## 2. Variation in the use of the inclusive/exclusive distinction

Here I will contrast the classic inclusive/exclusive distinction as described by Laycock and others which can be found in use among younger urban speakers in Lae with the systems in use in more rural areas of Madang and Morobe Province such as Erima, Geraoun and Waritsian, shown on Figure 1. Lae is the second largest urban area in the country and arguably the most important town in determining the future of Tok Pisin. Its status as such owes much to its accessibility by land and sea as well as to industrialization. In Romaine (1992) I have discussed the diffusion of a number of linguistic changes in terms of accessibility of various rural areas to major urban centers such as Lae and Madang. The younger generation in both these towns speak Tok Pisin primarily as a first language.



**Figure 1: Madang and Morobe Provinces**

In the rural areas examined here, Tok Pisin is mainly a second language for younger as well as older speakers, although the circumstances of its acquisition vary somewhat. Geraoun is the remotest rural area in Morobe Province I investigated. Located in the interior of the mountainous Kabwum District, it is not accessible to any urban areas except by air, and the nearest airstrip is in a neighboring village. By contrast, Waritsian village in the upper Markham valley, although much further from Lae than Geraoun, is connected to Lae by a very good road. Erima is about 20 miles south by road from Madang, the third largest town. All these villages are in areas which have had a long history of contact with Europeans.

I collected data from the younger generation of speakers between the ages of 5 and 17 in these and other areas during 1986 and 1987. A total of 191 speakers provided the data base discussed here. (See Romaine (1992) for further details of the study and speakers.) In Table 2 I have indicated how many speakers were recorded in each area. I have not broken down the figures into age groups or sex since neither of these variables proved to be important in the analysis of this particular instance of variation.

While all the areas use forms which could be characterized as exclusive and inclusive forms from a formal linguistic point of view, the semantics of the forms do not all express the same distinctions. Some examples will make this clear. In (1) we have occurrences of the

**Table 2: Numbers of speakers recorded in 4 areas**

(total = 191)

Lae	86
Geraoun	33
Waritsian	32
Erima	40

dual and the first person plural inclusive and exclusive in their 'traditional' meanings, i.e. as described by sources such as Mihalic (1971). The dual form *yutupela* is used to address two persons and excludes the speaker, whereas plural exclusive *mipela* refers to the speaker and one or more others (addressee excluded), and finally plural inclusive *yumi* refers to all those covered by previous reference to *yutupela* and *mipela* (i.e. inclusive of the speaker and the addressees).

- 1) *Yutupela, yutupela was long dispela kapul i stap. Mipela ol go nau long gaden kisim kaikai kam, bai yumi kilim kapul.* [ERIMA 6FGT]<sup>1</sup>

'You two (dual) watch over this possum. We (exc.) will go to the garden to get some food and then we'll (inc.) kill the possum.'

Consider also (2), where *mipela* expresses a 'communal' *we*, which by implication includes the speaker as one of the members of the community which is being referred to, but excludes the addressee. In this case I have asked the child whether a particular animal occurs in his area.

- 2) *Yea, i gat long bus bilong mipela.* [ERIMA 4MMD]

'Yes, we have it in our (exc.) bush.'

In Erima, however, these distinctions are not consistently made in this way. For instance, in (3) the same kind of communal meaning is encoded by means of a traditional inclusive

<sup>1</sup> After each example I have included in brackets the location where the speaker lives, i.e. Lae, Erima, Geraoun, Waritsian. The number immediately following it indicates the school grade, i.e. 1 through 6, and the next letters indicate sex, F or M, followed by two code letters for the individual speaker. Thus, the notation [ERIMA 6FGT] indicates the example comes from a female speaker in Erima, who is in grade 6.

form, even though it is clear that the addressee is not to be included in the scope of reference.

3) *Em, yumi go long Kristen pinis. Yumi save nating.* [ERIMA 1MMM]

‘Now that we’ve (inc.) converted to Christianity, we know nothing [of that].’

It might be conceivably argued that the speaker did intend to include the addressee in the community of Christians, but in (4) and (5) no such interpretation is possible. These are responses to questions put by the interviewer (in this case, me) to find out what activities go on in the local community. The reference of *yumi* is ‘communal’ and the addressee is not included in this community. Here activities such as pig keeping and holding singsings clearly exclude the addressee. In other areas such as Lae the form *mipela* would be regularly used here. In Erima, however, usage is variable and *yumi* tends more often to encode a communal meaning.

4) *Yumi gat planti pik.* [ERIMA 5FMM]

‘We (com.) have plenty of pigs.’

5) *Mipela long hia olsem mekim planti [singsings - SR] stret. Yea, taim ol treinis kam ia o ia go yumi ia singsing na yumi paitim kundu na singsing. Ol kam na kisim paia na empela mekim... taim Krismas ol laik go na yumi singsing ol.* [ERIMA 5FMM]

‘Around here we (exc.) have plenty of singsings. Yes, when the [teacher] trainees come or go, we (com.) have singsings and beat drums and celebrate. They come and get fire and they make... When it’s Christmas and they are getting ready to go [i.e. because it is the end of the school year and the teachers are generally not from the areas in which they teach - SR] we (com.) give a singsing for them.’

In Table 3 I have compared the first person plural pronoun forms of Erima with those of Waritsian, Geraoun and Lae. In my examples I have shown how *mipela* and *yumi* are used to encode exclusive and inclusive, but I have also added the additional distinction of ‘communal’ to refer to cases such as (4) and (5), where Erima uses *yumi* and the other areas tend to use *mipela*. I have included both plural and dual here.

Looking first at the plural pronoun system, we can see there is a two-way split between

**Table 3: First person plural and dual pronouns (percent)**

			Lae	Waritsian	Geraoun	Erima	
PLURAL	<i>yumi</i>	com	5	4	100	76	
		inc	95	92	0	20	
		exc	0	4	0	4	
	<i>mipela</i>	com	1	0	8	11	
		inc	1	0	2	2	
		exc	98	100	90	87	
	DUAL	<i>yumi</i>	inc	100	100	100	79
			exc	0	0	0	21
		<i>mipela</i>	inc	0	33	0	50
exc			0	67	100	50	
<i>yumitupela</i>		inc	0	100	0	100	
		exc	0	0	0	0	
<i>mitupela</i>		inc	50	10	17	73	
		exc	50	90	83	27	

Lae and Waritsian on the one hand and Erima and Geraoun on the other. While Lae and Waritsian maintain the traditional inclusive/exclusive distinction, Erima and Geraoun share similar use of the 'communal' *yumi*. As far as the dual is concerned, *mipela* is not consistently used for the traditional distinction of exclusive in Erima and Waritsian. The form *mitupela* is not consistently used for exclusive in Lae and Erima, although on the whole the specifically dual pronouns are used more often in Erima. The dual at Erima has kept the traditional contrast between inclusive and exclusive more so than the plural, but *yumi* is still used in Erima to express exclusive dual, as in (6). This seems at odds with Greenberg's notions about markedness in pronoun systems since we would not expect additional distinctions to be made in the more marked category (i.e. the dual) which were also not consistently made in the less marked one (i.e. the plural).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the Dyirbal spoken by the younger generation, where the traditional dual and plural pronouns have been replaced by pidgin type pronoun ones, Schmidt (1985:88-89) found that the dual pronouns gave way before the plural ones.

- 6) *O wanpela taim, yumi wantaim wanpela manki. Mitupela laik go long taim na mitupela go long wanpela stoa nau ol man pait.* [ERIMA 6MSB]

'One time two of us (inc.), me and another boy, the two of us (exc.) wanted to go... to a shop, and there were men fighting.'

Table 3 obscures the fact that there are differences between subject, object, and possessive forms of the pronouns. Table 4 shows the breakdown for the pronouns according to case. It can be seen there is a tendency for communal *yumi* to occur more often with subject pronouns than with non-subjects.

**Table 4: First person plural pronouns in Erima (percent)**

			Subject	Object	Oblique
PLURAL	<i>yumi</i>	com	91	0	22
		inc	3	0	78
		exc	6	0	0
	<i>mipela</i>	com	3	13	50
		inc	3	0	2
		exc	94	87	48
DUAL	<i>yumi</i>	inc	79	0	0
		exc	21	0	0
	<i>mipela</i>	inc	67	0	50
		exc	33	100	50
	<i>yumitupela</i>	inc	100	0	100
		exc	0	0	0
	<i>mitupela</i>	inc	74	67	73
		exc	26	33	27

Other areas I have examined which behave like Erima include rural villages in Madang Province such as Rempi and Bahor, where the indigenous languages do not have a distinction between inclusive and exclusive. Rempi is about 20 miles north of the town and Bahor a peri-urban village on the outskirts of town. Compare, for example, (7) and (8) from the Tok Pisin spoken by the young people in these villages.



7) *Yumi lukautim planti siken.* [REMPI 2MSK]

'We (com.) take care of a lot of chickens.'

8) *Hia yumi no save wokim dispela kain haus ia.* [BAHOR 5FAU]

'Here we (com.) don't build that kind of house.'

This lack of contrast between inclusive and exclusive is a typological trait of the Mabusu stock of languages to which Amele (spoken by some of the Bahor children) and Rempi belong (Z'graggen 1971:35). The Komba language spoken in Geraoun and some of the surrounding villages in the Kabwum District does not have the distinction either, although Kâte, which is widely known by the older generation as a mission lingua franca, does (McElhanon 1967:21). In Rempi 42% of the occurrences of *yumi* are communal and in Bahor a quarter of the *yumi* forms had a communal meaning. While these figures are not quite as high as at Erima, this still represents a significant difference from the usage at Lae. In Bahor there were also 3 occurrences of what seems to be a compromise form *yumipela* which has the meaning of inclusive. One reason why Bahor may have fewer occurrences of the communal overall is that other speakers in this sample speak Bilbil, which is an Austronesian language with an inclusive/exclusive distinction.

Since I do not have data from earlier stages in the history of varieties of Tok Pisin such as Erima, Bahor, etc., nor do I have adult data from these areas, I cannot tell whether the usage of the younger generation is innovative, or is perhaps in the process of changing to become more like the 'standard' Tok Pisin system. There is, however, no warrant for concluding that the inclusive/exclusive system is in decline, which is what we might expect if English influence were operative. Greenberg's (1988) discussion of the typology of pronominal systems states that the first person inclusive dual is diachronically an ambiguous category. In his reply McGregor (1989) says that is also synchronically ambiguous. I have certainly shown that *yumi* is now ambiguous in its reference in certain areas of Papua New Guinea where Tok Pisin is spoken, at least if communication involves urban and rural speakers. Varieties of Tok Pisin spoken in Erima and other rural areas divide up the same semantic space differently from urban areas such as Lae. Semantic differences such as these may add to the difficulty which many speakers already acknowledge when communicating across the

rural/urban dichotomy.

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