

Stephen A. Wurm (ed.) *New Guinea and neighboring areas: a sociolinguistic laboratory*. Contributions to the Sociology of Language (ed. Joshua Fishman). The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979. 289pp.

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This volume deals with a variety of sociolinguistic phenomena in the world's most linguistically diverse area, Melanesia. There are fifteen papers included in this volume, by such Melanesian linguistics specialists as Wurm, Tryon, Mühlhäusler, Bennett, Laycock, Scott, Olson, Johnston, Voorhoeve, Dutton and McElhanon. The contributions are divided into three general groups, "General Studies" (pp.3-78), "Ethnography of Speaking" (pp. 82-206) and "Lingue Franche in Papua New Guinea" (pp. 209-289). The real meat of this volume lies in the latter two sections, and this is where I will begin my review.

The section devoted to the ethnography of speaking contains articles on issues ranging from multilingualism and factors involved in code-switching, to lexical and stylistic expansion in Papua New Guinean vernaculars in a rapidly changing world, and the extent to which the structure of a language can directly match the categories in the world-view of its speakers. Of particular interest in this section is Olson's paper "The sociolinguistic significance of Barai possessive markers". Without trying to draw any Whorfian implications from his observations, Olson notes that there is a close match-up between certain aspects of the Barai view of themselves and their interrelations with each other and their role in the world, and certain very basic syntactic constructions which express verbal subjects and nominal possession.

What would be interesting of course, would be to see if there was any kind of general correlation between typologically similar languages and this particular set of cultural beliefs. Voorhoeve's "Turning the talk: a case of chain-interpreting in Papua New Guinea" should be compulsory reading for all government extension officers in Papua New Guinea, or in fact, for any naive communicator in cross-

cultural and cross-linguistic situations. The writer describes in completely non-technical language how a message which was delivered in Tok Pisin in the then 'unpacified' Nomad area of Western Province in Papua New Guinea, to a Hiri Motu speaker, who translated it to a Samo speaker, who then translated it into Kubo, was received by an assembled Kubo-speaking group, over whom the 'government' wished to establish 'control'. At the end of this complex chain of translation, the original 'government' ended up as 'the Old Man', while the concept of 'control' turned up as 'collecting and writing down names'. This original message was conveyed in 1966, and it was not until Voorhoeve analysed his tapes over ten years later that the extent of the miscommunication was uncovered, by which time presumably the government had already established its control.

The section dealing with Papua New Guinea's lingua francas concentrates heavily on Tok Pisin and related forms of the language, with some briefer discussions of Hiri Motu, English and the mission lingua francas. Of considerable interest is Mühlhäusler and Dutton's "Papuan Pidgin English and Hiri Motu", which documents a little known and very much depublicised Pidgin English spoken throughout coastal Papua before the government sponsored advent of Hiri Motu, even in the village of Hanuabada. The short life span of this pidgin and its replacement by Pidgin Motu (now known as Hiri Motu) has left modern Papua New Guinea with a linguistic (and political) split that shows no sign of healing quickly. Perhaps we can view this result of colonial interference positively however - it is "the only example (in the world) before World War II of an official language policy being successfully carried through" (pp.222-223). Mühlhäusler's "Sociolects in New Guinea Pidgin" describes the current development of new varieties of Tok Pisin, the lingua franca for most of the population of Papua New Guinea. The writer states that his "main stress...will be on the practical social implications" (p.225) of his observations, which is valuable, because the English-educated élite is now speaking a variety of Tok Pisin among themselves that is often largely unintelligible to the unschooled masses (and sometimes the élite even speak this variety of Tok Pisin to the unschooled masses!). The writer does note, however, that the élite is cleverly devising

strategies for effectively communicating their message *and* communicating their elevated status by extensive use of conjoined phrases, e.g. *dispela ekauntin o wok bilong lukautim moni 'this accounting or looking after money'*.

I now turn to the initial section of the book, which is perhaps the least satisfying. Although the title bills the book as a treatment of the New Guinea area, Tryon's "The language situation in the New Hebrides" and "Remarks on the language situation in the Solomon Islands" would seem to be somewhat out of place, as the languages of these areas do not figure significantly in the rest of the volume, which concentrates almost entirely on Papua New Guinea; besides which, they appear to say little that is new. The discussion of the languages of Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides) for example, appears to be little more than a short summary of Tryon (1976), which is 545 pages long. Wurm's "The language situation in the New Guinea area", while not out of place, also contains little that is new, and in addition to that, tends to perpetuate a number of unfortunate myths. On page 3, Wurm reports that "the indigenous languages of New Guinea area belong to two quite different language types", which is a misleading wording, as it would quite strongly suggest to the scholar new to the field that 'Papuan' was a genetic (or even typological) grouping of languages, which he later denies. Dealing with the so-called 'Papuan' languages, he says (p.4):

As a result of almost two decades of intensive work, it was established that the Papuan languages of the New Guinea area numbered a little under 750, and that they belonged to five large and six small phyletic groups which were apparently unrelated to each other, with seven or eight unrelated language isolates remaining outside these groups.

It would perhaps have been fairer to the neophyte to say that these genetic groupings are not necessarily universally accepted among specialists in the area.

There is one other minor weakness I find in this volume, though it is not a weakness that is limited to the initial section. Various writers, in talking about the role of English in Papua New Guinea, point to its peripheral function and the connotations of foreignness and social distance that it carries. Wurm, for instance, states that

English "lacks the feature of serving as a means of self-identification in connection with all that is typically Papua New Guinea" (p.9) and Mühlhäusler (p.249) also comments on the lack of national identification in English, which only Tok Pisin (or perhaps some other language) can express. These writers do not state that, among the educated élite at least, there is emerging some degree of backlash against Papua New Guineans who try to sound 'fancy' like Australians when they are speaking English, and there is a strong sense of attachment to the nascent Papua New Guinea dialect of English, with its wealth of new idiomatic expressions, e.g. 'Favour!', 'Like Good One!', 'The way you move your buttocks!' etc. The élites in this case seem to be establishing a trend.

Since we seem to be moving roughly from the back of the volume to the front, perhaps I could also comment on the rather unfortunate choice of title. It is currently unfashionable in this country to treat Melanesians purely as objects of research in an academic's test-tube, which is what the subtitle "A sociolinguistic laboratory" (perhaps unwittingly) hints at. There is much practical information in this volume that will be of value to academics and non-academics alike, and it is almost all written in a clear, non-jargonistic style. Hence the title gives a somewhat misleading first impression. I suggest that interested readers ignore the title, do not concentrate too much on the first section, and go straight to the more juicy cuts of meat in the second and third sections.