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## LANGUAGE ECOLOGY, LANGUAGE POLICY AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE IN A PAPUA NEW GUINEA HIGHLAND COMMUNITY

Francesca Merlan  
Australian National University  
[francesca.merlan@anu.edu.au](mailto:francesca.merlan@anu.edu.au)

Alan Rumsey  
Australian National University  
[alan.rumsey@anu.edu.au](mailto:alan.rumsey@anu.edu.au)

### Abstract

In this article we consider the relations among school language policy, pedagogical practice in a community school, and language ecology over the past 34 years in a community in the Nebilyer Valley in the Western Highlands Province of PNG. The local language Ku Waru is still being learned as a first language by all the children there and so is not immediately 'endangered'. But one of our main observations over several decades has been the advance of Tok Pisin, as indicated by earlier competence in it on the part of young children, and more widespread speakership among women and older people. Between 2011 and 2013 there was a sharp increase in the number of children who were learning Tok Pisin along with Ku Waru by the age of 2 ½. This resulted in part from an initiative taken by some parents to expose their children to Tok Pisin from an early age on the assumption that it would give them a head start in school. School policy has undergone several changes, from English-only to transitional bilingual education in Ku Waru and English, to the abandonment of that model in 2013. A consistent directive during all that time has been to prohibit or minimize the use of Tok Pisin in school, so that its greater diffusion cannot be seen as the direct result of policy. It has proceeded nevertheless, for a variety of reasons including greater mobility, wider communication networks, and progressively greater preferential use of Tok Pisin in church services.

### Introduction

This article has arisen from our participation in the 2014 Annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea, where there was extensive discussion of what use, if any, should be made of local languages in PNG's schools. That issue became the main theme of the Society's 2015 Annual meeting, resulting in a communiqué which summarized the debate as one over whether English language and literacy should be introduced from the earliest stages of formal schooling, or whether literacy in local languages should be taught in the initial stages of formal schooling, with oral English being introduced only as a subject<sup>1</sup>. These issues are currently being widely debated in PNG, not just within the LSPNG, and are likely to be the subject of far-reaching policy shifts within the next few years. Accordingly, the communiqué stresses the urgent need for further research and sharing of research results in this area.

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<sup>1</sup> For the full communiqué see <http://www.langlxmlanesia.com/lspng2015.htm>

With that in mind, drawing on our 34 years of linguistic and anthropological research in the community of Kailge in the Western Highlands Province, in this article we will provide an account of the changing ‘language ecology’ there (i.e. the range of languages and speech varieties that are used there and their contexts of use), the history and current operation of the Kailge Community School, including the changing mix of languages used and taught in it, local understandings of what is taken to be best practice in that respect, and how those do or don’t relate to official government policy. The Kailge school has undergone big policy changes over the past 34 years, from ‘English only’ until 1997, to transitional bilingual education in Ku Waru during 1997-2013, to English with some permitted admixture of Tok Pisin since 2013. In conclusion we will offer an assessment of how and to what extent those changes have affected the school’s performance in achieving what everyone wants for the children – a mastery of English and the subjects that can only be taught in it.

### **Language ecology and social setting in the Ku Waru region**

Our comments about the changing language ecology and social scene in the Ku Waru region of the Western Highlands Province are based on the field research we have done there since 1981. Currently engaged in a related project (‘Children’s Language Learning and the Development of Intersubjectivity’, funded by the Australian Research Council), we have travelled to our Western Highlands field site at Kailge 2-3 times per year since 2013 (on top of previous visits by at least one of us approximately every two years between 1997 and 2012). Our focus here is on evidence of various kinds of shift in language ecology proceeding quite strongly, in a context in which indigenous language use remains strong and is not immediately ‘endangered’. The local language Ku Waru is nevertheless observably losing ground to Tok Pisin, reflecting the social and political values attaching to the use of that language in particular settings. The ‘size’ of language speakership is, of course, important in the extent to which indigenous language continues to be used; but questions of setting, values speakers’ aspirations and the changing ecology of media and travel affect the patterns of language use even within large language communities.

Our research has been centered at Kailge, a concentration of houses, school, and church facilities on the slopes of the western Nebilyer Valley<sup>2</sup>. In our publications, in line with local usage, we have called the Kailge area Ku Waru (‘steep stone’), in reference to the expanse of white sandstone cliffs of the mountainside which rises above Kailge on the eastern slopes of the Tambul Range. This is only one kind of designation of the language and area used by locals, so it is useful here to briefly set out the language-dialect distinctions, and their relevance here.

Unlike in most areas of New Guinea, some Highlands languages are characterized by very large speakerships. These include Enga (approximately 242,000 speakers according to Ethnologue) and, immediately to the east, the language-dialect continuum in which we work. This continuum has no single name that is in popular usage but corresponds to the language group that is called ‘Hagen’ in Ethnologue, which nominally includes a total of 247,600 speakers. In Ethnologue, the ‘Hagen’ group is treated as comprising four distinct languages, but there are in fact no sharp boundaries between them. The political and economic centre

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller introduction to that region than the one presented here, and to the Ku Waru language, see Merlan and Rumsey (1991).

within this dialect continuum is Mt. Hagen town, the capital of Western Highlands Province. The language around Mt. Hagen is generally known as Melpa; this ethnonym has circulation in both anthropological and linguistic circles, and is also a term used by Mt. Hageners themselves. People of Mt. Hagen tend to distinguish their language forms from Temboka, a term they use to refer to people, language and geographical area southwest of Mt. Hagen, including the Nebilyer Valley.

There are numerous ways of distinguishing regional speech varieties within this dialect continuum. One, at fairly large scale, involves the contrast of our phrase *nu-nga na-nga* 'yours, mine' with the comparable form *nu-ngga na-ngga* used further west, in the Kaugel Valley, with prenasalised velar stop *-ngg* in place of velar nasal *-ng*. Within a few kilometres of Kailge in the Nebilyer Valley and over the Tambul Range are other recognized shibboleths – lexical, phonological and constructional marks of minor differences by which locals immediately recognize speaker provenience from various parts of the area. Within the area overall, the most conventional mode of identification of persons is by tribal name (preceding personal name). Named speech varieties do not necessarily coincide with tribal or other segmentary (clan, subclan) boundaries, but tend to extend across them. Marriage is normatively virilocal (i.e., women usually move to the husband's tribal territory). There is also a preference for men of any given tribe or local group to take wives from a range of other groups. This results in a variety of dialects typically being spoken in any residential concentration within these territories, but with one of these taken to be characteristic of the locally-grounded group (although usually not limited to it).

Among Ku Waru people who are living in their rural homeland, the local economy is still largely a subsistence one, based on intensive cultivation of sweet potatoes, taro and a wide range of other crops, raising of pigs, and use of locally obtained timber, cane, thatch and other materials for building their houses and agricultural infrastructure. But although Ku Waru people are on that basis still largely self-sufficient for their everyday subsistence needs, there is now also intensive engagement with the cash economy. This is based largely on their growing of coffee for the world market, something that they have been urged to do from the 1960s, when colonial Patrol Officers and agricultural advisors ('didiman') began to make numbers of trees available for people to start coffee gardens. To a lesser extent, people raise vegetables and sell some of these in local markets, others in Mount Hagen and more distant markets in coastal cities such as Lae and Port Moresby. There are also, as elsewhere in PNG, small local tradestores which are constantly restocked from Mt. Hagen. Some families raise chickens for sale, purchasing them, and feed and other accessories, at Mt. Hagen.

Since our early fieldwork, when travel to town usually involved covering the first stretch to the Highlands Highway on foot, Ku Waru people have become much more mobile. Many of them now travel regularly to Mt Hagen via commercially operated small buses and trucks that can get them there in about one hour. People take similar vehicles into the Wahgi Valley, to the Southern Highlands, and to Lae and Madang, where buyers purchase betel nut, and bring it back for sale in Mt. Hagen and Kailge. There is also much greater frequency of travel by Kailge people to Port Moresby, which from the highlands can only be reached by plane. There have been outposts of Highlanders in Port Moresby for some time (Strathern 1975), but the numbers have grown, and Western and other Highlanders now have significant control of the taxi business there. This attracts numbers of young men as drivers, with wealthier relatives purchasing the vehicles. Increasingly, wives and other relatives of people we know spend periods of time in Port Moresby. Some regard it as more entertaining than life at home, but generally complain of the constant need for money, even more than at home.

Corresponding with these various kinds of increased mobility, there has been a steady increase in the rate of marriage to people from outside the region, and in how far away those people come from. Since 2007, this increased mobility has been accompanied by greatly increased and accelerated interconnectivity due to the availability of mobile phones and network coverage across most of the Ku Waru region and the rest of Papua New Guinea and the wider world. Associated with these changes over the past 30-40 years, there have been considerable shifts in the language ecology of the Ku Waru region.

All children in the Ku Waru region continue to learn the local language (Ku Waru) from the earliest stages of language acquisition, and everyone who has grown up in the region speaks it natively. This contrasts with the situation in Mt. Hagen, where some children, especially those whose parents speak different languages, are not learning any local language and speak Tok Pisin as their mother tongue. But Tok Pisin has also made considerable inroads into the Ku Waru region.

When we first settled in Kailge in 1981, almost the only fluent Tok Pisin speakers were men under the age of about 45, adolescent boys, and children of age 6 and above<sup>3</sup>. Now Tok Pisin is spoken fluently by all but the most elderly people and by almost all children of age 3 and above. Nonetheless, except in certain restricted settings to be discussed below, Ku Waru remains the main or only language used at Kailge in everyday interactions among Ku Waru people of all ages.

In what follows, we first set out a picture of changing language use in one of the two settings at Kailge where languages other than Ku Waru are regularly used – the Kailge community school – and describe the role that that has been played in those changes by national language-education policy as locally understood. We then draw some brief, general conclusions from that picture. In the section that follows that, we describe changing language use in the other setting where Tok Pisin (and to limited extent English) are used – in church services.

### **Language policy and school**

The late Thomas Owa, a man of a large Kopia clan whose territory is at Kailge, worked in the 1960s at Tabuga Mission Station on the other side of the Nebilyer River from Kailge, assisting the Catholic priest there with education for a small number of elementary students, some of whom walked there every day from Kailge (a distance of approximately 10 kilometers) to attend school. Even earlier, he had worked with patrol officers, learned Tok Pisin, travelled the region, and saw himself trying to bring improvement to his people, for

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<sup>3</sup> It may be the case that more adolescent girls and young women were able to speak Tok Pisin than was evident to us at the time, for two reasons: 1) In order to be able to communicate directly with as many Ku Waru people as possible by learning Ku Waru, we encouraged people to speak it with us and instruct us in it rather than Tok Pisin; 2) the speaking of Tok Pisin by women at that time was somewhat stigmatised, as it was associated with town life, a more peripatetic lifestyle than was considered appropriate for women, and in particular with prostitution. Nevertheless, Francesca's experience of senior women at that time was that they genuinely did not speak or understand fluently spoken Tok Pisin. They revelled in speaking the odd (swear) word, but that was the extent of their usage.

which he saw schooling as necessary. He aspired to have a school located at Kailge that could draw in children from the surrounding area, and one was eventually established, in 1973. Since then, there has been a community school at Kailge, near the centre of the Ku Waru region. It retains its original association with the Catholic Church but is government funded and largely independent of the Church in its day-to-day operations.

From its students in the early years, we have heard that the first teachers were coastal New Guineans, and that instruction was in English. They also recount that the coastal teachers referred to Highlanders as ‘primitives’, instilling in them a sense that they needed to change – so that not all incentives to learning were mild-mannered! Without other evidence it is impossible, of course, to know what the standard of English of these teachers was, or if classroom instruction was fully in Standard English.

At any rate, when we first settled at Kailge in 1981, there was a large sign in the school showing a list of rules of conduct which the pupils were regularly called upon to recite out loud. Rule number one was “Don’t speak language” [i.e., “Don’t speak in the local language”]. The second rule was “Don’t speak Tok Pisin”. This confirmed what we had been told by an officer in the Education Department in Mount Hagen when we offered to help develop teaching materials in the local language. He said that he would like to accept our offer because he personally was very much in favour of using such materials, but that it was forbidden by Education Department policy, which called for the use of English only in schools. This changed dramatically in 1997, as we will discuss below.

The school was expanded in 2009 by the addition of grades 7 and 8; until then, it had included only pre-school and grades 1-6. The school thus now includes students whose level of English proficiency should be relatively high after a number of years of education in English. There is also a quite large cohort of preschool (‘Prep’) and first grade children. The simple, bush-construction facilities they use are located up the slopes about 15 minutes’ walk from the main Kailge school ground, where the buildings are more substantial. Prep teachers report large class sizes (of 50 and more), and currently adapt to this situation by breaking children into smaller sub-sets to carry out, with intermittent attention from teachers, simple activities of identifying, counting, singing and so on. Since we have not observed Prep in action, we cannot say much about language use there, except that the children who come in at this level all speak *tok ples* natively, and few or none have any familiarity with English. Their levels of understanding of Tok Pisin probably vary. As of 2015, one of the main ‘Prep’ teachers is an in-married woman from Chimbu Province whose language interaction with children is perforce in Tok Pisin. From time to time over the past few years, Prep assistant teachers have been local people whose first language in the local one, and who also can speak Tok Pisin. The number of Prep children in 2015 was said to be around 150 (Lina Paul, pers. com). How many of these attended regularly, versus intermittently, we cannot say.

As is the case throughout PNG, the main language of the Kailge school and the language of all the texts used there is English. But in line with dramatic changes in language policy at the national level in the 1990s, attempts were made during 1997-2012 to facilitate the learning of English through the officially sanctioned use of a model of transitional bilingual education. In this model literacy is first introduced in the local language in preschool and first grade, followed by a gradual shift to English over the next few years (Devette-Chee 2012, 2013). In 2013 this model was phased out at Kailge. In a discussion Alan Rumsey had with the headmaster at the time, he said that was because the model was not working: children were failing to make a successful transition to English. The headmaster also said that the

abandonment of bilingual education had been mandated at the national level by a recent policy shift away from it by the PNG Education Department. Having later been unable to find any reference to such a shift on the internet, in May 2014 Alan interviewed the Superintendent of Operations at the Education Department Office in Mount Hagen, William Awa. He said that there has been confusion about what had actually happened in that respect. According to him, the only official change was that English had been reintroduced as a subject of study in Prep and Grade One. The option to use local language as a medium for teaching it still remained in place. He said that there had been discussion lately of the possible introduction of an “English only” policy (to which he himself was strongly opposed), but that the issue was still under consideration and that no such policy was yet in place.

Though the transitional bilingual education model is no longer in use at Kailge, classroom interaction still takes place in various combinations of English, Tok Pisin and Ku Waru or related, mutually intelligible dialects if known by the teacher. Though some teachers come from outside the region, and thus do not speak any dialect from within the intelligible range on the dialect continuum, there has been an increasing number of teachers who do come from Hagen or other parts of the dialect continuum. It therefore seems probable that they can fairly quickly adapt to, or at least understand, the local spoken language. It is also quite likely that students (especially older ones) are able to understand teachers who speak dialects that differ only moderately from the local one, and/or the Hagen dialect forms, with which people gain some familiarity from trips to town. How teachers and students adapt to each other in this context is not something we have observed closely, but obviously would have considerable relevance to a detailed study of language change. This is all the more true since some teachers form friendships with locals and their families, so that the consequences of language and dialect diversity extend beyond school hours. (Some teachers remain fairly aloof, leave during holiday periods, and otherwise minimize interaction with locals).

What general conclusions can we draw from this picture of the interaction of national and regional language policy and implementation, and factors at the local level? First, we note in this connection that English-language proficiency seems to have actually declined among graduates of the school over the past 20-30 years. We observe considerable difference in competence between the students who first attended Kailge school and passed out at Grade 6 (who are now in their 40s and 50s), and those who are now at similar grade levels in the school. It remains to be seen what the level of competence will be of those who complete Grade 8. There has not been time to observe this, despite the introduction of Grades 7-8 in 2009. This is because the school was completely destroyed in a tribal war that took place during 2005-2007 and did not get started up again until 2009. It was then rebuilt and the year 7 and 8 levels were added. One consequence of this interruption has been that many students in lower grades are considerably older than they would otherwise be; many lost several years' schooling. Another, more positive consequence is that the school has been completely rebuilt, and its physical plant is much better than it was previously, when it largely consisted of thatched bush houses. The school now has three large, metal-roofed classroom buildings and a generator and administrative building funded by Digicel, PNG's largest mobile phone company.

The small number of graduates who have become proficient in English and gone on to pass high school and university entrance exams have not, in our experience of several families of this kind, generally returned to live in the Ku Waru region, but do usually remain in contact with family and friends there and serve as highly valued links to the world beyond.

Second, Tok Pisin has become more widely diffused, both by age and sex since the early 1980s. The age at which children begin to gain familiarity with Tok Pisin appears to have dropped considerably. This will be illustrated in detail below. Here we will simply note that by the time children are post-Prep age, most of them have some familiarity in both understanding and speaking Tok Pisin and some are fully fluent in it. This includes girls as well as boys, and gender difference in Tok Pisin facility has diminished considerably in recent years.

Third, local use of English in everyday conversation is vanishingly small. Even the few (like the headmaster) who speak it well cannot expect to use English as a viable language of communication except possibly within the most restricted circles in the school (and perhaps not even there). Many people would ideally like their children to succeed in school and be able to get jobs, and think that English is important for this. But it seems that many (especially less highly educated) do not distinguish clearly between Tok Pisin and English. Some appear to think that Tok Pisin confers the advantage they would like their children to have.

Fourth, school language policy was originally focused on English, then shifted to a period of bilingual transition, and now might be best described on the local level as a matter of practical adaptation to the actual mixture of local dialects, Tok Pisin, and a perceived policy injunction to focus on English. Clearly, at Prep level, the children's language of expressive competence is *tok ples*. They appear to be getting more exposure to Tok Pisin at this level than previously. Policy appears to be that English can be taught as a subject at this level. With post-Prep school entry, the language of education is meant to be English. This is most clearly so in that teaching materials are in English. Students attempt to speak and write English. Many teachers are less than fully competent in English. There is not a strong likelihood that students can become highly English-competent in these circumstances. They clearly acquire much greater sense of the differences between Tok Pisin and English, and some competence in English.

### **Language use in churches**

The other settings in which languages other than Ku Waru are regularly used in the region are church services. The denominations at Kailge now include Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, PNG Bible Church, Holy Spirit Revival Church, and New Covenant Church. All of them make use of a complete Tok Pisin translation of the Bible that has been available since 1989, and most also make at least some use of various English translations. The services are generally conducted in a combination of Tok Pisin and Ku Waru, but in different combinations in the different churches, with extensive *viva voce* translation and exegesis across those two languages, and of English-language scripture in each.

The Catholic Church was the only one at Kailge when we first arrived there in 1981. The priest who held mass every two or three weeks, Father John Roelfs, lived across the valley at Tabuga, and came to Kailge (or as close as one could come by car) in a small four-wheel drive vehicle. All priests who had serviced Kailge to that point had been Europeans, including Father John, who was Dutch. He spoke Tok Pisin, but not Ku Waru, which at that time meant that he could not communicate directly with the majority of parishioners. He heard confessions in Ku Waru, the content of which he could not, of course, understand. He attended to all the rites and sacraments, from baptisms to extreme unction; the parishioners were familiar with these rites, despite the lack of common language. There was a woman, the local government Councillor's wife, who served as women's representative in church

matters. There was a catechist, Karua, who had lived at Kailge for some years. Karua originated from the Kaugel Valley, on the other side of the Tambul Range from Kailge, and so spoke a dialect form recognizably different from the local one, but mutually intelligible with it. Father John delivered his sermons and readings in a combination of English and Tok Pisin; Karua translated into his Kaugel dialect. All discussions of church activities had to take place largely in Tok Pisin, and were mediated by the catechist, as many of the parishioners (older men, and most women) did not speak Tok Pisin.

The current Catholic priest in the region is a Papua New Guinean from another part of the country (the Sepik) who does not speak or understand Ku Waru. He conducts the services in Tok Pisin, generally no longer with the assistance of a local-language interpreter. As far as we know from our attendance of the other local churches, all the current ministers speak Ku Waru and/or related mutually intelligible dialects, and use a combination of them and Tok Pisin in their services.

With the arrival of new churches have come some new patterns of language usage, as well changes in other aspects of the services. The Holy Spirit Revival Church, for example, begins most of its services with a lengthy period of singing, much of which is in Tok Pisin, some in Melpa, and very little in local dialect/s. The proportion of singing to talk is much greater here than in the Catholic Church. The pastor, like most of the pastors of recently arrived churches, is himself a Papua New Guinean from a neighbouring tribal group (which was formerly inimical to ours, so his presence is regarded as evidence of the power of faith-based activity over *bo* or 'traditional' ways). He speaks a closely related and easily intelligible dialect to ours. He conducts services partly in Tok Pisin, partly in *tok ples*, with readings from both Standard English and Tok Pisin Bibles. It is typical of the newer churches that sermons are delivered partly or entirely in Tok Pisin.

### **The rise of Tok Pisin usage among small children**

The study of children's language learning that we are currently engaged in is one that builds on language acquisition data that Rumsey and two Ku Waru speaking field assistants had been recording on a smaller scale since 2004<sup>4</sup>. Beginning in mid-2013 our new data has consisted of audio and video recordings of four Ku Waru children of various ages – Philip, Jakelin, Sylvia, and Ken – each of whom is being recorded in interactions with their parents and other caregivers for approximately one hour at monthly intervals. The recorded interactions are being transcribed in their entirety, and the transcripts computerised for analysis along many different dimensions.

One of the most striking developments that has become evident from the new data is a recent decrease in age of the youngest Tok Pisin speakers, and in the age of the children when the parents begin speaking Tok Pisin to them. In all of the transcript data that was recorded during 2004-2011<sup>5</sup> there are almost no instances of Tok Pisin being used either by the parents or by the children, and most of the few instances of it are short, isolated utterances of one or two words only (*yu go* 'You go!' *yu kam* 'You come!', etc). In the data that was recorded in 2013,

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<sup>4</sup> For some of the results of that work see Rumsey 2013, 2015 and Rumsey et al 2013.

<sup>5</sup> This comprises approximately seventy hours of recorded interaction involving children, which has been transcribed by hand onto approximately 13,000 A4 pages and is currently being computerized as part of our new project.

as exemplified and tabulated below, Ku Waru was still the most frequently used language, but there were also sizable numbers of utterances in Tok Pisin from three of the four children, and they are the youngest three (Philip, Jakelin, and Sylvia). Why such a big shift within the space of only two years?

From our conversations with Ku Waru parents, it became apparent that this shift was related to the changes of policy and local practice at the Kailge Community school that were described above. There was a perception among the parents that those changes had ushered in a new era in which it was recognized that children had not been learning English as well as they should be in order to better their chances for economic advancement, and that to that end they must begin learning it at an earlier age. While most of the parents did not themselves speak English well enough to expose their children to it at home, all were fluent Tok Pisin speakers. Since Ku Waru people (as elsewhere in PNG) tend to think of Tok Pisin as being closer to English than to their local language – or even as a kind of English – they believed that they could give the children a head start for learning English in school by exposing them to children to Tok Pisin at home from an early age. That, they say, is what lay behind their increased use of Tok Pisin to their children. But all of them also thought it important that their children should continue to learn Ku Waru. So none of them spoke *only* Tok Pisin their children. Rather, they used it in to a limited extent, interspersed with Ku Waru, with frequent switches between the two.

To illustrate this, let us now look at some examples of inter-language alternation and interaction in the transcripts. Example 1 below comes from a conversation between a Ku Waru man Gabren and his son Philip. Philip's age at the time, shown in the format used in language acquisition studies, was 2;04.01 (2 years, 4 months and 1 day). He and Gabren are sitting on the floor of their house beside the fireplace in the middle of the main room. Positioned about one meter on front of them is the small digital audio recorder on which they are being recorded. With its two thimble-sized microphones protruding at ear-like angles from the top and small leg-like tripod on which it rests, it apparently looks to Philip like a little animal of some kind. While Gabren is talking to him about something else, in Ku Waru, Philip abruptly turns away from him towards the recorder, stands up and makes shooing gestures at it as if it were a stray dog or other beastly intruder, and says **ko**, which is his baby talk version of the Tok Pisin word *go*, 'Go'. Gabren is at first taken aback but then quickly realizes what Philip is up to and joins in the game. As can be seen, the interaction then proceeds as a series of alternations between Tok Pisin and Ku Waru. In this and all subsequent examples, Ku Waru words are shown in italic typeface and Tok Pisin ones in boldface. Words which are in the baby talk versions of those languages are underlined.

- (1) a. Philip [to the recorder]: **ko**  
   go  
   Go away!
- b. Father:  **ko** *melayl pa*  
   go thing go  
   Go away, thing, go!
- c. Philip:  **ko**  
   Go away!

- d. Father: *pa*  
Go away!
- e. Philip: **ko**  
Go away!
- f. Father: *melayl pa*  
thing go  
Thing, go away!
- g. Philip: **ko**  
Go away!
- h. Father: *pa*  
Go away!
- i. Philip: *pa*  
Go away!

Throughout this stretch of interaction, rather than directly addressing each other, Philip and his father Gabren are both addressing the recorder, but each with the other as what Erving Goffman (1981) would have called a “targeted overhearer”. For present purposes there are four things we want to point out about the interaction. One is that it is Philip who initiates the switch to Tok Pisin (in line a) after he and Gabren had been speaking in Ku Waru. Another is that it is not surprising that the utterance with which he does that is a command, using a short-and-sharp imperative verb. For even among the oldest Ku Waru speakers who do not speak Tok Pisin fluently, the few things they know how to say in it always include commands (and usually also curse words for berating people; both an apparent legacy from the colonial era, when Tok Pisin was characteristically used by patrol officers for just such purposes). The third thing to notice is that after the switch into Tok Pisin has been made, the father Gabren doesn’t stay with that for long, but instead repeats what Philip has said in Tok Pisin just once and then switches back to Ku Waru for the rest of the exchange. Finally, notice that what Gabren does with his Ku Waru utterances for the rest of the exchange is in effect to translate Philip’s into Ku Waru and sometimes expand upon them. Thus in line b after echoing Philip by repeating his BTP form **ko**, Gabren then follows this up with a Ku Waru word *melayl*, ‘the thing’, referring to the recorder. He then adds the Ku Waru word *pa*, which is the imperative form of the Ku Waru word for ‘go’. This is a direct translation of Philip’s BTP form **ko**, which he has first repeated before translating it. In the next two lines (c and d) Philip repeats his BTP form and Gabren his Ku Waru translation of it. The same thing happens again in lines e and f – with Gabren again adding *melayl* ‘thing’ in line f – and again in lines g and h. In line i Philip then finally in effect accepts Gabren’s lead by repeating the Ku Waru word *pa* instead of sticking with **ko** as in lines c, e and g<sup>6</sup>.

The next example, (2), comes from an interaction between Jakelin at age 2;10.29 and her mother Saina.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of processes of translation in this and other interactions between Ku Waru children and their caregivers see Rumsey 2014.

- (2) a. Mother: *wapi gai bo lyim-o nya*  
 [woman's name] sweet potato cutting got say (imperative)  
 Say "Wapi went to get sweet potato cuttings [to plant]."
- b. Jakelin: *api kai ki lip o*  
 [Jakelin's approximation of the above]
- c. Mother: *uj sula meba*  
 wood split will bring  
 She will split firewood and bring it.
- d. Jakelin: *us suk*  
 [Jakelin's approximation of the above]
- e. Mother: *ep gai kaluba tekim-o nya* (imperative)  
 now sweet potato will cook is doing say  
 Say "Now she is about to cook sweet potatoes"
- f. Jakelin: **em lak kukim kaka**  
 He/she like cook sweet potatoes  
 She wants to cook sweet potatoes

This stretch of interaction contains two instances of the imperative verb *nya* 'say!', at the end of lines a and e. In each of those lines the mother Saina presents an utterance for Jakelin and tells her to say it. In line b Jakelin does as she is told, repeating after Saina in her own simplified version of the utterance that Saina has modelled for her. Notably, Jakelin does the same thing in line d, repeating what Saina has said in line c, even though in this case there is no imperative verb of saying to make it explicit that Saina's utterance is being presented as one for Jakelin to repeat. This is typical of interactions between Ku Waru parents and children, in that the modelled-speech routine between them is so common that the explicit framing of the parent's prompt with the verb 'say' is unnecessary in order for the child to recognize that he/she is being prompted to repeat it. Be that as it may, in line e of this interaction the mother Saina does include the framing 'say' verb *nya* again. What she gets in response from Jakelyn this time, in line f, is not the Ku Waru utterance that has been modelled for her, but an utterance in Tok Pisin which is nearly equivalent to it in its sense. The main things we want to point out about this exchange are that here as in example 1 it is the child who initiates the switch to Tok Pisin, and that the utterance with which she does so takes the form of a translation, this time by the child, from Ku Waru into Tok Pisin rather than vice versa.

Our final example, (3), comes from a conversation between Sylvia (age 3;02.22) and her mother Ani.

- (3) a. Sylvia: **yu go lo aus**  
 you go to house  
 You go home.



least implicitly in another way, by enjoining the children, after Tok Pisin has been spoken for several turns, to shift back to Ku Waru.

**Table 1. Incidence of Tok Pisin vs Ku Waru in interactions involving four children**

Child and age	Ku Waru > Ku Waru	Ku Waru > Tok Pisin	Tok Pisin > Tok Pisin	Tok Pisin > Ku Waru	Ku Waru / Tok Pisin mix
Philip 2;04.01	249 (94%)	11 (4%)	0	0	5 (2%)
Philip 2;05.02	236 (94%)	7 (3%)	1 (<1%)	1 (<1%)	7 (3%)
Philip 2;06.05	171 (94%)	9 (5%)	0	0	2 (1%)
Jakelin 2;10.29	298 (72%)	93 (23%)	13 (3%)	1 (<1%)	7 (2%)
Jakelin 2;11.27	105 (68%)	34 (22%)	9 (6%)	1 (<1%)	7 (4%)
Jakelin 3;00.27	136 (84%)	21 (13%)	1 (<1%)	0	4 (2%)
Sylvia 3;02.22	225 (75%)	20 (7%)	44 (15%)	0	10 (3%)
Sylvia 3;03.12	252 (67%)	8 (2%)	110 (30%)	1 (<1%)	4 (1%)
Sylvia 3;04.21	407 (76%)	12 (2%)	115 (21%)	0	2 (<1%)
Sylvia 3;05.21	340 (91%)	26 (7%)	5 (1%)	0	4 (1%)
Ken 3;08.11	441 (>99%)	1 (<1%)	0	0	0
Ken 3;09.26	421 (>99%)	1 (<1%)	0	0	0
Ken 3;10.27	420 (100%)	0	0	0	0
Ken 3;11.23	564 (99%)	3 (1%)	0	0	0

Key: Children's ages are shown in years;months.days. For example 2;04.01 designates two years, four months and one day. In the top row of the table **Ku Waru > Ku Waru** indicates a pair of conversational turn in which the child was addressed in Ku Waru and responded in Ku Waru, **Ku Waru > Tok Pisin** one in which the child was addressed in Ku Waru and responded in Tok Pisin, etc.

## Conclusions

For students to achieve English competence, and related mastery of subjects that can only be taught in English, have always been the aims of school policy and programs, though two different policies have been in place: one, 'English-only', and the second, bilingual transition.

There has recently been a return in some quarters to the idea of English-only pedagogy. Whatever the policy has been, our experience indicates that English competence on completion has declined over the last 20-30 years on the part of those who have completed Year 6 (which was previously the most common exit point). It would be advisable to have ways of empirically assessing on this – having reliable data concerning standard of English competence at Year 6. This apparently declining competence is not in any obvious way the result of policy, but appears to have more to do with the changing motivations and attitudes of students and perhaps families.

The initial cohorts of students who succeeded in passing out of the school appear to have been highly motivated. This might be seen in both the level of English of those who did not continue, and the continuation of a handful of students who have become highly successful, obtaining academic, administrative and professional jobs. The question of trends in recent cohorts has been complicated by the hiatus in the school for approximately four years due to tribal warfare in the 2000s.

It is presently not clear to us how much language preparation occurs at Prep or grade 1 level, nor how much English is presented to these young children. But what is clear is that Tok Pisin competence is much greater among children at those levels than it previously was, consistent with its greater diffusion generally and with the recent change whereby some parents have begun deliberately exposing their children to Tok Pisin from an earlier age than had previously been the case. As shown by the data presented here, this initiative on the parents' part has been eagerly taken up by the children, some of whom perhaps carry it further than their parents had intended. Although that initiative was undoubtedly not the only reason for the big increase in Tok Pisin use by toddlers took place at Kailge between 2011 and 2013, it seems clear that there was such an increase. That has resulted in more children already being fluent in Tok Pisin when they enter preschool, and is likely to result in an even higher proportion in the future.

Children in elementary grades gain competence in English but probably not at levels that really allow for language facility in more complex reading. It would be instructive to have a comparison of, e.g., mathematical competences across the same time period, to be able to compare a highly language-based with a more numerically-based subject (which nevertheless must be explained in language).

One of the main local vectors of Tok Pisin appears to be church attendance and practice. This is an area of change and innovation in this respect. The previous, predominant church practice was for the priest to be an outsider who delivered sermons in Tok Pisin, and for these to be directly translated into the local language. We now have a situation in which there is a plethora of churches, most pastors are from the region, and use a combination of Tok Pisin, local language, and English Bible reading. The relation between what is said in the local language and what is said in Tok Pisin is much less directly a matter of translation of content from one to the other, but rather the delivery of messages in both media. We have noticed that, although many years have been put into Bible translation into both our dialect/s and Melpa, there is extremely limited use of such materials by parishioners. The main role of sacred texts is their use and exegesis by pastors, and it appears to be in that narrative form that Biblical stories come to be known.

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