

TRANSFER BETWEEN SELEPET AND MELANESIAN PIDGIN IDIOMS¹

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Mipela laik tokaut long wanpela lain tok na long dispela mipela laik makim tok piksa olsem. Yumi ken tokim olsem: "em i karim kaukau" na ol i save olsem: "wanpela man o meri em i holim kaukau na wokabaut". Olsem yumi ken tok olsem: "em i karim diwai" o "em i karim wanem samting" na ol i save olsem: "wanpela man o meri em i holim diwai o wanem samting na em i wokabaut". Tasol yumi tok olsem: "em i karim bel" na ol i no save olsem: "wanpela man o meri em i holim bel na wokabaut". Nogat, dispela tok i gat narapela as na mipela laik tokaut long dispela lain tok tasol.

Orait, mipela laik tingting long tupela samting. Taim sampela waitman o man bilong longwe ples ol i laik tokim man bilong tok ples Selepet ol i save tokim em long Tok Pisin. Na man bilong Selepet i save bekim tok long Tok Pisin. Orait, mipela gat tupela askim. Namba wan i olsem. Taim ol manmeri bilong Selepet ol i harim Tok Pisin, ol i klia gut long as bilong tingting bilong man i autim long Tok Pisin o nogat? Na namba tu i olsem. Taim man bilong Selepet ol i laik autim tingting na tokim ol long Tok Pisin, dispela Tok Pisin inap holim as bilong tingting bilong ol na ol man i ken klia gut o nogat?

Orait, mipela tokaut olsem. Sapos ol manmeri i laik tokim ol long pen samting, ol inap mekim long Tok Pisin. Tasol, sapos ol i laik tokim ol long as bilong tingting bilong ol, o bel i kirap olsem wanem, ol i no inap mekim long Tok Pisin na ol i harim na klia gut long as bilong tok, nogat. Bilong wanem? I olsem.

Tok Selepet i gat planti hap liklik tok istap insait long wanpela Tok Pisin. Olsem na wanpela man bilong Selepet em i autim tingting na mekim long Tok Pisin, ol i harim tasol ol i no save gut long wanem hap liklik tok dispela man bilong Selepet em i bin tingim, nogat. Olsem taim wanpela man bilong longwe ples i mekim long Tok Pisin na tokim ol Selepet, ol i harim tasol, ol i no save gut long as bilong tingting bilong en. Bilong wanem? Ol i no ken skelim Tok Pisin na tingim olsem: "O dispela Tok Selepet em i holim". Nogat.

Orait mipela tingim olsem. Tok Pisin em inap long makim sampela tingting bilong yumi na ol manmeri i ken harim. Tasol em i no inap autim as tru bilong tingting bilong yumi o bilong bel bilong yumi i kirap olsem wanem, nogat. As tok ples bilong yumi tasol em inap. Em tasol.

Linguists generally agree that an idiom is an expression which usually functions as a single semantic unit and which cannot be understood by simply regarding its constituent parts in a literal sense. Rather, it represents something more than its parts. Thus, the Melanesian Pidgin (hereafter simply Pidgin) expression (1) *em i bel kaskas long mi* has nothing to do with bellies and scabies but rather expresses the emotion of intense anger.

This study focuses upon the transfer made by the Selepet speaker when he wishes to express Selepet idioms in Pidgin, and conversely, when he is expected to understand idioms as expressed in Pidgin. Although the Selepet people would rank among the more acculturated peoples of Papua New Guinea, the Pidgin language is largely used by men as a second language in contexts foreign to their more traditional patterns of expression. For the majority of Selepet speakers, the message is encoded first in Selepet and then transferred into Pidgin, rather than being encoded directly in Pidgin. Conversely, when the message is heard in Pidgin, it is first transferred into Selepet and then decoded.² Since both the encoding and decoding processes are performed in the categories of the Selepet language, the starting point for this study is an understanding of Selepet idiom formation.

The literalisation (see Chafe, 1970: 40ff.) of Selepet idioms reveals a single dominating construction type, that of one or two nominal elements with a single verbal element. For example, (2) *engatŋe naŋgap* ('he knows his neck') is understood as 'he is responsible for his actions' and (3) *emet engatŋe naŋgap* ('the house knows its neck') indicates 'early in the morning before dawn'. In the surface structure of idioms, there is often an absence of a nominal element due to noun deletion as in (4) *nâŋgâŋetâ bâleap* from *nâŋgâŋetâ biwlyeŋe bâleap* ('they heard it and their insides became bad') 'they were dissatisfied, unhappy about it'.

Selepet idioms are built from apparently closed subsets of nominal and verbal elements. The nominal subset includes thirty nouns, of which twenty-seven represent various body parts. The verbal subset includes in excess of one hundred verbal elements. Although this system yields a potential three thousand or more idioms, this potentiality is not realised because not all combinations of nominal and verbal elements from these subsets represent idiomatic expressions. Rather, some combinations result in both idioms and literalisations as in (5) *engatŋe huhuap* ('he smashed his neck') which, when idiomatised, means 'he is repeating himself' but when literalised means 'he killed him'. Some combinations result only in literalisations as in (6) *biwŋe gikpok gikpok miap* ('he divided up its inside') 'he split (the tree trunk) into thick slabs'. Some combinations are rejected as meaningless.

Although it appears that the Selepet speaker normally does not discriminate conceptually between a class of idioms versus a class of non-idioms, a definition of the Selepet idiom can still be based upon the statement that a Selepet idiom represents a semantic unit which is understood as something more than its literalisation. Such a definition of the Selepet idiom, however, has no direct counterpart in English because it includes the English concepts of 'extended meaning', 'metaphor' and 'euphemism'. In Chafe's framework (1970) it would include both his 'restricted' and 'unrestricted' idioms.

The emotional responses evoked by the use of a particular idiom are

much greater than those evoked by the use of a corresponding non-idiomatic semantic unit. Thus, to say 'I am startled' by the expression *ok can*, which refers to the physical response, is much weaker than saying it by use of the idiom (7) *unutne ariap* ('my shadow went away'). To say 'he embraced him in greeting' with *parahuap* evokes much less sentiment than to say (8) *hâmeŋan hârem niap* ('he cut on his nose and ate it'). When one wants to express those emotions which are very basic to one's behaviour, it is very important to use the idiomatic expressions. To do so attains the deepest level of communication.

This study concerns the idioms generated by the use of three Selepet nouns, namely, *biwi* 'inside', *tep* 'belly' and *engat* 'neck'. The 'inside' represents the seat of one's emotions and evidences the largest number of idioms with ninety-three. 'Inside' was most frequently equated with Pidgin *tingting* when *tingting* represented 'opinion' or 'idea'. In other cases it was either equated with *bel* when *bel* represented the seat of the emotions or it was rendered by a Pidgin non-idiom. The use of 'belly' in many idioms is regarded as similar to, but not as strong as, the use of 'inside'. In other idioms, however, the resulting meaning is quite different. Of the fifty-one idioms using 'belly', fully one-third of them are restricted idioms referring to hunger or to the condition of one's feces. When 'belly' was not equated with Pidgin *bel*, it was rendered by Pidgin non-idioms. 'Neck' represents either the seat of one's intellect or understanding or it is used figuratively of one's voice. It is used in forty-six idioms. 'Neck' was equated with Pidgin *tingting* when *tingting* represented one's understanding, *nek* when *nek* represented 'melody, tune' and *tok* or *maus* when these terms represented one's 'voice' or 'dialect'. The 190 Selepet idioms used in this study make some very fine distinctions in the expression of one's emotions as illustrated by the following:

- (9) *biwinan teteap* ('it appeared on my inside') 'it has occurred to me' (after contemplation)
- (10) *biwine pâraŋ yap* ('my inside burst open') 'it occurred to me' (a new thought without contemplation)
- (11) *biwinan tap* ('it is in my inside') 'I have not divulged it yet' (a neutral focus here, a fact about the information)
- (12) *biwinane mian* ('I hold it with my inside') 'I have not divulged it' (focus is on the person's active suppression of the information)
- (13) *biwinane nelâmâk tap* ('my inside forgets it') 'I neglected to divulge it' (focus on the inaction of the person)
- (14) *biwinan ekmâ nangap* ('he looks at his inside and thinks') 'he is contemplating it' (focus on active contemplation)
- (15) *biwine golâek tap* ('his inside is awake') 'he bears that in mind' (focus is more neutral; the person is not necessarily thinking about it)
- (16) *biwinan kasap* ('he put it in his inside') 'he will not forget it' (focus is on the permanence of the information)
- (17) *biwine pâlâmne oap* ('my inside is dull') 'I do not care about it'
- (18) *biwine silik solok oap* ('my inside slides down') 'I am

dispirited'

- (19) biwine umatŋe oap ('my inside is heavy') 'I think it is useless to bother about it'
- (20) biwine pesuk yap ('my inside is finished') 'I have completely failed'
- (21) biwine hâuŋ yap ('my inside droops') 'I am in utter despair'

The type of Pidgin used in this study is that commonly spoken in the Selepet area, as contrasted with what could be referred to as 'town Pidgin'. Moreover, it represents the Pidgin spoken by men who have not acquired a high level of facility in English. Thus the Selepet idiom (22) tepeŋe bâleap ('their bellies became bad') is regarded as better translated by Pidgin *ol i bel no gut* rather than by *ol i jelas*. Although the latter equivalent was given by a councillor at a recent local government council meeting, it was understood by almost no one and therefore is not regarded as acceptable Pidgin.

The use of any written materials in collecting the data supporting this study was avoided in order to minimise the tendency toward Pidgin literalisations of the Selepet idioms and vice versa. Rather, by discussing a hypothetical situation in Selepet, the concepts involved were kept in the foreground with the result that in the transfer to Pidgin, attention was focused on the concepts themselves and not on the individual words expressing these concepts. The resulting list of Pidgin idioms were given in their appropriate contexts to a number of Selepet speakers who then expressed these again in Selepet. The transference of the semantic units expressed by the Selepet and Pidgin idioms allow several observations from which some generalisations may be made. In the examples given below the Selepet forms are omitted and only their English literalisations together with the English and Pidgin equivalents are given.

Selepet to Pidgin Transfer

The Selepet idioms which were most easily and most unambiguously transferred into Pidgin were those relating mainly physical conditions.

- (23) ('she puts her belly') 'she is pregnant' *em i karim bel*³
- (24) ('it does for his belly') 'he has a stomach ache' *bel bilong em i pen*
- (25) ('his neck tore open') 'he regained his voice' *nek bilong em i op long toktok*
- (26) ('his belly is awake') 'he has not slept' *em i no laik long slip*

When the difference between separate Selepet idioms is one of degree, these differences were brought out very well in Pidgin.

- (27) ('my neck floats upward') 'my neck is stiff from carrying' *nek bilong mi i pen liklik*
- (28) ('I do for my neck') 'I have a neck ache' *nek bilong mi i pen*
- (29) ('it bites on my neck') 'my neck has sharp pains' *blut sutim nek bilong mi*
- (30) ('my neck flares up') 'my neck throbs with pain' *nek bilong*

mi i pen tumas

Note, however, that of the foregoing nine Selepet idioms, only two (23, 29) were expressed by Pidgin idioms.

When the corresponding Selepet and Pidgin semantic units are expressed by idioms with the same or similar literalisations, the transfer in either direction is usually easy and adequate.

- (31) ('my belly is glad') 'I am happy about it' *bel bilong mi i hamamas⁴*
- (32) ('my belly is hot') 'I am angry' *bel bilong mi i hat*
- (33) ('my belly is bad') 'I am unhappy, jealous' *bel bilong mi no gut*
- (34) ('my belly is not sufficient') 'I want to eat more' *bel bilong mi i no inap*
- (35) ('she puts her belly') 'she is pregnant' *em i karim bel*

An overwhelming tendency was that the fine nuances expressed by various Selepet idioms were lost in Pidgin. The Pidgin idiom *bel bilong mi i kirap* embraces the semantic units expressed by eight Selepet idioms.

- (36) ('I do only with my belly') 'I hope to receive it'
- (37) ('my inside flares up') 'I eagerly anticipate receiving something'
- (38) ('my inside arises') 'I am aroused' (generally)
- (39) ('my inside raises up') 'I think that I am able'
- (40) ('my inside shook') 'I am ready to do it'
- (41) ('my belly raised up') 'I am desirous'
- (42) ('my belly shook') 'I have an urge for her'
- (43) ('my belly flares up') 'I am beside myself with excitement'

The Pidgin idiom *mi gat tubel* or *mi gat tupela tingting* resulted from transferring six Selepet idioms.

- (44) ('I tie it up with my neck') 'I am awaiting further word'
- (45) ('my inside appears everywhere') 'I am unable to choose among several things'
- (46) ('my inside fights and eats itself') 'I have butterflies about it'
- (47) ('he has two necks') 'he is doubtful' (of another's actions or of past actions)
- (48) ('my neck is dull') 'I do not care what is done about it'
- (49) ('my inside becomes two') 'I am in doubt' (over future actions of my own)

When these Pidgin expressions were transferred back into Selepet, with but one exception all were transferred by Selepet non-idioms. The exception, (49), however, has essentially the same literalisation in both languages. This would then fall into the same category as expressions (31-35).

Quite different semantic units in Selepet were expressed by a single Pidgin expression. The following all yielded *tingting bilong em i klia pinis*.

- (50) ('he knows his neck') 'he is responsible' (said of a child in pre-adolescent years)
- (51) ('his inside tore open') 'he remembered it' (after having completely forgotten it), 'a new idea occurred to him'
- (52) ('his inside set itself apart') 'the choice became clear to him'
- (53) ('their insides hollowed themselves out') 'it dawned on them'

Pidgin to Selepet Transfer

When Pidgin idioms or non-idioms were transferred to Selepet, they were rarely expressed by a Selepet idiom if a Selepet non-idiom expressed the same or a related semantic unit. In the following examples the literalisation and English equivalent is followed by the Pidgin expression which in turn is followed by the English equivalent of the Selepet expression which resulted when the Pidgin expression was re-transferred into Selepet.

- (54) ('my inside became white') 'I have been reconciled' became *mi no kros moa* which was equated with 'I don't feel anger a second time'
- (55) ('my inside is satisfactory') 'I agree' became *mi tingim em i stret* which was equated with 'I think, 'good''
- (56) ('he hit you on your neck') 'he forbade you' became *em putim tambu long yu* which was equated with 'he said, 'tambu''
- (57) ('his belly burst open') 'he died' (a euphemism said to children) became *em i dai* which was equated with 'he died' (note: a long contextual description did not change the response)
- (58) ('his belly is light') 'he is generous' became *em i gutpela man* which was equated with 'he is a good man'
- (59) ('I withheld my inside') 'I do not commit myself' became *mi pasim bel* (or *tingting bilong mi* which was equated with 'I do not speak out'

Some Selepet idioms represent intensification of semantic units expressed by other Selepet idioms. These idioms representing the intensification generally do not occur as a result of transfer from Pidgin.

- (60) ('she knows her belly') 'she is mourning' became *em i pilim sori* which was equated with 'she knows her belly'
- (61) ('her belly is bitter') 'she is mourning longer than usual' became *em i pilim sori yet* which was equated with 'she goes on knowing her belly'

In a number of cases when the Pidgin expression was re-transferred into Selepet, the resulting Selepet semantic unit was quite different from the original Selepet idiom.

- (62) ('his neck stepped aside') 'he is articulate' became *tok*

- bilang em i stret* which was equated with 'his statements are true'
- (63) ('his belly died') 'he doesn't like it one bit' became *i no laikim moa* which was equated with 'he doesn't think about it'
- (64) ('my inside dislikes it') 'I loathe it' became *mi no laikim tumas* which was equated with 'I don't think about it'
- (65) ('I live with my inside awake') 'I am watchful' became *mi tingim istap* which was equated with 'I will keep on thinking about it'
- (66) ('his neck is weak') 'he has a weak voice' became *i no bikmaus tumas* which was equated with ('his neck is small') 'his voice is high-pitched'
- (67) ('my inside set itself apart') 'I have already chosen' became *mi lukim, orait mi mekim* which was equated with 'I thought about it and then did it'

Pidgin expressions which can only be transferred into Selepet by use of a Selepet idiom are infrequent. In the following examples there are no suitable Selepet non-idiomatic equivalents.

- (68) *em i karim bel* became ('she puts her belly') 'she is pregnant'
- (69) *em i pilim sori* became ('she knows her belly') 'she is sad'
- (70) *em i givim bel long em* became ('his inside went to her place') 'he loves her'
- (71) *yau pas* became ('his ear is smothered') 'he is deaf'

The Transfer Process

Although the literalisations of most Selepet idioms are meaningless or yield nonsense, there is evidence that nevertheless the literalisations play an important role in the transfer. Several different types of cases support this conclusion.

The Selepet idiom (72) ('my inside floats upward') 'I am tired out' was first transformed to a related idiom (73) ('my strength droops') 'I am weary' which then was transferred into the Pidgin *bun bilang mi i slek* ('my bones droop') 'I am tired, weary'. The literalisation 'my strength droops' is much closer to the Pidgin literalisation 'my bones droop' than is the literalisation 'my inside floats upward'. This similarity appears to have been the cause for the transform before the transfer to Pidgin.

The Selepet idiom (74) ('it happens to his stools') 'he has diarrhea' is homophonous with the idiom (24) ('it does for his belly') 'he has a stomach ache'.⁵ In transferring the idiom ('it happens to his stools') many Selepet speakers first transformed the idiom to a non-idiomatic equivalent 'he excretes soft stools' and then transferred this to the Pidgin *em pekpek wara* 'he has diarrhea'. In this case the homophony led to the transform before the transfer.

Two Selepet idioms based upon the noun 'inside' were particularly troublesome. The idiom (75) ('his inside swells' (as an egg swells when fried)) 'he smelled something' proved to be very troublesome and ultimately was rejected as not being transferable. The second idiom (76)

('my inside is dry') 'I am thirsty' was transferred to the Pidgin *tingting bilong mi i drai*. In turn, this was re-transferred into Selepet as 'I don't have any ideas'. Apparently the difficulty in these two examples is that the Selepet word for 'inside' is used primarily to describe the seat of one's emotions, and for both of these problematic semantic units, there are other more common ways of expressing them. 'I smell something' is usually expressed simply by 'I sense an odor'. 'He is thirsty' is more often expressed by 'it sees him for water' or 'his neck is dry'. It seems likely that the literalisations of these idioms caused interference because the underlying noun is generally not used to express semantic units involving physical responses.

The Pidgin idiom *em i kisim bel* 'she became pregnant' was rejected by Selepet speakers who insisted that the proper Pidgin expression is *em i karim bel*. This rejection may indicate that the literalisation is important since it is the literalisation which was changed. Note, however, that in Selepet the literalisation is not 'she got her belly' but rather 'she put her belly' or 'it happens to her belly'.

If the literalisation of a Pidgin idiom is the same as the literalisation of a Selepet idiom expressing a different semantic unit, then the Selepet semantic unit replaces the intended Pidgin semantic unit. Thus, *bel bilong em i hevi* 'he is troubled, weary of something' is understood by Selepet speakers as 'he is selfish' ('his belly is heavy'). Similarly, the Pidgin idiom *em i tanim bel* 'he changed his mind, repented' is equated with the Selepet idiom (78) ('his belly turned') 'he is nauseated'. The command *tanim bel!* is largely meaningless since one doesn't usually command someone to become nauseated. Selepet speakers trained in Kâte theological schools generally equate *tanim bel* with the Kâte expression, *maŋ bārisiec* ('turn one's inside'), an expression coined by missionaries to express the idea of repentance. *Maŋ bārisiec* in turn is transferred literally into Selepet with the resulting semantic unit 'he had a vision, saw an apparition'.

In general, it appears that non-idioms are easier to transfer than are idioms. The Selepet idiom (44) ('I tie it with my neck') 'I am awaiting further word' was transferred to the Pidgin *mi gat tubel*, which in turn was transferred back into Selepet as 'I think and it becomes two'. This last expression was again transferred into Pidgin as *mi tingim yet* which more adequately renders the original Selepet idiom ('I tied it up with my neck').

This case is not unlike those in which Selepet idioms were transformed to a non-idiom before being transferred into Pidgin. Thus, (79) ('his neck snaps') 'he is thirsty' (said only of infants) was transformed to 'he cries for milk' which was then transferred to Pidgin *em i kraï long susu*. A similar example is that of (74) ('it happens to his stools') which was transformed to 'he excreted soft stools' before being transferred into Pidgin as *em pekpek wara* 'he has diarrhea'. Additional support may be inferred from the fact that Pidgin idioms were generally transferred into Selepet non-idioms and vice versa.

Conclusion

It may be conceded that the demands of commerce and government can be adequately expressed in Pidgin. However, when it comes to the expression of one's deeply personal and emotional feelings, the observations made in this study indicate that these are not adequately expressed

through Pidgin. Not only are the fine nuances expressed by Selepet idioms often lost in the transfer and expression in Pidgin, but frequently the broader meanings themselves are confused as well.

The evidence indicates that there is a greater probability of one being understood through the use of non-idioms than of idioms. Yet the evidence indicates that the use of idioms evokes a greater emotional response from one's listeners than does the use of non-idioms. The use of idioms attains the deepest level of communication. This presents a quandary since on the one hand the expression of one's personal feelings and emotions calls for the use of the idioms which reach to the level of meaningful communication. Yet, on the other hand, the transference of these idioms through Pidgin works against the attainment of the communication one is seeking, and presents the likelihood that one will be misunderstood.

Notes

¹ The Selepet language is spoken by 6300 Selepet people and perhaps by as many as 2500 bilingual Komba people living in the Selepet Census Division, Morobe District, Papua New Guinea. The language belongs to the Western Family of the Huon Peninsula group of Papuan languages (see McElhanon and Voorhoeve, 1970). The symbols \hat{a} and η represent [ɔ] and [ŋ] respectively. Research was supported in part by the Papua New Guinea Research Fund of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (PNG branch). In this study Barok provided the Selepet data and illustrated the various Selepet idioms by depicting situations appropriate for their use. Subsequent checking, comparing and discussion about each idiom delineated the equivalent English lexical unit or units. Once the Selepet idioms were adequately understood by McElhanon, these idioms were translated into Pidgin by Barok. The analysis, conclusions and write-up are the responsibility of McElhanon.

² There is evidence that Selepet speakers who regularly speak Pidgin do a limited amount of direct encoding when using Pidgin idioms.

³ Selepet speakers reject *em i kisim bel* as unacceptable Pidgin.

⁴ Selepet speakers may carry the distinction between ('my belly is good') 'I am pleased' and ('my belly is glad') 'I am happy' across to Pidgin by using respectively the expressions *em i hamamas* and *em i hepi*.

⁵ The Selepet noun in these idioms is *tep* and it refers to the stomach, its contents, and its waste product, the feces.

⁶ The Kâte language is used as a lingua franca by the Lutheran Mission New Guinea in the propagation of the Christian faith.

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