

## UNIVERSITY-LEVEL COURSES IN PIDGIN & CREOLE

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Mi harim wanpela askim olsem. Nau yumi laik pulim Tok Pisin i kam insait long yunivesiti na sampela sumatim ol i ken kisim save long Tok Pisin. Tasol yumi mekim wanem na Tok Pisin i kamap stretpela. Orait, mi gat sampela tingting bilong mi na mi laik autim.

Bipo, long yia 1967, mi kisim wok long wanpela yunivesiti bilong kantri Guyana long Afrika. Na wanpela rot bilong pulim Tok Pisin i go insait long yunivesiti mi bin lukim pinis. Olsem mi laik skruim i go long yunivesiti bilong yupela na long dispela mi laik mekim wanpela tok piksa.

Planti sumatim ol i save tumas long Tok Pisin. Olsem sapos sampela sumatim i laik kisim Tok Pisin na kisim save long as bilong Tok Pisin na as bilong wanpela wanpela tok, na pasin bilong autim tingting long Tok Pisin, ating olgeta tisa ol i mas mekim long Tok Pisin tasol na autim tingting bilong ol na tok save long sumatim.

Bilong wanem, Tok Pisin i tok ples bilong ol. Na sapos yumi autim tingting bilong yumi na mekim long tok ples bilong ol yet, bai ol i save kwiktaim. Na ol i ken save gut long olgeta samting bilong pasin bilong skelim tok ples na kisim tok ples. Tasol sapos yumi mekim long Tok Inglis na autim tingting bilong yumi, ol sumatim ol i mas tingting long as bilong Tok Inglis bilong yumi pastaim. Na tingting bilong ol sumatim i no go stret long Tok Pisin, nogat, tingting bilong ol i paul nabaut long Tok Inglis tasol.

Orait, sapos yumi mekim long Tok Pisin na givim save long ol sumatim, bai ol sumatim ol i yet go na skelim Tok Pisin bilong olgeta manmeri na kam bek na tok save long yumi. Na ol sumatim ol i kamap olsem tisa bilong yumi.

Orait, em tingting bilong mi. Ating em gutpela tumas yumi traिम na bihain yumi ken lukim kaikai bilong en. Em tasol.

Several years ago, at a cocktail party, I was approached by the Pro-Chancellor of the university at which I was then working and was asked with considerable indignation, "What's this I hear about you teaching students to speak Guyanese Creole?" The tone and expression of the speaker left me with little doubt that I was engaged in some kind of seditious activity which was wholly contrary to the aims and aspirations of the respectable professoriat, and I think my explanation that I

could hardly teach people something they already knew, and that anyway the intent of the course was analytic rather than pedagogic--hardly did more than forestall the wrath that might otherwise have erupted.

Such an incident is hardly likely to occur in this university, but since the precise role that Tok Pisin will play in higher education is still unclear, my experience as a pioneer in teaching pidgin and creole languages at university level may be of some interest and relevance.

However, since the situation in Guyana differs considerably from that in Papua New Guinea, those differences had better be made clear from the start. In Guyana, Creole English is socially stigmatised and, in consequence, very little is known about it. There has never existed for Guyanese Creole a large body of scholarly writing comparable to that which exists for Tok Pisin. It was thus clearly out of the question to begin a student's training in linguistics through the study of Guyanese Creole examples. However, the situation as I found it was that *ALL* linguistic training was based on English examples and that Creole was entirely ignored.

The syllabus I developed for language study was as follows. The University of Guyana catered, and still largely caters, for students who are too poor to study overseas and who in most cases have to keep up full-time jobs in order to support themselves and their dependants. Classes are therefore all at night and students have up to seven years to complete the first degree course. The majority of students obtain their degrees after five years (a few exceptional ones do it in four) so that, effectively, one assumes a five-year period in planning courses. There was then no linguistics department as such--linguistics constituted in effect a subdepartment within the department of English. First-year students took a general course in the use of English, of a type fairly widely known in developing universities. Since this was a service course obligatory for many students who would go on to do subjects other than English, it had no formal linguistic content. Second-year students were given courses in phonetics, elementary phonology, and grammatical analysis at a rather rudimentary level. This was followed in the third year by an obligatory course in generative grammar plus a choice of options which included semantics, stylistics and the history of English. Courses in Guyanese Creole did not commence until the fourth year, by which it was assumed that the student would have a fair general grasp of linguistic principles.

A general course in Guyanese Creole was given in the fourth year. The main aim of this course was to encourage students to apply the linguistic skills they had already gained on material which was thoroughly familiar to them, but which had not been previously analysed. In other words, it would oblige them to carry out their own analyses without the possibility of 'looking in the back of the book' which exists with any previously-studied language. Since the lecturer himself was at that time almost totally ignorant of Guyanese Creole, it is hardly surprising that classes in the first course given resembled elicitation sessions more than orthodox lectures or seminars.

In spite of this, the course was easily the most popular and successful on the programme. In part, psychosocial reasons contributed to this. For many years, Guyanese Creole had been a topic almost as taboo in pedagogical circles as sex. To have it brought out in the open and treated seriously and with respect was a very liberating experience for

students many of whom had, at one time or another, suffered on account of the way they or their relatives spoke. But another powerful factor was that, for once, the student did not feel himself in a position of inferiority vis-a-vis his teacher. His knowledge as a native speaker gave him a positive advantage, and at least the possibility of answering outstanding questions sooner or more accurately than the teacher could. There is a sense in which normal teaching situations are like a bull-fight; no matter how good the bull is, the matador always wins. But give the bull a break in the odds, and you have one of the most powerful learning motivations that I have yet come across.

Full advantage of this motivation was taken in the final year. Here, students were required to produce an original essay on some aspect of Guyanese Creole, and classes consisted simply of informal seminars in which proposals for essays and early drafts would be discussed, and any problems arising from individual projects would be thrashed out by the group as a whole. A number of these essays reached a very high standard, providing their writers, who would mostly be going on to be secondary-school language teachers, with many insights into Creole-English relationships which would be of practical value to them in their subsequent careers. It is, to my mind, highly unlikely that work equivalent in either quality or utility would have been produced had they been required to produce essays on some branch of English linguistics.

If a creole language studies course could be so effective (and I might add that several graduates of it went on to take masters' degrees in linguistics at English Universities), even where the language concerned was heavily stigmatised and virtually unstudied, it follows that a similar course should enjoy even more success where the language involved has higher prestige and much more thoroughly understood. Given such a situation, one could considerably increase the role of the pidgin or creole language in a number of ways.

In the first place, it might even be worth asking whether it might not be used as the language of instruction. There are, of course, many seemingly strong and plausible-sounding arguments against this. Those of you who have followed language-planning in Africa will recall the 'raven croakings' which educators set up when Tanzania first proposed carrying on higher education in Swahili:--there were no texts; it would be impossible to translate sufficient texts: the necessary technical terms were lacking; it would all cost far too much money, and so on. Despite these arguments, I understand that the Swahilisation of Tanzanian higher education is proceeding quite successfully. As for our particular subject, there have been grammar books written in Papiamentu, a creole language no whit more complex than Tok Pisin, for at least the last two decades. And as you may recall, in my earlier talk I raised some specific reasons why it might be better, in the long run, to indigenise the medium of instruction in Papua New Guinean universities. However, as this opens up very broad issues, I shall assume in what follows that the language of instruction will continue to be English for the foreseeable future.

Since Tok Pisin has been extensively studied, it might well be best to begin the student's introduction to linguistics via the study of Tok Pisin, rather than through the study of English. There are several reasons why this might be desirable.

In the first place, the average student will presumably know Tok

Pisin better than he knows English. If he comes from an area where Tok Pisin has creolised, it will probably be his native tongue. Even if he comes from a predominantly vernacular area, he will have actively used Tok Pisin in his daily life, and he will probably have had little occasion to use English except in the artificial environment of the classroom. If you are teaching him linguistics through the medium of English phonology and grammar, you are adding an extra dimension of difficulty. You are requiring him to master two things at a time instead of just one: (1) abstract linguistic structure and (2) the strings of formatives that actualise it. You are, in fact, handicapping him vis-a-vis his Australian, American, or European counterpart. How many English-speaking linguists learned their linguistics in French or Latin or German courses? One takes it for granted that in an introductory linguistics course, the examples of distinctive feature, inflectional morpheme, or sentence-embedding that one is given will be derived from one's native tongue rather than from some foreign language in which one's competence is of a highly debatable quality.

If you teach the student linguistics through English grammar, you are also depriving him of the benefit of any native or quasi-native intuitions he may have in Tok Pisin. I believe intuitions are of the greatest importance in the learning of linguistics. Whenever I give an introductory course in linguistics, I always begin by telling the class that I am not going to teach them anything that they do not already know; I am only going to show them how to label and organise knowledge that they must already have in order for them to be able to speak at all. In a very real sense, all linguistics is in the formalisation of already existing tacit knowledge. One of the most fruitful experiences that can be had in learning linguistics is the 'shock of recognition'--the feeling, "Yes, of course that must be so, why didn't I see it before" that one gets when an instructor demonstrates a really felicitous piece of analysis. To get that shock, it has to be your own language that he's talking about. If he did the same example in a foreign language, the most you could say would be, "Well, yes, that looks very clever, I suppose it might well be so", and you would remain relatively untouched and unilluminated. But in order to really know anything, you have to get turned on by it.

Next, if you give the student his elementary training in Tok Pisin grammar, you are enabling him to participate actively in that training. At the end of the class he can go out and look for examples and counter-examples of what the class has been discussing. Learning becomes a discovery procedure rather than a bucket-filling operation. At a later stage, a student exposed to training of this type will have the opportunity to make substantive contributions to the further study of his own language. Any original work he does on Tok Pisin will have the solid basis of this training under it rather than a sketchy attempt to transpose and adjust rules derived from an initial study of English.

Further, one has to consider the question of precisely how any future linguistics department in Papua New Guinea is going to be oriented. Is it going to deal solely with abstract linguistic structure, or is it going to study 'language in its social context', as Labov has termed it? There is a growing feeling amongst many linguists--not merely sociolinguists, either, but 'pure' linguists such as George Lakoff--that language can no longer be profitably studied as a system of abstract relationships, but that language studies must concern them-

selves with the practical use of language in its everyday social settings.

If a future Papua New Guinean linguistics department is going to place any emphasis on studies of this kind, then a concentration upon Tok Pisin will become essential. Please note that this is not just a matter of putting something called 'sociolinguistics' into the syllabus, just because it happens to be a fashionable word at the moment. One can teach a sociolinguistics course that is just as unreal as an old-style linguistics course--the students read books and make notes and write essays on language-planning, diglossia, bilingualism and education and never get out into the field at all. But if the study of language is to be related meaningfully to its social context, this means that the student must go out and record and analyse language as it is actually used in the clubs and bars and shops and streets of his own society. Apart from a few bars in downtown Port Moresby, the possibilities of studying English in its social context are pretty poor. So he will have to study Tok Pisin in its social context. But what will be the point of this if he has had classes in the linguistic structure of English but none in the linguistic structure of Tok Pisin? Contrary to what many believe, in order to do worthwhile sociolinguistics you have to know a hell of a lot of just plain linguistics.

Against these arguments, it could be urged that the student is being confined in some kind of linguistic backwater since the vast bulk of articles and books on linguistics deal specifically with English linguistics.

It would, however, form no part of such a course to limit the student to Tok Pisin. Assuming that most or all the students involved would be bilinguals, even introductory courses could be to a large extent contrastive, making explicit the relationships between Tok Pisin and English which must already form part of the tacit knowledge of such bilinguals. It is precisely such relationships which would be of interest and concern to those students, since possibly a majority would subsequently become teachers of English or of Tok Pisin or both. Optional courses in more advanced English linguistics could then be provided for those students who hoped to become university teachers or who wished to pursue a career in linguistics proper. Such students probably would, in any case, want to round off their education with a period at some university overseas.

But there is yet another reason for making Tok Pisin, rather than English, the centre of linguistic training in Papua New Guinea. This is the rapidly growing importance of pidgin and creole studies in linguistics generally.

For many years, the study of pidgin-creole languages was the Cinderella of linguistics. Now it looks as if the Prince has found out who really owns the slipper. The suggestion that pidgins and creoles may represent some level of language closer to the universal base than standardised languages, made in different forms during the past couple of years by Kay and Sankoff, Molotny, Mühlhäusler and others, now opens up the possibility that pidgin-creole studies may be, and may have to be, used as the testing ground for any theories about language universals. Next, the rapid development shown by pidgins and creoles at certain phases of their life-cycles makes them unrivalled natural laboratories for the study of linguistic change, which elsewhere is

generally too glacial for direct observation. Finally, Indo-Europeanists such as C. J. Bailey are now suggesting that pidginisation and creolisation are processes which may have affected many, even all languages at some stage of their development, and therefore that an adequate understanding of these processes is vital for the study of historical linguistics. These three themes--universals, change, historical reconstruction--are among the most central in general linguistic theory, and it looks as though in the next couple of decades pidgin-creole studies will have a vital part to play in all three of them.

During this past summer I gave a course in pidgin and creole languages at the Linguistic Society of America's Summer Institute in Michigan. Five years ago, such a course would have been hard put to gather even a dozen students. Now, this course was attended by fifty registered students and at least another fifty auditors and visiting scholars, representing, between them, more than forty universities in the United States and a wide range of universities elsewhere. Moreover, the level of enthusiasm for the subject was greater than I have ever encountered or witnessed elsewhere. But this was, I believe, only a symptom of the rapidly rising status of pidgin and creole studies within general linguistics, and to a growing understanding of its vital role in the future development of the discipline. And all that was holding these students back was ignorance. Not ignorance of linguistics--they included some of the most brilliant young scholars in America today--but ignorance of pidgin and creole languages. Very few of them had any first-hand experience of these, and when they turned to the literature, they found all too often that extant descriptions of these languages were too old-fashioned or amateurish to be of any use to them. As soon as these kids can scrape up enough money to get out to pidgin-creole speaking areas, out a lot of them will come. But with the present state of academic finances in the U.S., that could take quite a time.

In the meantime, the student in New Guinea finds himself temporarily at an advantage over them. This is so unusual an occurrence I feel I must dwell on it. Characteristically, the less developed nations lag behind the more developed ones--in technology, in knowledge, in fashion. They are always doing what the developed countries were doing ten years ago. And that, of course, is why they remain in a position of inferiority to the developed countries. If they can't find some way to jump the gun, anticipate the trend, and make the great leap forward, they will stay in that position forever. But here, in this one little area, there is this one little chance. The student here has native or near-native control of a pidgin language and there are people here who can supply him with the necessary linguistic theory. He is therefore in a position to anticipate the discoveries of the scholars from developed countries instead of trailing sadly behind them as others have perforce had to do before.

I can only urge that the chance be taken. I do not see what there is to lose. Students will acquire knowledge of linguistic structure more rapidly and it will be much more meaningful to them. This more thorough knowledge can then be transferred to the study of English linguistics by those students who wish to specialise therein. But many will wish to capitalise on the natural advantage they have as Tok Pisin speakers and pursue their linguistic studies in a pidgin-creole context. Obviously, an essential part of any such syllabus would consist of a comprehensive course on pidgins and creoles generally, one which will

place Tok Pisin in perspective as a member of its class and which will study (and subsequently try to account for, in the light of general language theory) the differences as well as the similarities which exist between Tok Pisin and other pidgins and creoles. This, coupled with the socially-oriented studies suggested above, should provide the student with as well-rounded a linguistic education as he could get anywhere.

For those who would still argue that universities in developing countries should not indulge in rash experiments, but should follow in the tried and trusty footsteps of the ivy-league universities in the metropolitan countries, I have one last anecdote. It concerns the Roman plebeian who was abused by the Roman patrician on account of his low birth. Drawing himself up to his full height, the plebeian said, "You are the last of your line; I am the first of mine".

History does not record what the patrician answered. I don't think there was anything he could answer.