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A DEFINING FEATURE OF THE TOKPISIN LEXICON

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ABSTRACT

A number of scholarly works on the lexicology and lexicography of Tokpisin have already been published. Some of these works are widely read internationally¹. However, the Tokpisin lexicon is “exploding”. This calls for more research to be done. This paper presents an alternative, bilingual approach to Tokpisin lexicon. Instead of focusing mainly on the needs of English speakers, this approach aims to help native Tokpisin speakers as well, by providing them with a guide to reading and writing standardized and emerging standard forms. The various meanings of each entry, whether it is a simple word, a compound word, or a phrase, is explained fully with the help of an illustrative sentence and its free English translation; in many cases, cultural notes are also provided. The culture of the Tokpisin speakers, reflected in the words and phrases of the language, has not been captured fully in the current publications, which lack examples of many institutionalized labels and discourse paradigms. This research attempts to investigate and to incorporate the semantics and pragmatics of these labels and discourses. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2010 edition) appropriately labels its main database ‘Dictionary and Culture’; this research aims to do the same for Tokpisin for Vision2050.

Key words: dictionary-making, lexicology, lexicography, defining feature, Tokpisin, paradigm shift.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the defining feature of the Tokpisin lexicon and compares two different concepts of the defining feature found in: (a) Mihalic’s work (*The Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin*) and (b) Thomas’ research work on the *Melanesian Creole-English Bilingual Dictionary and Culture*².

PURPOSE OF A DEFINING FEATURE

A defining feature of a lexicon is basically a set of words and phrases which form the framework or template that people use to talk about or describe a lexical item. Snyder says that,

“The purpose of a defining vocabulary is to provide a metalanguage with which one may talk about language and meaning. Normally this metalanguage is specifically designed ... to

¹A specific reference is made to Frank Mihalic’s *The Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin*.

² The research includes all three dialects of Melanesian Creole – Tokpisin in Papua New Guinea, Pijin in the Solomons, and Bislama in Vanuatu.

communicate more precisely the meanings or definitions of words and phrases. [In other words], it allows the reader or learner to understand more precisely and easily the meanings of words and phrases” (1996:23).

Some of the features or metalanguage that is used includes parts of speech, homonyms, synonyms, antonyms, variants, cross referencing, etc. The lexicographer decides their sequence in the process of recording and documenting meanings.

RESERVATIONS ON A DEFINING FEATURE

One of the arguments against a defining feature has something to do with the idea of universal semantic primitives. This argument points out that the lexicon of each language is based on a small set of universal semantic primitives. It promotes the idea that a defining vocabulary uses these primitives to define all words and phrases of other languages (Snyder, 1996:25).

Other researchers argue that universal primitives are inadequate or based on wrong information. Based on that premise, they conclude that the whole concept of the defining feature is therefore erroneous.

Another reason for harboring reservations with regard to defining vocabulary is the hindrance it causes to lexicographer. Sherman Kuhn points out that,

“One can create definitions which may have aesthetic value, beauty, and elegance, even solemnity, but which have been liberated from the bondage of utility (1980:186)”.

The advice from Kuhn is that theories and rules about defining words and phrases can be made, but they do not necessarily make a dictionary compiler more competent. At the same time, though, Kuhn believes that a defining feature is still an excellent tool.

The third reason for lingering reservations about the concept of the defining feature is the lack of rigorous criteria. Many linguistic works are modeled on scientific paradigms. The scholars, therefore, have certain notions that languages have strict rules like the phrase structure rules. Snyder comments, in addition, that works which are modeled on scientific paradigms are “similar to the phrase structure rules that govern computer programming languages” (1996:26).

Human language, however, is not the same as computer programming languages. Human language is creative; it is governed by logic-driven patterns. Every speech community constantly creates new grammatical patterns; new Tokpisin morphosyntactic patterns are, thus, also constantly emerging.

ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF THE DEFINING FEATURE

The defining feature of the lexicon has facilitated and improved lexicographers' work. Two criticisms lexicographers faced in the past were the use of circular definitions, and the lack of accepted pedagogical practices. The concept of the defining feature emerged because lexicologists and lexicographers had for a long time yearned for a better and improved way to avoid circular definitions, and for a sound pedagogical approach to dictionary compilations. Exemplifying traditional circular dictionary definitions, Snyder uses the following:

“Ask is defined in terms of call on, but call on is defined in terms of ask; another meaning of ask is defined in terms of invite, but invite is defined in terms of ask. The reader is sent from one verb to another, and back, and can never find out what the meanings of ask, invite, and call on” (1996:29).

Many language students have difficulty understanding definitions of words in the standard dictionary. Fritz Neubauer says teachers of foreign languages have difficulty using bilingual dictionaries. He reports on his own students:

“... They cannot understand the definitions of the words because the definitions do not proceed from the known to the unknown” (1987:49).

To solve these problems, Neubauer recommends the use of a well-constructed defining feature of the lexicon. The defining feature of a language lexicon must elucidate meanings, leaving no room for circular or ambiguous definitions, so typical of many monolingual and bilingual dictionaries.

Dictionaries are compiled to meet certain needs. If a dictionary does not meet certain expectations of the user, then that dictionary won't be used.

MIHALIC'S DEFINING FEATURE

Mihalic's work targets a non-Tokpisin speaker who is basically an English speaker wishing to learn Tokpisin. Naturally, Mihalic's Tokpisin-English defining feature of the lexicon must reflect his target audience; it includes:

- An entry;
- Etymology;
- English primary sense or senses;
- (Phrasal entries with English equivalents);
- (A sense number);
- (An English sense);
- (A list of synonyms);
- (A phrasal or a few entries with English equivalents)

THOMAS' DEFINING FEATURE

Thomas proposes an expansion of the defining feature, which includes:

- An entry;
- A homonym;
- A variant or variants;
- (Etymology)
- part of speech;
- (Domain or Status);
- An English gloss;
- An illustrative sentence;
- A free English translation;
- (A synonym or synonyms)
- (A cross reference)
- (Cultural notes)
- (A sub-entry)
- (An English gloss)
- (An illustrative sentence (secondary sense))
- (An English free translation (secondary sense))

The lexical item *pig* has been used to compare the two defining features (these are shown in Appendix A).

CONCLUSION

There is a difference in the treatment of *pik* in the two defining features of the Tokpisin lexicon. Mihalic has one primary entry with eight phrases. Thomas has thirty-nine words and phrases recorded. For Mihalic, his target audience is not the Tokpisin, but the English speaker. For Thomas, the Tokpisin speaker and the English speaker are both his target audiences. Thomas' defining feature aims at making reading more interesting, captivating, and at the same time pedagogical for both audiences. This is realized by the Tokpisin entry with its optional variation(s) and obligatory characteristics which include parts of speech, etymology³, status, the illustrative sentence, and its free English translation. Thomas also provides cultural background to Tokpisin words and phrases, especially words that have experienced a paradigm shift, e.g. *kilimpik* – a ceremony where members of the community are gathered to share food and, of course, pigs' meat.

³ English words and phrases are just too many to acknowledge, so it was felt unnecessary to show. Only words or phrases borrowed from local languages and others are acknowledged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the belief of the author that vernacular dictionaries must meet certain expectations which include standardization⁴ and pedagogical considerations. To enhance dictionary users' reading experience, while also promoting people's awareness of what the work of the lexicographer involves, I recommend that:

- Speakers of the language, who are interested in participating in the dictionary-making project, be taught dictionary-making skills, as well as all relevant computer software; and that
- A committee must be put in place to receive, examine, and pass dictionaries submitted. Two or four native speakers must be appointed as members of the committee.

APPENDIX A

MIHALIC'S OUTPUT

pik, pig, pork

banispik – pigsty

pikbilongples – a domestic pig, a tame pig

pik mama – a brood sow

pik man – a boar

pikmeri – a sow

pikinipik – a piglet

piksusu – a brood sow

wailpik, pikbilong bus – a wild pig

⁴ Especially for languages that have a number of varieties or dialects.

THOMAS' OUTPUT

banis pik Variant: pikbanis.comp [n+n].pigsty.Tupelapiktasol i stap long banispik. There are only two pigs in the pigsty.

bilakpik comp [adj+n].black pig.ani.Bilak pik em i winimol narapela kain pik. There are more black pigs than all the others. See: waitpik.

grisipik comp [n+n].pigs' fat.food. Ol i rabim grisipik long skin bilongol, naol i go singsing. They rubbed pigs' fat onto their body, and went a traditional dance.

grisipik ingratiate, to make somebody like you esp. the opposite sex.fig.Yu givim em planti grisipik, bai yu winim laik bilong en. You give her a lot of pig's fat, you will win her heart.

kala pik Variant: kalakala pik. comp [n+n]. spotted pig.ani. Kalapik em gat wait na bilak spot long en. The spotted pig has white and black spots.

kilim pik1 vphr [v+n].to slaughter pig. Mi kilim pik bilong tisaasde. I slaughtered the teacher's pig yesterday.

kilim pik2 nphr [v+n].apig slaughter ceremony. Jesi bin marit na ol kilim pik long Zak Veli insaitWapenamanda. Jessy got married and they had a pig killing ceremony in the Zak Valley ofWapenamanda. See: pikkilim.[Note: In a pig slaughter ceremony some forty or more huge fat pigs are brought to a central spot where they are slaughtered, dressed and cooked, normally in huge mumus. The leaders share the pigs' meat to the members of the community. This is predominantly practiced in the Highlands of the country.]

pik1 Variant: pig.n.pig.ani.Yu gat hamas pik? How many pigs do you have? Syn: swain.

pik pig.fig.Yu pik! Mi no laikim pain bilongyu. You're a pig! I don't like the way you behave.

pik eating too much. fig. Em wanpela pik, nogat hap kaikai stap (Em kaikai olgeta kaikai)He's a pig, there's no left-over food (He's eaten up all the food)

pik wealth.fig.Em gat pik.He is wealthy.[Note: In many parts of PNG, esp. in the Highlands region, a person who has many pigs, is considered wealthy.]

pik bride price.fig.Hamas pik long gelprenbilong Pol?How many pigs (are earmarked)for Paul's girl friend?[Note: A part from money, garden foods, store goods and foods, pigs are used to pay for the bride price.]

pik pork.food.OlSevende no save kaikaipik.The Seventh-Day Adventists don' eat pork.See: kilimpik.

pik2 n.plectrum.Yu save yusimpik long pilaigita?Do you normally use the plectrum to play the guitar?

pik3 vi.pick something.Milukimem, em i pik long hap nabihain go pik long hap.I saw her pick (something) there and then pick (something) over there.

pik pick on somebody, choose. Maski bin gat planti save lain, tasol tisa pik long mi. Although there were many knowledgeable people, the teacher chose me.

pik bilong Variant: piklong.phr [n+poss].pig belongs to. Em pik bilong Fa'afo. This pig belongs to Fa'afo.

pik bilong bus wild pig or wild boar. Ol pik bilong bus nogat planti gris. Wild pigs don't have a lot of fat.

pik bilong ples domesticated pigs. Tama gat planti pik bilong ples. Tama has many domesticated pigs.

pik bilong waitman hybrid pigs. Olpikbilongwaitman i bikpela moa. The hybrid pigs are huge (than the local ones).

pikbilongsalim pig for sale. Popo gat tripela pik bilong salim. Popo has three pigs for sale.

pikkarim comp [n+v].pig given birth. Pik karim pikinini aninit long haus. The sow has given birth underneath the house.

pikkarim taken away by pig. Pikkarimrausimpinisolpikinibilong en. The sow has taken her piglets away.

pikkarim born to pig.fig. Pasinbilongyunogut, pikkarimyu o man. Your ways are not good, were you born to pig or what.

pikkilim comp [n+v].killed by pigs. PikkilimtupeladokbilongRumints. The pig killed Rumints' two dogs.

pikkilim strong desire to eat pork or hem.fig. Pik-kilim mi! I really like to eat pork.

pikgris comp [n+n].lard.food. Kais laikimpikgrisbilongpraimpotaito. Kais needs lard to fry potato. See: grisfik.

pik haus Variant: hausfik.comp [n+n].pigs' house. Ol wok long wokimtupelapikhausbilong en long ples. They are building two pigs' house for her at home. Syn: hausfik. See: banisfik.

pikhet Variant: pikhed.comp [n+n].pig's head. Ol i givimWanpispikhet. They gave Wanpis a pig's head. [Note: In some places the pig's head signifies leadership or importance of the person. And so when someone is given a pig's head, the person is acknowledged.]

pikinini pik comp [n+n].piglet.ani. Mi baim dispel pikinini pik long Sikirap maket. I bought this piglet from Sikirap market.

pikman Variant: manpik.comp [n+n].boar.ani. Dispelapikmanol no katimbolbilong en. This pig is not castrated. See: pikmeri.

pikman womanizer.fig. Yu wanpelapikmanstret. You're a real womanizer. See: pesmeri.

pikmeri Variant: meripik.comp [n+n].sow.ani. Dispelapikmerikarimtenpelapaippikinipik. This sow gave birth to fifteen piglets. See: pikman.

piksosis Variant: sosispok.comp [n+n].pork sausage.food. Meribilongtisapraimpiksosisbilongsalim long maket. The teacher's wife fried pork sausage to sell at the market.

wailpikcomp [adj+n].pigs of the bush.ani.Olwailpikbagarapimgaden taro.The wild pigs spoiled the taro garden.Syn: welpik.

waitpela pik phr [adj+n].pigs that are white.Yu baimwaitpelapik?Did you buy the pig that is white?See: waitpik.

waitpikcomp [adj+n].white pig.ani.Torato gat tupelawaitpik.Torato has two white pigs.See: waitpelapik. bilakpik.

welpik comp [adj+n].wild pig.ani.Ol i sutimtupelawelpik long bikpela bus.They shot two wild pigs in the jungle.Syn: wailpik.

welpik loafer.fig.Heiwelpiktraimnastapisi.Hey loafer settle down.

welpik big headed.fig.Hey welpik, harimtok.Hey big headed, listen to advice.

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