

Tom Dutton in collaboration with Dicks Thomas, **A New Course in Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin)**, Canberra: The Department of Linguistics, A.N.U., 1985 [**Pacific Linguistics**, D-67]. xxviii + 407 pp. \$A46.30

Reviewed by J.M. Charpentier, National Centre for Scientific Research, Paris

A New Course in Tok Pisin is the title chosen by Tom and joint author Dicks Thomas for a volume of 407 pages, a daunting size for even the most motivated of students. The authors state that the volume comes as a replacement of T.E.Dutton's 1973 **Conversational New Guinea Pidgin** which is now out of print. Whereas the latter was indeed "a course" today's volume is much more. Even though the global structure is very similar--units of conversations followed by a vocabulary section with exercises and then grammatical sections followed by exercises, the whole unit being completed by texts--it is in fact a mini-encyclopedia on Papua New Guinea. The volume comes with fourteen tapes covering all the material in each unit. Narrators from different social and geographical backgrounds present the "conversations", texts and final texts. The student is therefore presented with different pronunciations, varied sociolects, and representative sociocultural classes. The conversations have been deliberately taken from actual experiences so the student is placed in real conditions, and the themes are often typical of life in PNG. For example, p.53 deals with problems of permissiveness and p.73 with thefts in Port Moresby while pp.78 and 180 offer many details on transport and local beliefs and religious life respectively.

The vocabulary which follows, also on tape, complements the conversations and the exercises which come after help the student to understand the vocabulary and enable him/her to practise these words actively. Each unit offers exercises of "simple substitution" which can always be done by a student working on his/her own. The choice of exercises is very wide: letter fill-ins, prose and unseens, discovery of the meaning of given words, discovery of words from their definition, and crossword puzzles. Because of the great variety of exercises work is never routine and therefore never boring. Some exercises are immediately followed by their answers such as the unseen on p.65, but answers are usually found at the end

of the volume, as is the case for all “supplementary exercises”. The student can thus work alone. But the authors seem to fall victim of an excess of optimism when they state, on p.xviii: “on average it should take at least four to five hours to study the material given in each unit...”.

Elaborated by linguists, the grammatical descriptions are always very precise and perfectly well analysed but the authors could have perhaps kept the non-specialist in mind and avoided such expressions as “reason clause”, “predicative marker”, “noun phrase”, “non-verbal predicates” etc., all this linguistic vocabulary being familiar only to linguists.

As the authors suggest, help from a native speaker as teacher is highly desirable, especially to understand some of the sometimes very free translations such as on p.44 “*Het bilong yu i go bum olgeta*” which is translated as “one loses one’s senses”, “*long mi em nogat*” as “but not me” etc.

The thematic unity of some vocabulary lists may seem difficult to grasp and may seem artificial, as in Unit 10, p.233, where under the title “Some body parts” one finds the body parts of the human being, of the bird, the fish, the tree and the pig. The volume holds so many details on local life, on habits, on beliefs etc that classifying the “conversations”, the “texts” and the “vocabulary” becomes a gamble, but the authors have clearly managed very well.

The course seems to have been developed especially for native speakers of English: on p.33 Tok Pisin pronunciation is explained as opposed to English and in the final units Tok Pisin grammar is not given priority but translations of certain aspects of the English tongue are proposed instead. Given the increase in the number of exchanges between Pidgin English speaking states of Melanesia there are, and will be, more and more speakers less familiar with English than with their national pidgins who will be wanting to learn another pidgin. This excellent work, exceptionally rich in linguistic and sociologic information will hold as much interest for ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Islanders who have to live in PNG as for Australians for example. As for me, knowing Bislama and some English, after two close and very enjoyable readings of this volume I am convinced of being ready for eventual fieldwork in some region of PNG. So even for a moderately able student that method is excellent. No need to say that the grammatical points in each unit are extremely well explained. But isn’t that the main author’s profession? Here

again, many exercises are available to the student so he/she may apply the rules given or carry out the described practice.

At the end of each unit two or three texts describe the most typical aspects of national life in PNG. They are told by different narrators and can therefore only enlarge the student's ability to master any local variant of Tok Pisin. Furthermore, they deal with very special themes of national life: p.152 presents an article from "Wantok" newspaper. On the following page is a letter from a son to his mother, p.130 describes land customs in the Highlands etc.

All of this would have been intricate and probably boring if the sections had not been separated by excerpts of PNG music. Each unit is furthermore widely illustrated, here with beers and the country's currency, and there with a woman cleaning sago (p.102), or with a blueprint for development of the newly independent country of PNG (p.225) etc. Each conversation is followed by a drawing or a photograph. Each text is personalized by the narrator's short biography and his or her photograph. To all this, let us not forget the numerous humoristic drawings that ornament this course, which even without them is never boring.

In trying to describe both the national tongue and its sociocultural environment the authors were at risk of being submerged by details thus drowning the essential, the basic Tok Pisin. The volume is indeed very dense and would have benefited from more spacing especially between units as one can easily jump from one to another without noticing it. The volume betrays the personality of its authors who are not practising teachers. So many application exercises may not have been desirable--there are no less than 23 in the very first unit. Fortunately, the units are independent one from another and the student can choose from or come back to all or any part of the volume. This great density appears again in the field of vocabulary, the long lists of supplementary vocabulary with a mean of sixty words are surely difficult to absorb, even for, or more precisely, perhaps especially for, native born English speakers for whom false cognates between English and Tok Pisin are legion. Page 62 is an example of the unapparent difficulty due to density when a short unseen is given as practice after a vocabulary list of no less than 70 words.