

Practical Issues in Bislama Lexicography

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1 Background

Bislama is the constitutionally declared national language of Vanuatu, spoken by almost the entire adult population in addition to one or more of the 100-odd local vernaculars. There is also a small but increasing number of children who are growing up monolingual in the language, especially in the two major towns of Vila and Santo. In linguistic terms, Bislama is a radically altered contact language which has drawn its lexicon primarily from English (i.e. it is an 'English-based pidgin'), though it has significant French and Melanesian lexical inputs as well.

As is typical with pidgin languages, Bislama has had a history of negative social judgments, not only from Europeans, but also from its own Melanesian speakers. Even as recently as 1977, I remember hearing it referred to publicly by ni-Vanuatu as *lanwis blong waetman* 'a European language', despite the fact that relatively few Europeans speak it more than tolerably well. Charpentier (1979: 133) reports hearing it described by Melanesians in the early 1970s as *lanwis blong rod*, an expression that translates literally as 'language of the road', but which parallels the derogatory phrase *pikinini blong rod* 'illegitimate child', and therefore translates best as 'bastard language'. Bill Camden (p.c.) reports that when he first arrived in Vanuatu in the 1950s, Bislama was spurned by the churches as a medium for evangelisation as it was felt that it was only through the various vernaculars that the Christian message could successfully reach people. Bislama was alright, it would seem, as a language of the copra plantations, but not of the heart.

During a visit to Vanuatu early in 1993, I was asked by a long term European resident of Vanuatu whether I thought Bislama was a "real language." One could dismiss such linguistically ill-informed questions as unimportant, except that the person who asked this question teaches in the main English-medium secondary school at university entrance level. I mention this because it would be easy to imagine the assumptions underlying such a question being passed on to young students as "fact" rather than the distorted opinions that they actually are.

Over the last couple of decades with the dramatic growth of an urban population and the gaining of independence in 1980, there has been a significant expansion in the range of social domains in which Bislama is used. It has developed from an essentially rural plantation

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language into a language that expresses an emergent national culture. It also expresses the day-to-day needs of the media, local and national politicians, and participants in a burgeoning urban youth culture. Out-of-print vernacular hymn books and Bibles are falling into disrepair and disuse right around the country as people buy copies of recently produced Bislama hymn books and translations of the New Testament. Bislama is now the usual language which one uses in town when buying tomatoes in the market, answering the telephone, withdrawing money from the bank, making an enquiry at the police station, enrolling in a course at the University of the South Pacific, speaking to your employees or to your employer, borrowing a book at the library, appealing to voters, justifying government policy, going to the disco, or drinking kava.

Local vernaculars are actively maintained in town, but they tend to be restricted to family and explicitly community contexts (and with so many inter-island marriages, Bislama is also making inroads in these contexts, as linguistically homogeneous families and communities can no longer be guaranteed). English and French are taught as languages of education, and are used for many written purposes, but are seldom used as spoken languages by ni-Vanuatu of all levels of education outside the formal classroom situation. Thus, while Council of Ministers (i.e. cabinet) discusses matters relating to government policy in Bislama, written papers for discussion in cabinet will be presented in English and French.

The last dictionary of Bislama appeared in 1977, and this was Pastor Bill Camden's *A Descriptive Dictionary: Bislama to English*. Naturally enough, with such a broadening in the range of domains in which Bislama has come to be used since that time, there has been a dramatic increase in the size and scope of the lexicon. It was because of these developments that I decided to produce an updated dictionary of Bislama in 1990, entitled *An Illustrated Bislama-English and English-Bislama Dictionary* (Crowley 1990). This appeared exactly ten years after Vanuatu gained its independence. The text of this volume is now being completely revised, and considerably expanded in preparation for a second edition, which should appear some time in late 1993 or early 1994.

In this paper, I will address some of the particular problems that I faced in compiling this dictionary, as well as some more general issues facing lexicographers working on Oceanic and Australian languages (and which are discussed in greater detail in parts of Crowley 1989).

2 Sources of Information

2.1 *Lexicographical Sources*

This updated dictionary was based on a variety of sources, and therefore builds on the work of as many scholars as possible. Unlike Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, however, Bislama has benefitted from only a relatively short period of serious study. The first publication of any

degree of linguistic sophistication was Jacques Guy's (1975) bilingual *Handbook of Bichelamar/ Manuel de bichelamar*. This includes only about 1300 Bislama entries, and it is very easy for the lexicographer to get beyond the limits of this fairly incomprehensive (and sometimes incomprehensible) work (Lynch 1975).

Bill Camden's volume, to which I referred earlier, represents a major source of lexical information, containing as it does almost 3000 entries. An even longer Bislama spelling list that was distributed in unpublished form in 1986 by the Kokonas Bible Translation team in Santo (of which Camden is a member) includes many additional items of vocabulary that were not included in the 1977 dictionary.

The only other major published lexical source for Bislama is the specialised trilingual medical dictionary by D. K. Bowden (1986), entitled *Medical Dictionary in Bislama, English and French*. This contains quite an amount of lexical information that is designed to assist expatriate English- and French-speaking medical staff in the diagnosis and treatment of ni-Vanuatu patients, and also to communicate with ni-Vanuatu health workers.

This must be used with caution as a lexicographical source, however, as it contains many forms that are not generally known in Bislama, and which represent nothing more than ad hoc borrowings from specialist medical terminology in English, for example *staflakokas* for 'staphylococcus', and *vaeras* for 'virus'. Even some of the non-medical vocabulary that is listed has been incorrectly adopted directly from English, for example *baetem* for 'bite' (for which *kakae long tut* is the correct and most explicit Bislama expression), and *konsen* for 'consent' (which should have been *letem* or *agri*).

In addition to the more recent sources for Bislama vocabulary referred to above, the dictionary also includes information that was culled from a variety of published sources from the first half of the twentieth century, and even from the nineteenth century. Information from older sources such as these generally comes from linguistically naive observers, and is very restricted in scope. There are, however, occasional references in print to words that are no longer used, such as *Kongkong* for modern *Jaena* 'Chinese', and *meri* for modern *gel* or *woman* 'girl/woman', but such interesting published finds are fairly rare.

2.2 Contemporary Sources

In compiling the updated dictionary, I relied for the most part on my own observations of Bislama in use in a wide range of situations. I have been speaking and observing the language on a daily basis for about a third of my life now (and with a small group of Vanuatu students studying at the University of Waikato, I have been able to maintain contact with the language since leaving Vanuatu). It is mostly through continuous exposure in this way that it has been

possible to expand on the work of earlier published sources. Most new usages have cropped up in conversations that people have been having with me, or conversations between other people that I have heard.

However, I made sure that the Bislama that I recorded was not simply my own private variety (despite the comment by Charpentier (1992:75)). Public use of Bislama, such as over the radio and in speeches, provided another major source of vocabulary. I also kept a detailed watch over a wide range of printed materials in the language, in newspapers such as the government *Vanuatu Weekly/Hebdomadaire* and the Catholic Church *Ekalesia*, and large numbers of government and non-government publications providing health, agricultural and other kinds of developmental information. It is necessary to exercise caution when using written sources such as these, however, especially where the material has been translated from English, as illicit anglicisms very frequently intrude.

2.3 *Scientific Identification of Species*

Camden's dictionary provided quite a number of words referring to biological species. He did not attempt to specify the reference of these by means of scientific binomials, using instead English translation equivalents such as 'Pacific teak' for *natora*, or vague descriptions such as 'tree with small edible fruit which attracts pigeons [*sic*]; fruit forms in small bunches and is often sold in town markets' for *nakatambol*. Guy's dictionary went further in providing explicit scientific designations of some of these kinds of terms, though some of his botanical and zoological words in Bislama were provided only with English and French translation equivalents.

In common with most linguists, I have no training in biology (as well as precious little interest in scientific taxonomy), so relating particular Bislama names to particular taxonomic terms represented something of a problem. A number of botanists and zoologists have published various extensive lists of plants, animals, fish and birds that are found in Vanuatu, with their taxonomic names, their English and/or French names, and also their Bislama equivalents. Sources such as these provided a convenient way out of this difficulty. Wheatley (1992)—replacing Gowers (1976)—and Cabalion (1984) provided the greatest amount of information of this type in the area of trees and plants. Weightman (1989) also provided some information, especially with regard to agriculturally important plants. For scientific information on birds, Pickering (1981) and *Naika*, the journal of the Vanuatu Natural Science Society, proved valuable.

While Guy (1975) did include some taxonomic names, these are not infrequently at variance with binomials used by specialists whose works I have consulted. Where he lists

nanggalat as *Laportea crenulata*, all specialist sources that I have consulted indicate that *nanggalat* actually refers to a number of *Dendrocnide* species. He lists *nakavika* as *Jambosa malaccensis*, whereas specialists indicate that this term is used for both *Syzygium ricchi* and *Syzygium malaccense*. His *Calophyllum morphyllum* for *nabanggura* is given by specialists as *Calophyllum inophyllum*. The differences here have two possible explanations. Firstly, Guy's scientific identifications may have been in error; secondly, his identifications may have been correct at the time, but based on scientific information that is now considered to be outdated. Many older scientific sources, for example, label *kabis aelan* as *Hibiscus manihot*, though scientists nowadays are apparently generally agreed that it should be referred to as *Abelmoschus manihot*.

Although these botanical and zoological sources provided valuable scientific information, none of these authors had any linguistic training, and in some cases this also caused problems. Gowers (1976) occasionally confuses a word from some other language as a Bislama word. For instance, she records one word for *Acacia spirorbis* in Bislama as *ga'iac*, though this is actually used only in Vanuatuan and New Caledonian French. The correct Bislama name for this tree is *namariu*.

These non-linguists also seem to have had problems hearing and representing some sounds. While Cabalion (1984) contains much valuable information, this source must be used with care as it contains many errors of transcription. His *langalat*, for instance, represents a mishearing for *nanggalat* '*Dendrocnide* spp.'. Sometimes, errors in published sources also apparently involve simple typographical errors that were not picked up before publication. Gowers also made a mistake with the same form, not spotting the typographical error in the initial consonant in what she gives as *mangalat*. Cabalion (1974) also includes typographical errors such as *nakake* for *Pangium edule*, which is cross-referenced in the same article to *nalake* (and it is only the latter which is correct).

Although I was heavily reliant on scientific sources for information of this type, I also found that sometimes I recorded Bislama names for species that had not been referred to in these specialist studies. In cases such as these, where local expertise (and expertise from the Fijian Dictionary Project) was unable to provide the necessary scientific terminology, I had no choice but to provide some kind of a descriptive label, for example *yelotel* '(unidentified) freshwater fish with yellow tail', *nambalanggo* 'kind of tree with small round fruit growing in clusters all along the trunk'. This is clearly not ideal, but it represents that best that could be done under the circumstances.

The scientist, and perhaps also the purist layperson, may be dismayed at what may appear at a glance to represent a certain amount of sloppiness or inconsistency in the species names that are given. The purple swampphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), for example, is listed as *napiyu*, *redhed* or *longnek*, yet *redhed* is also listed as referring to the cardinal honey-eater (*Myzomela*

cardinalis) and *longnek* is also given as the a name for the reef heron (*Egretta sacra*), which is alternatively listed as *naova*. For a linguist, of course, listings such as these are not a problem as it is very much in the illogical nature of languages to fly in the face of scientific rigour. The fact is that while most people call the purple swamphen a *napiru*, there are others who call it a *longnek*, and yet others who called it a *redhed*. However, those who call it a *longnek* perhaps don't use that name for the reef heron, preferring to refer to that bird by its alternative name of *naova*.

3 Delimiting the Lexicon

I tried to make my dictionary as comprehensive a record as possible of ordinary Bislama as it is spoken today, a decade after independence. In all, the dictionary contains about 8000 pieces of lexical information arranged under more than 4000 headwords. Thus, this dictionary contains about a third again as many entries as were included in Camden (1977). In fact, the number of headwords in Camden's dictionary is slightly inflated when compared with my own dictionary because he included reduplicated forms as completely separate entries, whereas I did not. Thus, for example, he has separate entries for *defdefren* and *defren* 'different'. Because the former is regularly derivable from the latter, I have only given a single entry.

Every lexicographer faces the problem of deciding when a word of foreign origin ceases to be a foreign word and becomes a genuine word in the language. Few would want to exclude *coup d'état* from a dictionary of English. While *The Macquarie Dictionary* does list this for Australian English, it excludes the widely used *nouvelle cuisine*, so where do we draw the line? It is arguable that in a pidgin language such as Bislama, this problem is compounded as the entire lexicon is in a sense "borrowed."

3.1 English Etyma

With regard to words of English origin in Bislama, few would have qualms about saying that *konsampsen blong raes hem i ingkris dramatikali long tufala prinsipol eben senta* represents the highly anglicised speech of the well-educated and that a dictionary of genuine Bislama should exclude words such as *konsampsen*, *ingkris*, *dramatikali* and *prinsipol*. However, in trying to reflect the speech of ordinary ni-Vanuatu today, it is obvious that many new words of English origin are presently flooding into the language and enriching it. New words and expressions such as *seremoni* 'ceremony', *tekem ples* 'take place', *hatatak* 'heart attack' and *filwoka* 'Cultural Centre fieldworker' are so frequently heard over the radio and read

in the newspaper today that not only do these words have general recognition, they have even come to have fairly widespread active use, even if in some cases only in more formal styles.

In deciding what sorts of words to include and what to exclude, I was guided by the general principle that if a word is used systematically in informal contexts in town by people with primary level education, then it should be treated as a genuine Bislama word. Even if such a word is not generally known in rural areas or among older generations, it is probably destined to spread in time through the effects of radio and circular migration. Even so, the dictionary is likely to be perceived as having an urban bias (c.g. Charpentier 1992:75).

3.2 French Etyma

In a language such as Bislama where the lexicon is predominantly of English origin, one might expect that it would be relatively easy to decide whether a word of French origin is or is not part of the lexicon, but this is not always easy either. There are some words of French origin that are recognised and used in Bislama by large numbers of people, and which are often the only accepted word to express that particular concept, e.g. *pima* ‘chilli’ (< *piment*), *sitrong* ‘lime’ (< *citron*), *kamiong* ‘truck’ (< *camion*), *masut* ‘diesel’ (< *mazout*). There are also many examples of synonymous pairs in which one word comes from French and the other from English, yet both are universally recognised and used as genuine Bislama words, for example *ariko* and *bin* for ‘bean’, *pamplimus* and *grefrut* for ‘grapefruit’, *gato* and *kek* for ‘cake’.

However, there is still a grey area where it can be difficult to decide whether a word of French origin represents a genuine Bislama lexical item, or whether it simply represents an ad hoc borrowing by a French-educated ni-Vanuatu. If somebody says *Mi wantem mekem wan virement i go long kaon blong mi* ‘I want to make a deposit into my account’ to a bank teller, it is undeniable that *virement* ‘deposit’ is being used as an ad hoc borrowing, especially if it is pronounced with its French phonology intact. On the other hand, while the English-derived word *ofis* ‘office’ is universally known and used, the French-derived synonym *biro* will also occasionally be encountered. If its phonological shape is completely assimilated to Bislama phonological patterns, this would suggest that it should perhaps be treated as a genuine—though rare—Bislama form.

3.3 Melanesian Etyma

A problem that is almost as difficult to solve as that of deciding whether a word of English or French origin “belongs” in the Bislama lexicon is the question of the status of words of local vernacular origin. Many words in this category are universally accepted as being part of the

lexicon: *nabangga* ‘banyan’, *namarae* ‘eel’, *lusefsef* ‘bush sprite’, and so on. There are other words of vernacular origin that may not be universally known, but which are still well established in particular local areas. Thus, for instance, Santo speakers are more likely to use *nakarae* instead of *blakbokis* or *flaenfoks* for ‘flying fox’, and Malakula speakers are more likely to use *natalingan* instead of *ia* or *sora* (< *les oreilles*) for ‘ear’.

However, there are other words that are perhaps not universally used or recognised, and which some people may recognise as being derived from their own languages, yet I chose to include them as entries in my dictionary. Frequently these are used as exclamations in Bislama (e.g. *names*, *ndeke*, *naoti*, *yanganen*), and although these have clearly recognisable (and often obscene) meanings to speakers of particular languages, I included them in this dictionary for two reasons:

- i) Such words are increasingly being used by speakers of languages other than those from which these items are drawn. If you sneak up behind somebody from Erakor (on Efate) and he exclaims *Names!*, we cannot really say that he is speaking a language from Tanna (where the word means ‘fuck’). He is, in fact, speaking Bislama, but using a word that comes from a language of Tanna.
- ii) Even when these kinds of words are used in Bislama by speakers of the language from which they originate, they are no longer used with the same range of meanings or grammatical functions as in the vernacular. Thus, for example, the word *yanganen*, which derives from the inflected word for ‘his penis’ in one of the languages of Tanna, can only be used as an exclamation of surprise in Bislama, and is never used as a noun to refer to the actual body part. Thus, it would be unimaginable that anybody would say *yanganen blong hem*, for example; the only way to express this meaning would be to say *kok blong hem* ‘his penis’. Similarly, while in the Tannese language the same body part with a second person singular possessor is *yanganim*, the same form would never occur in Bislama, where only *kok blong yu* ‘your penis’ is possible.

3.4 Creativity and the Lexicon

One problem that faces the solitary lexicographer, in a way which would not be faced by a lexicographer operating as part of a larger team that is more representative of an entire speech community, is deciding whether an attested usage represents a fixed expression (which belongs in the lexicon), or whether the usage represents a purely individual stylistic creation.

For instance, the expression *openem eksesaesbuk* ‘be in a sexually responsive position (with one’s legs apart) [lit: open the exercise book]’ is widely known among the youth of Vila.

The legitimacy of this as part of the Bislama lexicon is not, I think, open to dispute. However, because this is a risqué slang expression, linguistically creative individuals may play with this idiom in previously unattested ways to produce a sentence such as the following:

Mi wantem raet long eksesaesbuk blong hem.

Literally, this means 'I would like to write in her exercise book', but the allusion is clearly to the idiom *openem eksesaesbuk*, and the intended meaning is clearly that the speaker would like to enjoy the carnal pleasures of the young lady he is talking about. However, this is a meaning that hearers have to work out on the basis of their knowledge of the original idiom. Thus, *raet long eksesaesbuk* would represent a purely individual creation, and would not belong in the dictionary.

Some people's stylistic creativity—especially if they are known as *faniman* 'jokesters'—can appeal to others to the point where a word or an expression produced spontaneously by a single individual may be taken up by others, spreading from there, and eventually entering the general lexicon. The problem for the lexicographer, of course, is in deciding when a usage ceases to be original (and does not belong in the lexicon) and when it becomes a fixed expression (and does belong in the lexicon). There are going to be cases that can be easily decided one way or another, but others are much more difficult to deal with.

For instance, there is a widely used idiom *mekem rod* 'fix sexual partner for friend [lit: make road]'. Some of the secondary students at Malapoa College in Vila have recently started to use the expression *draevem buldos* [lit: drive a bulldozer] for the same meaning. The question is how do we decide whether *draevem buldos*, which must initially have begun its career as an individual stylistic response in a similar way to the *raet long eksesaesbuk* example, is now simply an in-group joke, or whether it represents a genuine innovation in the lexicon. I have observed that those people who use the expression *draevem buldos* face looks of puzzlement from first-time hearers, and apparently have to explain that the expression was used only by their group at Malapoa. This suggests that *draevem buldos* has not yet become a genuine part of the Bislama lexicon, but still falls within the realm of stylistic creativity.

The study of the development of slang in Vila is particularly interesting because in such a small place it is sometimes possible to trace the history of a slang term back to a particular person or to a particular event. One of the most noticeable things about the development of slang expressions is the rapidity with which they can spread. In September 1990, Radio Vanuatu began a campaign to promote the breast-feeding of babies over bottle-feeding, and in one of the spots was the line:

Tata botel! Titi hem i nambawan!

'Good-bye bottle! Breasts are best!'

Within two months, by November of the same year, it had become all the rage to take one's leave of someone else not by using the normal *gudbae* or *tata*, but by saying *tata botel*, with everyone, of course, bursting out in gales of laughter because of the implicit reference to breasts. By the end of the year it was too early to say whether *tata botel* was going to become well established enough that we could regard it as having genuinely entered the slang lexicon, but it seemed to be close. I visited Vila a year later and found that not only was *tata botel* still all the rage, but that it was acquiring new uses, a sign that it was indeed establishing itself in the lexicon. Beer drinkers, announcing the fact that their bottle (or even can) of beer was finished, would announce *Tata botel!*

Slang terminology associated with the newly trendy practice of drinking kava can also spread very rapidly from a single original source. The independence holiday in July in Vila is always celebrated with stalls along the sea-wall in town where people sell food and drink, operate games of chance and skill, and now also sell prepared kava. The operator of one such stall in the independence celebrations of July 1989 was trying to lure customers his way with the call:

Kam dring kava long ples ia. Wan sel nomo, bae fowil antap.

'Come and drink kava here. Just one shell and you'll have four wheels up in the air.'

to which a passer-by responded with:

Wanem, trak bakegen?

'Is that a car or what?'

This exchange was immediately passed on all around Vila. It is a typical Melanesian joking technique to repeat a joke such as this whenever one has the chance, and even if one has heard it twenty times before, one is still expected to scream with laughter. This joke then became abbreviated, and by the end of the year, the phrase *fowil antap* had become sufficiently well established with the meaning 'be strongly affected by kava' that I included it in my dictionary.

Twelve months later, the expression appeared to be spreading into other contexts as well. A group of Christian singers—from an anti-kava-drinking sect—who were singing hymns of praise to the Lord in disturbing proximity to a kava outlet were castigated in a voice loud enough for other kava-drinkers to hear (but not loud enough for the singers to hear) with the following:

Atasióng, mi kam longwe, bae yufala i fowil antap!

'Watch out, if I go over there, you'll all be laid out flat.'

The fact that the expression is expanding its area of reference is probably a sign of its vitality and that it is now firmly established in the lexicon. However, there are many examples of incipient slang usages that cause immense problems for the lexicographer.

Slang depends on its recognised novelty for its spread and use, and slang frequently disappears as quickly as it is introduced. One such term that did not survive was the word *lima*. When half-shells of kava, selling for fifty vatu, first appeared in kava outlets in Vila in the mid-1980s, it was possible for a while to use the slang word *lima* to refer to these. This word derived from a widespread vernacular word meaning 'five' (because old people will often say "five shillings" instead of "fifty vatu"). However, if one were to ask for a *lima* in a *nakamal* now, five years later, one would almost certainly receive a blank look. The only way of getting a half shell now is to use the straightforward expression *wan sel blong fifti* 'a shell for fifty'.

4 Variation and Standard

I did not specifically try to define a "standard" Bislama in the first edition of my dictionary. This responsibility belongs, I feel, not with an expatriate, but with ni-Vanuatu themselves. For Bislama speakers to establish a standard will require a certain amount of political will in the appropriate places, and it is arguable that this will is not present in Vanuatu today. Politicians have in the past spoken encouragingly of the need to standardise and develop the language. For instance, speaking to a conference on language issues in Vanuatu in 1981, shortly after independence, the then Prime Minister:

"assured the conference of the present government's full support should appropriate recommendations regarding the development of Bislama emerge from the discussions" (Pacific Churches Research Centre 1981:4).

That conference did indeed come up with a wide range of suggestions relating to the use of Bislama, but none of these were followed up in any way by the government at the time (or at any time since then).

Various other conferences and workshops hosted by the Pacific Languages Unit of the University of the South Pacific during the 1980s drew attention to the need to standardise and develop Bislama, and while these resulted in a growing acceptance among some people that there is a need to "do something" for the language, this had little or no effect in terms of government support and encouragement for the language.

In 1986, a number of ni-Vanuatu whose work requires them to write in and translate into Bislama decided that it would be beneficial for them to group together and to hold meetings to discuss matters of mutual concern in order to share solutions to problems, and to avoid

duplication of effort. What emerged was a *Komiti blong Bislama* 'Bislama Committee', which set its basic objectives (in Bislama) as follows:

"Tufala Dipatmen blong Midia mo Dipatmen blong Lanwis wetem Skul blong Olgeta Lanwis blong Pasifik long USP (wetem plante narafala man moa) oli yusum Bislama evri dei olsem wan tul long wok blong olgeta. Olgeta memba we i wok long olgeta tri defren kaen bodi ia oli luksave nid blong lukluk moa long olgeta problem blong raet mo tanem lanwis long Bislama.

*"Folem wan tingting we i kamaot long olgeta toktok bitwin trifala bodi ia, oli agri blong setemap wan komiti blong hem i wok long saed blong lefsetemap fasin blong yusum olgeta toktok long Bislama i kam antap moa."*¹

This committee drew up a set of guidelines, stating that its membership would be drawn from the national radio station (Radio Vanuatu), the government newspaper (*Vanuatu Weekly/Hebdomadaire*), and the public service Translation Department. At the same time, one member of the Pacific Languages Unit of the University of the South Pacific was to sit on the committee in an advisory capacity.

The task of the committee was seen in the beginning as being primarily to standardise vocabulary so that these three different arms of government would no longer each need to come to their own solutions to translation problems independently, ensuring that the task of vocabulary development could be shared. Vocabulary equivalents that were discussed and agreed to by the committee were kept on computer in the hope that when these lists became sufficiently comprehensive, they could be printed and distributed more widely.

At the same time, however, the committee found that it was also having to make a number of orthographic judgments. It issued the first of what was planned as a series of spelling guides under the title of *Olsem Wanem Bae Yumi Raetem Bislama Namba 1* 'How we will write Bislama No. 1', to provide some kind of model for users of the written language to follow.

The committee members made provision for meetings to be held at the same time every month, and an agenda of points for discussion was circulated ahead of each meeting. Meetings were in fact held even more frequently than this when members were available and when there were particular points to discuss. Although the members of this committee found their work useful, they also faced problems. Part of the problem lay in the fact that not all members could find time from their everyday work to attend every meeting. Another significant problem was that of "enforcement." Without an overall editorial position in the government newspaper,

¹ Both the Department of Media Services and the Department of Language Services, along with the Pacific Languages Unit of the University of the South Pacific (and numerous others) make use of Bislama every day as a tool in their work. All of those working in these organisations and departments recognise the need to investigate problems involved with writing in and translating into Bislama.

Arising out of discussions between these three organisations, it was agreed that a committee should be established to improve the way in which Bislama is used.

there was in fact no single individual to check spellings for consistency and adherence to the agreed norms.

In 1987, the committee wrote officially to the Prime Minister's Department (as it is the Prime Minister who was responsible for both Media Services and the Translation Department in Vanuatu at the time) to request that the Council of Ministers give the committee's decisions official status in the country, and to ask that an editorial position be created for the newspaper. The committee never received a response to that letter. One can only interpret this as indicating that questions of standardisation and lexical development in Bislama are close to the bottom of the political agenda in Vanuatu today.

Another problem involving the issue of standardisation in Bislama relates to differences between ecclesiastical and secular uses of the language. I have already indicated that the churches in Vanuatu now make extensive use of Bislama, in both its written and spoken forms. Many features of the spelling of Bislama that are now widely followed were in fact first adopted by the churches and disseminated through the very widely used hymn books and scriptural translations. There is a church committee that decides on orthographic conventions, and these are strictly followed in all publications emanating from the churches. However, there are some conventions that are regarded by many secular spellers as odd, and which tend to be followed only sporadically, or not at all, in non-ecclesiastical materials. The *Komiti blong Bislama* made some recommendations that went against ecclesiastical orthographic traditions because it was felt that their own decisions were more in line with general usage.

In producing my dictionary, I felt conscious of the fact that I should not preempt any future attempt by ni-Vanuatu to standardise their language, assuming that at some stage the political will to achieve this might be found. In any case, I feel that the task of standardisation belongs in a monolingual dictionary of Bislama, about which I will have more to say below, rather than in a bilingual dictionary such as the one I produced. However, as a lexicographer cannot avoid spelling words and putting words in alphabetical order, some choices had to be made.

Rather than attempt to establish a single standard form of Bislama, I therefore tried to include as much information as possible on all varieties of the language, except for the more formal and anglicised registers of the best educated anglophone ni-Vanuatu (for which people will always have recourse to a dictionary of English). Words of purely local or regional usage were included insofar as I was able to uncover them. For example, in the interest of comprehensiveness I included the word *namel* 'enamel mug', which is used by people from Erakor village on Efate, in addition to the more widespread *panikin*. I did not try to indicate which geographical area a restricted word such as this comes from, as information on the dialect geography of Bislama is far too sketchy at this point in time to make this practical, though I did mark a form as [rare] when it is restricted in some way in its distribution. When a restricted form corresponds to a more widely known form, the two were cross-referenced to each other, with

an indication as to which is the more common form. Thus, my entries for *namel* and *panikin* were as follows:

namel [rare] enamel mug More commonly **panikin**

panikin enamel mug Sometimes **namel**

With considerable variation in the possible pronunciations of many words, I did not try to include every possible phonetic variant of every word in Bislama as this would have made the dictionary unwieldy. The word *from* ‘because’, for example, appears in a variety of guises: *from*, *forom*, *prom*, *porom*. Of these, the pronunciations *forom*, *prom* and *porom* are undoubtedly more restricted in their distributions. Moreover, the alternations between *p* and *f* and the presence or absence of the epenthetic vowel can be accounted for by general statements that cover variations in the pronunciations of a large number of other words at the same time. Thus, I decided to enter such words only in the shape which I perceived to represent the most general usage. Any possible predictable variations on these shapes were covered by generalisations set out in a separate discussion in the introductory section of the dictionary.

However, many words vary their shapes in ways that go beyond these kinds of generalisations. For instance, the word for ‘tomato’ alternates between *tomat*, *tomato* and *tamata*. Where such variations are unpredictable or not part of a general pattern, these were included as separate entries in this dictionary. Where one variant is more frequent than another I generally tried to make this clear in the way that the cross-references are set out, though if there are two or more genuinely competing shapes for a word, I did not attempt to set up one as in any way “basic.”

Words of vernacular rather than English or French origin in Bislama are particularly subject to variation in shape because people from different islands tend to associate these with particular words in their own languages and vary the pronunciation accordingly, taking variation well beyond the range of that ordinarily to be expected. The word for ‘banyan’, for example, has been recorded in published sources with all of the following shapes: *nabangga*, *nambaka*, *nambanga*, *nambangga* and *napanga*. Logical possibilities which have not, at least as yet, been recorded also include *napaka*, *nabanga*, *napangga* and a variety of others. In cases such as these, I settled on the form that I judged to be the most widespread under which the full range of information was provided. Under what I judged to represent occasional variants, I often provided only skeletal information in the entry, but I did provide a cross-reference to the main entry where full information was made available (including, in some cases, also an illustration).

I did receive some feedback from some users of the dictionary that they felt that there appeared to be too much choice in the spelling of some words, and that they would have preferred a more “prescriptive” approach. In the second edition of the dictionary, I have tried to respond to these sorts of pleas by providing full entries only for what are deemed to represent

“standard” spellings, with “non-standard” spellings being cross-referenced to standard spellings, but not vice versa. Thus, while the first edition provided translation equivalents for all of the different words for ‘banyan’, in the revised edition, there is a definition only under *nambangga*, while all other forms are simply cross-referenced to this form (no longer with even skeletal definitions). Thus:

nabangga See *nambangga*

nambaka See *nambangga*

nambangga (n) banyan (*Ficus* spp.)

In order to conform as far as possible to existing spelling conventions, the standardised spellings in the second edition of my dictionary will derive from a number of sources:

- i) My own observations of the written form of Bislama that is found in public notices, private letters, and both government and non-government publications and documents.
- ii) The spelling list propagated by the *Kokonas* Bible Translation team in 1984, entitled *Fasin blong Raetem Bislama*. (This spelling list is not publicly available, and only a restricted number of copies were distributed.)
- iii) Recommendations of the *Komiti blong Bislama*, to which I have already referred.
- iv) Standard spellings that are already well-established for Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea. Mihalic’s *The Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin* has been accepted as a source for standard spellings in Papua New Guinea for a couple of decades.

I tried to include words from as many different kinds of social contexts in which Bislama is used as possible. However, if a word is restricted to a particular context, I indicated this in the dictionary by means of a number of notations including the following:

[sport]	sporting term
[naut]	nautical term
[ecc]	ecclesiastical term
[trade]	tradesperson’s term (carpentry, mechanics, plumbing, electrical, etc.)
[med]	medical term
[baby talk]	term used only with babies

I included material from a variety of levels of usage. The rich and developing set of slang expressions was included, insofar as it is possible to keep track of it, and it was labelled as **[sl]** so that users would recognise it when they come across it and use it accordingly. Euphemistic or avoidance terms were marked by **[euph]**. If a dictionary is to be comprehensive, words that

are felt to be offensive, either because the things they refer to are not generally mentioned in public or because they are regarded as swearing must also be included. In order that people should be aware of the need to carefully choose the contexts in which they use such words and expressions, these were labelled in the dictionary as [off].

Many people like to think of dictionaries as means of preserving languages, or of preserving individual words. It should be obvious that it is not dictionaries which preserve languages or words, but speakers themselves who ensure preservation. Any claims that dictionaries preserve languages and words really involve the idea of dictionaries being “word museums.” Just as museums do not preserve cultures, but preserve only the physical manifestations of earlier forms of cultures, dictionaries generally do little more than preserve older words for the sake of interest. However, because there is still a strong feeling that dictionaries **should** maintain this tradition of “musemisation”, I did include as many Bislama words as possible that have now disappeared from use, or which are now seldom heard in general use.

Such words were labelled as [arch] in the case of words that are generally recognised but seldom actually used today, or as [obs] in the case of words that have apparently completely disappeared from general use. Thus, while most people exclusively use the word *pig* for ‘pig’ in Bislama, one will encounter the occasional old person who will use the earlier form *pigpig* instead. While it would sound ridiculous for an expatriate learner of Bislama to use the archaic form *pigpig*, both forms were included in the dictionary, more out of general interest than for any practical need. Similarly, although I have never come across anybody using the word *Kongkong* for ‘Chinese’ in modern Bislama, I have included it in the dictionary with the marking [obs] because earlier written sources point to its once having been used in Vanuatu (and it is also recorded as being current in Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin).

5 Speaker-friendliness vs. Linguist-friendliness

Many, perhaps most, dictionaries of Oceanic (and Australian) languages are linguist-friendly rather than speaker-friendly. Linguists point to a number of reasons why it would be valuable for a dictionary of an Oceanic or an Australian language to be produced, and these may include the following:

- i) **Pride.** An undervalued unwritten language may, it could be argued, acquire some kind of increased status in the eyes of its speakers if they can point to the existence of a written dictionary of the language.
- ii) **Reference.** Obviously, a dictionary will be of more use if people actually **use** it to find words, rather than just to beam with pride at it. Legitimate reference purposes

to which dictionaries of Oceanic and Australian languages might be put include finding obscure, specialist and stylistically restricted items.

- iii) Preservation. There is a widespread feeling that we should include as many old words as possible in dictionaries; in doing so we will be keeping the old words alive. Where entire languages are under threat (as is commonly the case in Australia), there is a feeling that perhaps recording a language in a dictionary will save it from extinction.

However, I think that it is only fair to say that very few dictionaries of any Oceanic or Australian languages come close to achieving any of these goals.

This is because most dictionaries of Oceanic and Australian languages are clearly linguist-friendly rather than speaker-friendly. The reasons just presented will often be quoted as legitimate reasons for the production of a dictionary not just by linguists but also by speakers of Oceanic or Australian languages themselves, but when a linguist actually produces a dictionary, these reasons generally end up being subservient to the idea that dictionaries should be produced primarily for the benefit of other linguists rather than for speakers of the language. Linguists use dictionaries for quite different things than do native speakers of languages. Typically we use them to investigate the history of languages, or to test our theories of semantics.

About the only dictionary of any Oceanic language that I have found native speakers referring to with any frequency is Churchward's (1959) *Tongan Dictionary (Tongan-English and English-Tongan)*. The reason that his dictionary has proved useful is that it represents as close to comprehensive a list of Tongan words as possible, and also because it includes a very lengthy list of Tongan equivalents of English words at the back. There is no Tongan word that has 'codicil' as its translation equivalent, yet the English-Tongan section of the dictionary does list 'codicil', for which the entry reads as *fakalahi 'o ha tohi tuku* 'extension of a will'. Thus, a native speaker of Tongan who is learning English and who comes across the unfamiliar word 'codicil' will be able to find out what it means from Churchward's dictionary.

Most dictionaries of Oceanic and Australian languages do not go beyond providing a mere finderlist or a reversal for the information that is found in the first section of the dictionary. Typically, the information that is found in the finderlist will be abbreviated with respect to what is found in the main body of the dictionary. Such a finderlist is not designed primarily to help speakers of the vernacular to find the vernacular equivalent of an unknown word in English, but to help speakers of English find the word for something that they do not know in the vernacular.

I therefore tried to make the second half of my dictionary of Bislama as useful as possible to Bislama-speakers. A simple reversal of the Bislama-English section would have made it possible for expatriates to find the Bislama word for 'banyan tree'. However, ni-Vanuatuan wanting to know the difference between the English words 'rectangle' and 'square' would find

little comfort in such a finderlist as both words would simply have been listed as *fokona*. While the first half of my dictionary indicates that *fokona* translates into English as either 'rectangle' or 'square', the second half goes beyond this as it informs us that a 'rectangle' is simply any *fokona*, while a 'square' is a *fokona* (*we olgeta saed blong hem i semmak nomo*) 'quadrilateral which has equal sides'.

Similarly, none of the words in the Bislama-English section of my dictionary has 'obstruction' as its translation equivalent in English, so the English-Bislama section in a simple reversal would contain no entry for this word. Ni-Vanuatu coming across this word and wanting to know what it means would therefore find such a dictionary of no help. However, the word 'obstruction' has been included in the English-Bislama section of my dictionary. As there is no simple translation equivalent of this word in Bislama, a definition of this word in Bislama is provided instead: *samting we i blokem rod blong mekem se samting i no save pas* 'something which blocks the way making it impossible for something to get through'.

While I was still preparing my dictionary, ni-Vanuatu would sometimes ask how the work was getting along. When I was asked how comprehensive the dictionary was going to be, I was never asked whether it was going to include every word of Bislama, but whether it was going to include every word of English. Because of limitations of time and space I was not able to provide definitions in Bislama of every word in English, though doing this would certainly have increased the overall usefulness of the dictionary. I had to be selective in the English words that I chose to include. Those words that I included were those that I felt to be sufficiently commonly encountered in written materials used by ni-Vanuatu of upper secondary levels of education. In all, there were Bislama equivalents for about 6250 English words.

Another feature of my dictionary that was intended to make it speaker-friendly was the inclusion of illustrations for as many entries as I thought would be helpful. I especially tried to include illustrations for birds, trees and fish where these were available. The reason for this was twofold. Firstly, it enabled people for whom both English names and scientific labels mean little to recognise the referent of a word. Secondly, illustrations break up the text and make the pages more attractive to slow readers. Second-language speakers of English are, by and large, slower readers than native-speakers of English, and people tend to read Bislama relatively slowly because they have never been taught to read it in school. I even included random illustrations of many things that would not, strictly speaking, require illustration, such as a hacksaw or a cow, as this made it possible to break up pages that would otherwise have appeared as solid text.

6 User Response

6.1 Ni-Vanuatu

Judging by the way that people responded to the appearance of other dictionaries of Bislama, such as Guy (1975) and Camden (1977), I expected that my own dictionary would receive a mixed reaction. Both of these other dictionaries have been criticised by some ni-Vanuatu as representing *Bislama blong ol man Santo nomo* ‘just Santo people’s Bislama’, and Bill Camden’s dictionary has also attracted the criticism that it is a dictionary only of anglophone Bislama (and Presbyterian anglophone Bislama at that), and does not give adequate coverage to the Bislama of French-educated Catholics (Charpentier 1979:252). If anything, I expected that I would be criticised for the inclusion of many neologisms (e.g. Charpentier 1992:75), though my reasons for having done this are set out in section 3 above.

In the period that I was working on the dictionary, many of my friends and acquaintances became aware, by my frequent scribbling of notes on a piece of paper in mid-conversation, that I was working on a dictionary. Some people reacted to this by asking if I had recorded particular words. Very often, it was felt that the words I should be recording were archaic or of very restricted distribution. One speaker, for example, insisted that I should include *areno* ‘I don’t know’, which I had never heard in actual use (though Camden (1977) did record it). Another category that people often explicitly requested that I include were recent slang expressions that they felt I perhaps was not familiar with. For instance, I remember being urged on one occasion—at a restaurant where somebody else was paying for the meal—not to forget *tang i hang* ‘be absolutely stuffed (from eating)’.

Initial reaction to the dictionary after its publication, at least to my face, was by and large favourable. One critical comment that was made relates to the inclusion of some words of vernacular, rather than French or English, origin. Just after the dictionary appeared, one public figure rang me to point out that I had mistakenly included the words *names* and *yanganen* in the dictionary as, he said, these are in fact not Bislama words at all, but words from his own language. This reaction relates to what I suspect is a reasonably widespread suspicion among more highly educated ni-Vanuatu that Bislama does not have a vocabulary of its own at all, as its entire lexicon is “borrowed.” Such a reaction is therefore not a criticism of the dictionary itself, but reflects a lack of popular understanding as to how decisions are made about what belongs in a dictionary and what does not.

Another comment from ni-Vanuatu has been to question why there was no provision for French equivalents in addition to the English equivalents of Bislama words (and this criticism is also expressed in Charpentier 1992:73). Given the equal constitutional and educational status of English and French in Vanuatu, equal weight should ideally should have been accorded both languages in the dictionary.

Practical considerations, however, dictated that I had to give priority to English over French. The first consideration is that I have the competence in English to compile a dictionary in English, but not in French. Another consideration was that a trilingual dictionary would be quite awkward to produce. To produce such a volume would involve making decisions in the layout of the Bislama to English/French section that would ensure that the material in both languages could be easily located by users. This would also require an additional French-Bislama section at the end, which would have caused problems in binding due to the added thickness. Having separate Bislama-English and Bislama-French sections would also have made the volume impossibly thick. Producing quite separate volumes would be an obvious solution, but this would require additional funding.² In any case, unfortunate though it may be, it is a fact that in Vanuatu today a Bislama-English dictionary will sell much better than a Bislama-French one.

One way of judging the success of a dictionary is to see how well it sells, and to see whether the anticipated market does in fact represent the actual market. As I have indicated in this discussion, I tried to make my dictionary as useful as possible to ni-Vanuatu as well as to expatriates. I can report that professional linguists represent only a small proportion of those buying the volume, which is gratifying as it means that the market perceives the dictionary as it was intended, that is, not specifically as a linguist-friendly dictionary. However, while I have been pleased about the rate that the dictionary has been selling, relatively few of those buying it have been ni-Vanuatu. This suggests that I have still not produced a dictionary that is considered by ni-Vanuatu to fully meet their needs, and that it is still to some extent Anglocentric.

6.2 *Academics*

Although this dictionary was not written for an academic audience, it has attracted comment from a number of reviewers (Bradshaw 1991, Siegel 1991, Holm 1991, Charpentier 1992). Siegel (1991:3), Bradshaw (1991:55) and Charpentier (1992:73) all comment on problems with some unfortunate choices regarding fonts and page-layout. I acknowledge the wisdom of these criticisms. The problems arose because of my wish to produce the volume locally, as well as to keep the production costs as low as possible. This meant that I had to produce camera-ready material myself, and I was clearly not sufficiently experienced at this. The revised edition of the dictionary should eliminate these simple problems.

² A formal approach was made to the French embassy in Vila in search of funds for such a volume, but no response was ever received. It would appear that the French government sees as little importance in promoting either Bislama or French as the Vanuatu government.

Siegel (1991:3), Bradshaw (1991:50) and Holm (1991:140) all expressed disappointment about the lack of etymological information in the entries. The exclusion of this kind of information was a deliberate choice on my part, in keeping with my aim to make the dictionary as speaker-friendly as possible. I felt that this additional information could have been distracting. In any case, one of my intentions in producing the dictionary was to increase the awareness of Bislama among its speakers as a separate and distinct language in its own right. Although Bislama is now the national language of Vanuatu, there are still some who believe that it is little more than a corrupted and broken English. I fear that if the dictionary were to indicate specifically that a word such as *puskat* 'cat' is derived from 'pussy cat', these sorts of attitudes might be reinforced.

The great majority of Bislama words are of English origin and the source of most of these will be immediately recognisable to native speakers of English. The source of some words of English origin, however, may be more obscure. *Makas* 'residue', for example, derives from 'bagasse' (referring to the waste from a sugar mill), with an unpredictable change in the initial consonant, and *kapa* 'roofing iron' derives from 'copper' (because most of the sheet metal that ni-Vanuatu first came across was the copper used on ships' hulls in the early days). As I have already indicated, there is also a substantial proportion of words in Bislama that come from French as well as a variety of local vernaculars. There is also a small number of words that ultimately come from a range of other languages, for example *kanaka* 'hillbilly' (from Hawaiian), *kakae* 'eat' (from a number of Polynesian languages), *pikinini* 'child' (from Portuguese), *tambil* 'kava grinding pipe' (from Solomon Islands), *pupu* 'rinse mouth after drinking kava' (from Samoan), *yosi* 'expression of surprise' (from Drehu in the Loyalty Islands), *nem* 'spring roll' (from Vietnamese) and *nalnal* 'club' (from Australian Aboriginal Pidgin).

With many Bislama words, it is often quite difficult in any case to give a single source. This is especially so with words that are derived from Melanesian languages rather than from English or French. A word such as *nakamal* 'meeting house' does not have a single origin in any particular language, as words of this approximate shape are found in a large number of Vanuatu languages. Even many European-derived words could be equally derived from more than one source. For example, *bang* 'bank' could be derived equally well from English *bank* and French *banque*. It is even possible for words from both languages to fuse into a single form in Bislama, such as French *rideau* 'curtain' and English 'window' giving the occasionally encountered Bislama term *rindo* 'curtain'. It is arguable, in fact, that words which have more than one potential source stood a greater chance of being incorporated into the Bislama lexicon than words which come from only a single language. However, the more complicated the statement of the etymology of a word, the more likely that this kind of information would distract Bislama speakers from the main tasks that the dictionary is supposed to perform. For those who are

interested in etymology, there is a detailed discussion of this subject in Crowley (1990b:108-78).

While most reviewers provided very positive comment, Charpentier (1992) finds very little indeed that is positive in the dictionary. He said that the work had been “regrettably hasty” because I had not included a Bislama-French section (p.73), “incomplete” because I had not included the word *rentaka* ‘prostitute’ (p.73), “inappropriate” because I entered variable words under their most widely distributed shape rather than shapes that are maximally divergent from their English sources (p.74), “totally culturally ignorant” because I made reference to only a single way of talking about tusked pigs instead of a number of other non-lexicalised expressions that he knew (p.74), “reckless” because my Bislama definitions of some English words differed from what he himself would have said (p.75), “influenced by English” for including the entries which he claimed to be strictly urban, and “idiosyncratic” because the dictionary derived from the work of a single author rather than a pair of authors (p.75).

I have already referred to the financial and practical reasons why a Bislama-French section was not produced. Absolute completeness is something that probably no lexicographer could hope to achieve; what is important is to build on previous work, and produce something that others can build on later, and this I think my dictionary achieved. I have already discussed the reasons for my orthographic choices. This is something that is to some extent out of the control of the lexicographer, as the views of the speakers (and writers) of the language also have to be taken into account. Different linguists will inevitably represent meanings differently, and I would not take this to be a sign of recklessness, as Charpentier has done. Although Charpentier’s only stated evidence to back up his claim that my dictionary was unduly influenced by English was the inclusion of the word *niubebe*, he is in factual error on this point. I first heard the word *niubebe* systematically used by rural Paamese women in the late 1970s.

As for the claim that the dictionary is idiosyncratic, this is always an inevitability in a dictionary (or grammar) that is produced by a single individual. One could make the point, of course, that this is certainly not the first description of a language that has had a single author, so is presumably no more idiosyncratic than any other, including works that Charpentier himself has produced. Perhaps the only difference is that in the case of Bislama, there are more academics who are familiar with the language and who are therefore in a position to feel aggrieved at information they are familiar with which happens to have been left out (or perhaps even misrepresented).

7 Monolingual vs. Bilingual Dictionaries

I remember once receiving a phone call from someone I did not know at my office in Vila (from a ni-Vanuatu speaking Bislama) asking where he could get hold of a dictionary of Bislama. I referred him to Camden's dictionary, which was available in the main bookstore in town at the time. The caller responded that he didn't mean that dictionary, as he wanted a "real" dictionary. It emerged that for a dictionary to be "real", it should provide comprehensive definitions of words through the medium of Bislama itself. My dictionary is, therefore, by this definition also not a real dictionary.

So far, no monolingual dictionary of any Oceanic language has ever been produced (and I am almost certain that the same is true for Australian languages). The Fijian government is sponsoring the long term monolingual dictionary project, and the Tongan government is now sponsoring a Tongan speaker enrolled in a doctoral programme at the University of Auckland, in the expectation that she will return to conduct a similar kind of project in her country. The Department of Language and Literature at the University of Papua New Guinea has for some time also been talking about the need to produce a monolingual dictionary of Tok Pisin. So far, these are the only serious efforts that have been made in the direction of producing monolingual dictionaries of any of the languages of Oceania and Australia, and none has yet been completed. Obviously, if we are to ensure that a dictionary of an Oceanic or an Australian language is in no way Eurocentric, then all definitions and all other information in the dictionary should be provided through the medium of the language itself.

I can see great value in producing a monolingual dictionary of Bislama, and feel that if agreement were to be reached on standardising the spelling of the language, a monolingual dictionary would be the most sensible way of disseminating it. Although I regard the arguments in favour of producing a monolingual dictionary of Bislama as self-evident, there are certain practical considerations that would need to be dealt with first (apart from the issue of standardisation).

If a completely monolingual dictionary were to be produced, it would be necessary to set up a body of vocabulary in Bislama that would enable us to talk about the language itself. The major problem would involve establishing a full set of word class terminology in Bislama as there are no generally accepted terms for 'noun', "pronoun", "verb" etc. Crowley (1987) represents a first attempt to produce a monolingual grammar of Bislama, and in that volume I developed a set of terminology that could be used to talk about the word classes of Bislama. The major categories, along with the terms that I adopted to refer to these, are set out below:

Word Class	Bislama Term	
noun	<i>nem</i>	= 'name'
pronoun	<i>jenis</i>	= 'replacement'
verb	<i>wok</i>	= 'work/action'
transitive verb	<i>wok-samting</i>	= 'thing action'
intransitive verb	<i>wok-nating</i>	= 'action of no effect'
preposition	<i>hinsis</i>	= 'hinge'
conjunction	<i>kale</i>	= 'support/chock/wedge'
adjective	<i>mak blong nem</i>	= 'mark of name'
adverb	<i>mak blong wok</i>	= 'mark of work/action'
modifier	<i>mak olbaot</i>	= 'general mark'
interjection	<i>singaot</i>	= 'shout'

Other specialist linguistic terms that would need attention include 'euphemism', 'compound', 'reduplication', 'suffix', and so on.

There is another problem that I suspect relates specifically to pidgin languages, and this relates to partial lacks in the area of generic terminology in Bislama. In English, we would probably want to define terms such as 'car', 'bus', 'taxi', 'truck' and 'motorbike' as various kinds of 'vehicle'. Although Bislama has the specific terms *trak*, *bas*, *taksi*, *kamiong* and *moto* respectively, there is no superordinate term corresponding to 'vehicle' in English. The only generic term that encompasses all of these terms in Bislama is *samting* 'thing', which is far too general to be useful. While there is a superordinate term in Bislama which includes *nabangga* 'banyan', *namambe* 'Tahitian chestnut' and *napiropiri* 'lantern tree', that is *wud* or *tri* 'tree', there is no superordinate term corresponding to English 'plant' that would also include *banana* 'banana', *pima* 'chilli' and *naviso* 'Fijian asparagus'. Thus, while it would be possible to define a *nabangga* monolingually as a *kaen tri...* 'kind of tree...', there is no parallel frame for defining a *naviso* as a 'kind of plant...'. A *naviso* is definitely not a *tri* in Bislama. The best that we could do is to say that it, too, is a *samting*. Other inconvenient lacks in the area of generic vocabulary include words for 'insect', 'person' (although *man* 'man' has generic as well as specific reference, though this would leave one open to accusations of sexist bias), and 'furniture'.

It might be argued that a monolingual dictionary is a bad bet commercially, as this would exclude expatriates learning the language, as well as many linguists. Pacific Linguistics, for instance, declined to publish my *Gramma blong Bislama* in 1987 because of its restricted market.³ A compromise to a purely monolingual dictionary is possible, of course, in the form of a "mono-bilingual" dictionary, in which entries might be provided with monolingual definitions in Bislama, as well as translation equivalents in English. This would involve the same kinds of

³ The University of the South Pacific eventually produced this as part of a set of duplicated course materials, though these are not easily accessible to the public.

layout problems that I referred to earlier when I raised the possibility of producing a trilingual dictionary.

Assuming for the moment that a satisfactory solution to this problem could be worked out, there is another problem involved in the production of any comprehensive English-Bislama dictionary relating to lacks in the area of abstract nouns in Bislama. Bislama grammar does allow unmodified active and stative forms to be used in nominal constructions to express abstract nouns, as illustrated by the following examples involving *yang* 'young':

Hem i yang yet..

'He is still young.'

Foto ia, yang blong hem.

'That photo was in his youth.'

However, such nominal usages are very rare, and active and stative forms are generally productively used only in verbal or adjectival kinds of constructions.

This difficulty would become particularly apparent when formulating definitions in Bislama of English words in a comprehensive English-Bislama dictionary. While the English verb 'migrate' could be defined in Bislama as *aot long wan kantri mo go stap long narafala kantri* 'leave one country and go to live in another country', the nominalised form 'migration' is rather more difficult to deal with as the intransitive verb *aot* does not have a nominalised form in normal styles in Bislama. One could put this form into a nominal slot as follows, but it reads at best extremely awkwardly, and at worst as being completely ungrammatical:

aot (blong man) long wan kantri i go long narafala kantri

'(someone's) leaving one country to go and live in another country'

One way around this would be to use the abstract noun *fasin* to put the verb *aot* into a nominal construction. This noun normally means 'method' or 'way', but it can also be used (at a push) to mean 'activity', so we could say:

fasin blong aot long wan kantri i go long narafala kantri

'the activity of leaving one country to go and live in another country'

However, while nominalised active verbs could conceivably be defined in Bislama by means of a *fasin* construction, this would not be possible with a nominalised stative. Thus, while 'hungry' could be defined as *wantem kakae* 'want to eat', defining 'hunger' as *fasin blong wantem kakae* reads as quite bizarre.

8 Conclusions

Everybody's experience in lexicography involves particular agonies. J. J. Scaliger, a lexicographer of some centuries past, declared that criminals should not be executed or imprisoned but should be forced to compile dictionaries because all kinds of torture are included in this work. In this discussion, I have not attempted to deal with every decision I had to make in producing an updated dictionary of Bislama. I could have talked about problems that present themselves to all of us, such as the homonymy vs. polysemy question, how to represent phrasal rather than monolexemic information, the status of compounds, orthographic problems, word class membership, and so on. To do so would have made this an impracticably long treatise, however. In choosing to address those issues that I have addressed, I have tried to indicate that many of us linguists still have a long way to go in reconciling our own knowledge and needs with the knowledge and needs of native-speakers whose languages we are recording.

A dictionary entry can be perfect from a linguist's perspective, yet ordinary speakers may be able to make little use of this. What use is a definition of 'cup' to a non-linguist if it runs to 97 lines of printed text of text (Wierzbicka 1984:222-4), given normal people's memory loads? Besides, think of the difficulties involved in binding (and lifting!) a volume in which the average entry involved nearly a hundred lines of text.

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