

ON THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF NEO-MELANESIAN,
ALSO CALLED PIDGIN ENGLISH

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Papua Niugini i gat planti tok ples moa. Tasol i nogat wanpela tok ples i bikpela tumas. Olsem ating em gutpela samting bihain ol manmeri ol i kisim Tok Pisin olsem namba tu tok ples bilong ol.

Yupela save pinis. Olgeta manmeri ol i save autim tingting long tok ples bilong ol yet na toktok i sutim bel bilong ol wantok na ol i klia gut long as bilong tok. Tasol Tok Pisin i no olsem. Yupela mekim Tok Pisin na tokim man bilong longwe ples na tok em i hap hap tasol. Orait, yupela mas pulim sampela tok moa i kam insait long Tok Pisin na dispela nupela tok i ken helpim ol manmeri long autim tingting bilong ol na manmeri bilong narapela ples ol i ken harim na klia gut.

Orait, pastaim yupela skulim ol pikinini long Tok Pisin na bihain ol i ken kisim save long Tok Inglis kwiktaim. Tasol planti sumatim ol i les long Tok Inglis na taim ol i toktok ol i save mekim Tok Pisin.

Ating bihain gavman i no skulim ol mama papa long Tok Inglis, nogat. Tasol, ol inap kisim save long Tok Pisin na ol i ken toktok wantaim manmeri bilong narapela narapela tok ples.

Olsem em gutpela samting ol gavman i makim rot bilong raitim Tok Pisin na ol pipel i mas bihainim. Tasol, ating dispela rot em rot biling raitim buk na niuspepa samting. Ating taim manmeri ol i laik raitim pas ol i ken bihainim nek bilong ol tasol.

Na bihain olgeta manmeri ol i kisim save long Tok Pisin, ating Tok Pisin i ken helpim ol long tupela samting: Tok Pisin i ken bungim olgeta manmeri na ol i ken kamap olsem wanpela lain tasol. Na Tok Pisin em olsem rot bilong manmeri ol i ken kisim save long Tok Inglis.

I consider that the serious study, codification and careful teaching of Pidgin (Neo-Melanesian) at all levels of the educational system is crucial to the future nationhood of Papua New Guinea.

The situation of Papua New Guinea, with its enormous number of languages, is unique in the modern world. No other country of comparable size has anything like the number of languages that are found in Papua New Guinea. All the educational findings that show that it is important that children learn to read in their mother tongue--arguments which

are very cogent--are irrelevant to the Papua New Guinea situation. It would be impossible to train a teacher corps whose different members could teach in one or more of the 500 to 700 languages. It is, of course, feasible for young adults who have finished six years of schooling to teach Pidgin in their own villages in their mother tongue to adults and children.

Given the situation in New Guinea, it will be necessary to have some common language for the country that is not the mother tongue of any indigenous Papua New Guinean group, for no Papua New Guinean group is large enough to claim any sort of priority. The choice clearly lies between Pidgin and English. But the problem is how are teachers who do not know the particular local language of any Papua New Guinean group to teach English without an intermediate language. Pidgin is that intermediate language.

All natural languages have the advantage over any sort of artificial or consciously constructed language in that many hundreds of years have gone into shaping them in ways that make them suitable for every variety of human being--the bright and the stupid, the defective, the intoxicated, the insane, the babbling child and the senile adult. Over centuries the necessary redundancy is built into the language to make this possible, so that any language that human beings have developed can be learned by every reasonably normal human child. A lingua franca has to be somewhat different from a natural language in that it is developed in intercommunication between speakers of at least two different languages. Where a natural language emphasises the homogeneity of linguistic experience of members of a single culture, a lingua franca is rooted in recognised diversity and contrast.

So, devised for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication, a lingua franca may lack the depth and richness of an indigenous natural language. It is also necessary to consider what the sources of future enrichment are when a lingua franca has grown up with a restricted vocabulary appropriate to certain limited kinds of culture contact, e.g., trade, employer-employee relationships, missions, etc. For example, Bahasa Indonesian, the national language of modern Indonesia, was developed by taking a lingua franca, Pasar Malay (which was a simplified version of Malayan), and adapting it as a national language, enriching it from its ancestral form, High Malay.

Pidgin English has been enriched by vocabulary and idiom from the hundreds of language groups where it is spoken, and is also highly receptive to foreign words that are incorporated sometimes by merely altering the pronunciation. Each incorporated word from a local language, and each incorporated English word, increases the usefulness of Pidgin as a form of communication. At the same time it carries some of the widespread Oceanic peculiarities: such as the use of an affirmative to a negative statement, "Yes, we have no taro"; the distinctions between sibling of the same sex and sibling of the opposite sex, so that a woman may speak of her brother (English usage) as her sister, or one woman may speak of another woman, her sister, as her brother; and the distinction between incomplete and completed action--*i dai? i dai pinis? No, i dai tasol.*

These widespread features not only facilitate communication between members of one Papua New Guinea linguistic group and another, but they also alert the foreigner to these widespread peculiarities, so that the

English speaker who has learned Pidgin has a much easier time communicating with a Papua New Guinean.

Where Bahasa Indonesian has the advantage of drawing on the many Malay languages of Indonesia, Pidgin has a further advantage over Motu because of the significant English vocabulary. Papua New Guinea children taught first in Pidgin, which is related in many ways to their own language and culture, can move quite easily into English. It is important to realize, however, that to the extent that students with different mother tongues speak Pidgin, they will prefer to communicate in it rather than in English. If there is no shared language except English, they will perforce speak it, but with a lower degree of communicativeness than in Pidgin, which they speak with greater fluency. The preference for Pidgin, whenever it is known well demonstrates that it provides a more congenial form of intra-Papua New Guinean communication than does English. Also, if the diverse language speakers of Papua New Guinea do not learn to speak easily and fluently to each other, they lack a model for communicating in a less congenial and more foreign medium. Furthermore, there are many older people in Papua New Guinea who will never learn English, but who could learn to read and write Pidgin, and so communicate better with the younger, more educated members of their communities. And there are inland peoples, who are just beginning to speak Pidgin, who could communicate with coastal peoples in Pidgin long before their children are introduced to English.

It would seem essential to have a standard orthography for written Pidgin, and at the same time to preserve the flexibility of spelling and habituation to reading letters written in Pidgin cursive script. In this way, the printed page would be standardised for greater intelligibility and at the same time the capacity to write phonetically and read phonetically rendered script would be preserved.

Pidgin should also be systematically enriched, not only by technical words like 'generator', but by a refinement of the vocabulary for bodily functions and the expression of human emotion. As the vulgarities and obscenities are removed, new, gentler forms of expressing not only anger and frustration, but also affection, are needed.

With Pidgin as a national language, it should be possible to provide a sense of nationhood among Papua New Guinea's diverse peoples, and also provide a medium through which Papua New Guineans can move into English and the wider world.