

Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea 2019 Conference - Port Moresby



LSPNG 2019

Promoting Unity in Diversity:
Celebrating the Indigenous Languages of the South Pacific

Proceedings
Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea 2019 Conference
September 22-24, Port Moresby

LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA 2019 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

PLENARY LECTURE

*The legacy of youth: the seeds of change and the diversity of voices
in Papua New Guinea*

Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, Language and Culture Research Centre, JCU

Linguistic diversity in Papua New Guinea comes in many guises — diversity of genetic groups, diversity in language numbers, and diversity of linguistic structures and forms. Add to this the diversity of genres and speech registers available in the speech repertoire of every thriving language community.

TRANSGENERATIONAL diversity adds a further dimension to this. Young people develop new forms, new ways of saying things, and even new languages. And they are hardly a minority or a negligible group. Within the context of PNG an estimated 76% of the population are aged under thirty five; 40% of the population are aged under fifteen.

Older traditional speakers — bearers of the norm — complain that youngsters 'get it all wrong'. This is reminiscent of what the late Jane Hill (1998) called 'discourse of nostalgia' — lamenting the good old days and the good old ways these 'youngsters' are losing. In their quest to document and maintain traditional languages, many linguists pay scant attention to newly emergent ways of speaking as 'wrong' or 'impoverished'. This is a dangerous path to tread. Younger people's ways of speaking carry the seeds of language change — the direction which the language is likely to take in future.

That children and youngsters do not 'speak properly anymore' is a pervasive myth — convincingly dismantled by Milroy (1998) in the Western context, as myth number 8 in the classic set of 21 myths in *Language myths* edited by Peter Trudgill and Laurie Bauer.

Sadly, in a number of communities children no longer acquire their ancestral tongues, shifting to a national language instead. Examples include Abu' Arapesh, a Torricelli language from East Sepik and Sandaun Provinces, and Iatmul as spoken in the village of Korogo in East Sepik (Nekitel 1998; Jendraschek 2012: 478). Many of these languages show signs of language obsolescence — speakers' insecurity, random variation, and so on.

For now, let's concentrate on younger generations' varieties that are actively spoken — or were so, at the time when they were documented.

What patterns of change do we find in Innovative varieties spoken by younger speakers?

Do they add to the diversity of linguistic structures, or is it all doom and gloom?

1 Linguistic creativity of younger speakers: adding to linguistic diversity

Young people — those at least a generation younger than the elders, the bearers of the linguistic norm — are creative. In many vital languages, linguistic creativity of younger generations manifests itself in the creation of special in-group languages, thus expanding speech repertoires in each language community and effectively creating additional communities of practice.

A prime example is Unserdeutsch, or Rabaul Creole German. This is the only known German lexifier Creole. It developed as an in-group language in the Sacred Heart Mission school in Vunapope (New Britain) just before and just after the WWI, and was originally spoken by a younger generation of blended heritage students. Now severely endangered, it nevertheless resulted in adding a further splash of colour onto the patchwork quilt of PNG languages, one of the most linguistically diverse area in the world (Maitz and Volker 2017).

Young people may consciously wish to set themselves apart from the older family members and keep their interaction private. This promotes creation of special youth-only speech styles, or even languages.

The Nungon of the Morobe Province have a pig-Latin style special variety, called 'girls' and boys' speech'. This consists in the insertion of *b* and copied vowel after each CV syllable. An example is in (1b) — compare this with the standard Nungon in (1a). The inserted syllables are in bold.

- | | | | |
|------|--|--|-------------------------|
| (1a) | bög-in
house-LOCATIVE
'I went home' | ongo-go-t
go-REMOTE.PAST-1sg | Standard Nungon |
| (1b) | bö- bö -gi- bi -n
'I went home' | o- bo -ngo- bo -go- bo -t | Girls' and boys' Nungon |

This special code-speak is reserved for gossip or snide remarks, and is not mutually intelligible with the mainstream language (Sarvasy 2017: 50; 2019: 26). It is typically used by people aged approximately from 11 through 25 years. The code-speak could be interpreted as a means of subverting the implicitly hierarchical social structure in this seemingly egalitarian society: people aged in their late twenties and older are the ones who command most power and respect, and younger speakers develop something of their own (one of the functions described by Storch 2017, with regard to language manipulations across the world).

This special language may have its roots in a variety of 'long Tok Pisin' in the urban environment of which little is known.

Youth-only speech styles and special languages has been amply documented for urban Africa and for Europe (Mous and Kießling 2004, Mensah 2016, Nortier and Svendsen 2015 and many more). The informal variety of Indonesian, called *bahasa gaul*, is an example of a youth language from another part of the world (Smith-Hefner 2007). *Boso Walikan* is originally a youth slang developed in Malang, the Indonesian Province of East Java as a secret language, deliberately made unintelligible to outsiders. This is gradually expanding to the urban population at large as a marker of their linguistic identity (Hoogervorst 2014).

Any more in New Guinea? The answer is probably 'yes': just before this talk was delivered, Chris Holz, a PhD scholar at the LCRC, sent me a message confirming the existence of such a language among the Tjang people of New Ireland. Let's watch this space!

Innovative varieties of vernaculars — or the ways in which younger people speak — point towards the ways in which languages are evolving and adjusting to the modern world.

2. Innovative varieties and the seeds of change

There is little doubt that as younger people get more exposure to the modern world, the ways they speak reflect the influence from major languages — especially Tok Pisin, PNG English, and maybe also Hiri Motu. This takes us to A.

A. Expansion of loan forms and code-switches from Tok Pisin and English

From a story told by a thirteen-year old girl, speaker of Manambu (Ndu family, ESP):

- (2) **wanpela** **lapun** ta:kw ata wa:l **orait** **boili boili little pot**
 one:TP old:TP woman then said alright boil boil little pot
 'An old woman then said, Boil, boil, little pot!'

• Tok Pisin number words are used instead of *tok ples* forms

Young speakers of Manambu (Ndu family, ESP) Traditional speakers

wanpela ta:kw	ta:kw nak	'one woman'
tupela ta:kw	ta:kw viti	'two women', etc.

B. Regularization of paradigms and analogical extensions

Yimas (Lower Sepik, ESP) is known for its complex marking of plural number. Younger speakers tend to use regular forms and eliminate irregularities, e.g.

singular	dual	plural	
tanm	tan-p-l	tanp-at	'bone'
impram	impram-p-l	impram-p-at	'basket type'
aprm	aprm-p-l	apra	'plate': traditional speakers
		aprm-p-at	'plate': younger speakers (Foley 1991: 145-6)

Compare Modern English: older speakers might say: *referendum*, plural *referenda*;
 younger speakers would say: *referendum*, plural *referendums*

Nungon (Huon-Finistrrre, Morobe Province: Sarvasy 2017: 121, 342; also 350)

traditional speakers

-o 'after': medial suffix before perfect aspect
 -a 'after': medial suffix in all other contexts'

innovative speakers

-a 'after': medial suffix everywhere

C. Expansion of analytic patterns

Traditional Yimas has a complex paradigm for marking imperatives, positive and negative. Prohibitive forms used by traditional speakers are marked with a negative imperative prefix *apu-* and the present tense marker *-nt* (with its allomorph *-nc*). The prohibitive forms — used by younger speakers — involve the irrealis, accompanied by *pack* 'don't' (Foley 1991: 275-6):

- | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| (3) | apu-tmi-nc-mpwi
NEG.IMPV-talk-PRESENT-talk.O
'Don't talk any more!' | ma-mpwi
other-talk | <i>Traditional Yimas</i> |
| (4) | ma-mpwi tmi-k
other-talk talk-IRREALIS
'Don't talk any more!' | pack
don't | <i>Younger speakers' Yimas</i> |

This analytic construction is reminiscent of Tok Pisin, where a negator *no ken* accompanies the verb in a prohibition. Compare:

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------------|
| (5) | <i>no ken</i> <i>toktok moa!</i>
'Don't talk any more!' | <i>Tok Pisin</i> |
|-----|---|------------------|

The form which was 'new' in the 1970-80s is now used by everyone (Bill Foley, p.c.).

We are faced with **the seeds of change**. And now — how can innovative varieties sound differently?

D. New pronunciation patterns — phonological and phonetic differences, partly under the influence of major languages, such as Tok Pisin.

D1 Anticipatory change: The story of fish

How do you say 'fish' in Yalaku, a small language from the Ndu family spoken in East Sepik Province?

The form is *homuy* for older and middle-aged speakers, and *homi* for younger speakers (under 30).

The diphthong *uy* becomes *i* at the end of words: we also see this in the word for 'big': older people say *maquy*, younger people say *mafī* 'big (one)'.

This change replicates a change that already happened in closely related Ndu languages: compare Manambu *kami*, *kami*.; Iatmul *kami*, Sos Kundi *kami* 'fish'.

Younger peoples' Yalaku 'anticipates' the change which has already occurred in related languages.

! An Innovative variety contains information on how the languages of the family evolve.

D2 Some loss, some gain: How to say 'no' in Manambu?

- very old people (now mostly gone): *ma'an* 'no, negator'
- older people: *ma:n*, *ma:*
- younger people: *ma:*, now the form accepted by everyone.

Expansion of long vowels at the expense of vowel sequences interrupted with a glottal stop is a prevalent feature:

older people	younger people	
ka'añ	ka:ñ	'bamboo'
ma'an	ma:n	'bird of paradise'

and so on: Aikhenvald, Ala and Laki (2008: 42).

D3 Merger of phonemes and the emergence of new sounds

The daily use of Tok Pisin, especially by younger speakers who frequently visit markets and travel outside the village, is having an impact on Yalaku. Allophonic variation of the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ in the intervocalic position is a case in point. For older speakers (forty years of age onwards), /p/ has a bilabial fricative allophone [ɸ] in intervocalic position and word-finally. Younger people (under thirty) pronounce [ɸ] as a labiodental [f] in both positions, as shown in (6).

(6)	older speaker	younger speaker	<i>Yalaku</i>
	[yaɸa]	[yafa] 'father'	
	[seɸi]	[sefi] 'skin, body'	
	[areɸ]	[aref] 'bush knife'	

Tok Pisin has a labio-dental [f] but no [ɸ]. The pronunciation of the allophone of /p/ by younger people results from Tok Pisin influence.

More similar examples:

- The phonemes /n/ and /ŋ/ tend to be merged in word-initial position in the Yimas (Foley 1991: 39) spoken by younger people.
- Younger speakers of Eibela (Western Province: Aiton 2017: 34-5) tend to use nasal vowels less frequently than older speakers.
- Younger speakers of Yimas prefer the voiceless dental fricative [s] while older speakers prefer the palato-laminal stop [c] as the intervocalic allophone of /c/ (reminiscent of Tok Pisin /s/ which traditional Yimas does not have) (Foley 1991: 39).
- Similarly, [s] as an allophone of Yalaku /tʂ/ is a feature of younger people's language, under the influence of Tok Pisin, which has /s/ but no /tʂ/.

‘Younger peoples’ ways of pronouncing sounds is here to stay!

3 New grammatical forms

Ma Manda (Papuan, Morobe Province: Pennington 2018: 412-13) distinguishes two aspect markers *-waa-* 'perfective habitual' and *-i-* 'imperfective habitual'. Younger speakers combine the two to indicate a greater length of time between the habitual state and the present. This is ungrammatical for a traditional speaker:

- (7) na-**waa-i**-go-t-nang
 eat-PERFECTIVE.HABITUAL-IMPREFECTIVE.HABITUAL-REMOTE.PAST-1sg-HABITUAL
 '(A long time ago) I used to eat (it)', or 'I used to be eating it'

The newly introduced conjunction *ayi sa ma* (lit. for.it what emphatic) meaning 'because' in Paluai is predominantly used by younger speakers. In all likelihood, it is a calque from Tok Pisin *bilong wanem* 'why, because' (Schokkin 2015: 424-5).

- (8) a-yi sa ma nik yi=an pwak a-yi lau
 at-3sg what EMPHATIC 3sg=PERF be.stuck at-3sg fishing.net
 ('Thei net went under) because (*bilong wanem ya*) fish had become stuck in the net'

4 New grammatical patterns

Older speakers of Bena Bena (Highlands, Carols Emkow, p.c.): use a locative construction for predicative 'have':

- (9) nani=i=toga gefahi me ni've
 1sg=ACCUSATIVE=LOCATIVE money not is
 'I don't have any money.' (Lit. money not is on me)

Younger speakers say, omitting the locative 'on':

- (10) nani=i gefahi me ni've
 1sg=ACCUSATIVE money not is
 'I don't have any money.' (Lit. me money is not)

Frequently-used Tok Pisin expressions come to be replicated in Younger people's Yalaku, using the language's own forms.

In Tok Pisin, 'Our Lord' is consistently referred to as *Bikpela*, lit. the 'big'. Adjectives in Tok Pisin can be used without a nominal head. In Yalaku they cannot.

The only instance of an adjective used on its own to form a noun phrase is *Maqwi* 'Big one; Lord', only used to refer to Our Lord. This is an instance of structural influence of Tok Pisin on Yalaku: the Tok Pisin-influenced form tends to be used by young members of the community (older people use the term *Maqwi tu* 'big man').

A new pattern is born — just for one important adjective. And these patterns will not be going away soon.

5 New ways of saying things

Clause chains in younger peoples' narratives are markedly shorter than those told by traditional speakers. This is especially so in written stories, text messages, and internet communication — we see the rise of the new genres and ways of framing events (along the lines of Foley 2014, for Watam from East Sepik).

Clause chains in traditional Manambu contain at least two or three medial clauses. Sentences in younger people's narratives contain no more than one medial clause (this could be the result of Tok Pisin influence and the new written genres; some of this was discussed by Hannah Sarvasy 2019, for Nungon). Same for text messages.

Children and speakers under thirty are often less well-versed in traditional genres than their parents and grandparents. Younger speakers of Paluai (Oceanic, Manus) have little knowledge of traditional musical chants. Younger speakers of Manambu (Ndu, ESP) cannot sing traditional songs; many have little knowledge of totemic terms. Younger speakers of Yalaku (Ndu, ESP) have little knowledge of traditional songs and lore.

and so on. Young people's knowledge of terms for flora and fauna is often dwindling, as they no longer partake in the traditional subsistence practices of their ancestors (Sarvasy forthcoming offers an in-depth study of the young speakers of Nungon, Morobe Province). But instead, they are likely to excel in the knowledge of modern technology and of appropriate terms.

Young speakers of Yalaku are responsible for extending the language's own forms to cover notions such as 'flex, phone credit' and 'phone number', so as to avoid Tok Pisin and English terms and thus maintain the 'in-group' status of their native language. Younger speakers of Yalaku can be credited with a plethora of such terms — including

- *wifa* 'phone number (lit. drum beat), also used for phone credit',
- *mesireba* 'flex, phone credit (lit. stick for beating slit-gong drum)', and
- *salaliki* 'address (including postal address) (lit. a mark, a sign)'.

This innovation is now spreading to all the members of the community.

In this day and age, the gap between traditional and innovative varieties may well be exacerbated by the inevitable disruption of traditional ways of life. Younger people get more exposure to technological innovations and less to traditional practices. But isn't this the way the world is going?

Young people's ways of speaking carry the seeds of language change — the direction which the language of a community is likely to take.

They add an extra dimension to linguistic diversity and are fascinating for linguists.

The ways in which young people deploy and manipulate their *tok ples* enhance its vitality and its utility. The linguistic legacy of youth is a foundation for the future. Supporting rather than discarding linguistic innovation may be tantamount to valuing young people's ways thus making sure that they keep the languages alive.

6 To conclude

Living languages never stay still — whether languages are progressing, decaying or maintaining a precarious balance is a matter of opinion (see Aitchison 2001).

- The ways in which younger people speak may sound differently from traditional speakers.
- Younger people may use different forms and different words.

- Changes to do with regularization make languages simpler, maybe more manageable.
- Younger people embrace technological and other advances and evolve new speech styles.
- Overall: innovative varieties contribute to the enhancement of linguistic diversity.

It is not all doom and gloom. Innovative varieties of vital *tok ples* are something to reckon with.

I will conclude with a blessing from Elisha, a sms-savvy member of the Yalaku community:

- (11) **Mafi** nyinwa puri tek!
Bigpela with.you.feminine future.imperative stay
'Let Bigpela be with you!'

Let me extend it to you-all — using the Younger People's word for Our Lord, a new and increasingly popular way of speaking!

And now: what can we do to ensure it gets a space in language documentation and in educational practices, within the multilingual and multicultural ecologies of PNG?

References

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2019. 'Transgenerational perspectives on linguistic diversity', talk presented at The International Workshop *The challenges of linguistic diversity: its social, anthropological, and structural aspects*, Bern, September 2019.
- ., with Jacklyn Ala, and Pauline Agnes Luma Laki. 2008. *The Manambu language of East Sepik, Papua New Guinea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aitchinson, Jean. 2001. *Language change: progress or decay?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aiton, Grant. 2017. A Grammar of Eibela: A language of Western Province, Papua New Guinea. PhD thesis, JCU.
- Foley, William A. 1991. *The Yimas language of New Guinea*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 2014. 'Genre, register and language documentation in literate and preliterate communities', pp. 85-98 of *Language documentation and description*, volume 1, edited by Peter K. Austin. London: SOAS.
- Hill, Jane H. 1998. "“Today there is no respect”": nostalgia, “respect” and oppositional discourse in Mexicano (Nahuatl) language ideology', pp. 68-86 of *Language ideologies: practice and theory*, edited by Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity eds. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hoogervorst, Tom G. 2014. Youth culture and urban pride The sociolinguistics of East Javanese slang'. *Wacana* 15: 104-131.
- Jendraschek, Gerd. 2012. 'A grammar of Iatmul'. Habilitationsschrift. University of Regensburg.

- Maitz, Péter and Craig Alan Volker. 2017. 'Documenting Unserdeutsch. Reversing colonial amnesia'. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 32: 365-97.
- Mensah, Eyo (ed.). 2016. *The dynamics of youth language in Africa*. Special issue, *Sociolinguistic Studies* 10, 1-2.
- Milroy, James. 1998. 'Children can't speak or write properly any more', pp. 58-65 of *Language myths*, edited by Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill. London: Penguin Books.
- Mous, Maarten and Roland Kießling. 2004. 'Urban Youth Languages in Africa'. *Anthropological Linguistics* 46(3): 303-341.
- Nekitel, O. 1998. *Voices of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Language, Culture and Identity*. New Delhi: UBS, Publisher Distributors Ltd.
- Nortier, Jacomine and Bente A. Svendsen. 2015. (eds). *Language, youth and identity in the 21st Century. Linguistic Practices across Urban Spaces*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarvasy, Hannah. 2017. *A grammar of Nungon, a Papuan language of Northeast New Guinea*. Leiden: Brill.
- . 2019. 'Taboo and secrecy in Nungon speech'. *Mouth* 4: 20-30.
- . forthcoming. 'Hunting epistemology in a Papuan context'.
- Schokkin, Dineke. 2015. 'A grammar of Paluai, the language of Baluan island'. PhD thesis, JCU.
- . 2018. 'Language contexts: Paluai, also known as Pam -Baluan (Papua New Guinea)', pp. 65-86 of *Language documentation and description*, volume 8, edited by Peter K. Austin and Lauren Gawne. London: EL Publishing.
- Storch, Anne. 2017. 'Typology of secret languages and linguistic taboos', pp. 287-321 of the *Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Typology*, edited by Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R. M. W. Dixon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith-Hefner, Nancy J. 2007. 'Youth language, *Gaul* sociability, and the new Indonesian Middle Class'. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 17: 184-201.

Acknowledgements. I am grateful to my Manambu family, especially Pauline Yuaneng Agnes Luma Laki, James Sesu Laki, and Jacklyn Yuamali Benji Ala and her family for teaching me their remarkable language, and to Joel Ukaia and Elisha Kasandemi for sharing their wonderful Yalaku language with me. Special thanks go to R. M. W. Dixon, Grant Aiton, Carola Emkow, Hannah Sarvasy, and Dineke Schokkin, for their incisive comments and suggestions, and to Brigitta Flick for careful proof-reading.