

7.4.1. NEW GUINEA PIDGIN

7.4.1.1. THE HISTORY OF NEW GUINEA PIDGIN

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7.4.1.1.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

New Guinea Pidgin is a young language, most of its development having occurred in the last hundred years. One would therefore expect sufficient documentation to be available on the history of Pidgin. This, however, is not the case. Although we are fairly well informed about Pidgin's linguistic and non-linguistic developments since the turn of the century, the first decades of its existence lie in the dark. Pidgin was a despised language for many years and therefore drew remarkably little attention from scholars although in recent years much has been written on the history of Pidgin. However, the theories about the origin and early developments of Pidgin are only insufficiently supported by facts. Only a joint effort of linguists, sociologists, and historians will solve this problem.

In discussing the history of New Guinea Pidgin it is necessary to distinguish between its linguistic and social development on one hand and the question of its origin on the other. Whereas the question of its origin has drawn considerable attention, less work has been done on its subsequent development. The question of the origin of Pidgin has been emphasised because of its relevance to the dispute about the origin of pidgin languages in general. New Guinea Pidgin is seen as yet another test case for a number of linguistic theories. Moreover, apart from the question of its genetic affiliation, there is also the argument about its status as a mixed language.

7.4.1.1.2. THEORIES ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF NEW GUINEA PIDGIN

In recent years a number of theories about the origin of pidgin languages have been proposed and various theoretical frameworks, developed by leading pidginists, have been applied to New Guinea Pidgin. It has become obvious, however, that at least in the case of this pidgin the existing theories fail to account for all the facts known.

The four main theories about the origin of pidgins are the following:

- i) relexification theory
- ii) theories that assert that Pidgin is basically English
- iii) theories that stress the mixed character of the language
- iv) hybridisation theories that stress the complexity of linguistic developments.

7.4.1.1.2.1. RELEXIFICATION THEORY

Relexification theory in its strongest form claims that all pidgins possess identical grammars which can be traced back to an early Portuguese Pidgin. The differences between individual pidgins are said to be mainly lexical. Pidgins change their lexical affiliation but not their grammar. Relexification theory attempts to explain not only the linguistic similarities but also the historical relationships of pidgin languages. In its strongest form it is not applicable to the majority of pidgins and a direct relationship of New Guinea Pidgin with Chinese Pidgin English and Macao Pidgin Portuguese has never been claimed. A weaker claim can be found in Laycock (1970a:ix). Laycock proposes that New Guinea Pidgin is at least partly related to other pidgins spoken in the Pacific area.

There are certainly many similarities between Pidgin and, for example, Bichelamar. These similarities can be interpreted as an indication of historical relationships. Structural differences, on the other hand, can be explained in terms of subsequent linguistic developments. This is more realistic than the assumption that the grammars of pidgins do not change. An appraisal of relexification theory and its relevance to New Guinea Pidgin can be found in Hall 1975.

7.4.1.1.2.2. THEORIES PROPOSING A CLOSE STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PIDGIN AND ENGLISH

The basically English structure of New Guinea Pidgin has been claimed by Hall at various times (e.g. Hall 1961:414; 1966:115). Hall wants to exclude substratum influences as relatively minor factors in the development of Pidgin and tries to show that all English-based pidgins have

their origin in a 17th century 'Proto Pidgin English' which in its turn is closely related to 17th century English.

The hypothesis of the essentially English origin of New Guinea Pidgin has been examined by Hooley (1962), who compares a number of syntactic transformations in Pidgin and Standard English to conclude that 'the results of the study would seem to indicate that Hall is right in his contention that Neomelanesian is much more closely related to English structurally than is generally conceded' (Hooley 1962:127). However, Hooley's analysis is open to a number of criticisms, some of which have been discussed by Turner (1966:206ff.). Until much more is known about Pidgin grammar, the validity of such claims cannot be established.

7.4.1.1.2.3. MIXED LANGUAGE THEORY

Hall's view is contrasted by yet another view that claims that the grammar of New Guinea Pidgin is basically Melanesian and that only the lexicon is preponderantly English. This opinion is particularly strong among non-English pidginists. Many examples of this view can be found in works on Pidgin written by German missionaries. The most extreme example is Borchardt 1930, a Pidgin grammar based entirely on Bley's grammar of Kuanua. A similar view has been expressed by Salisbury (1967) who proposes that New Guinea Pidgin was 'naturalized and converted into a variety of Pidgin Tolai between 1885 and 1921' (Salisbury 1967:48). However, Salisbury fails to provide convincing linguistic data to support his views.

7.4.1.1.2.4. HYBRIDISATION THEORIES

Recent developments in the theory of pidgin languages are characterised by a considerable refinement of the earlier models. At the same time, key-cause or single-cause theories such as the ones just discussed have been replaced by more complex integrated models which take into account a number of diverse causes and their interrelationships. The relative importance of each of the causes has to be established for every individual pidgin. A good example of a more complex explanation of the origin of New Guinea Pidgin is Wurm's modified version of Whinnom's hybridisation theory (Wurm 1971).

7.4.1.1.3. EVALUATION OF THE THEORIES OF ORIGIN

7.4.1.1.3.1. INTRODUCTION

Theories stand and fall with factual evidence that either confirms or disconfirms them. In the case of New Guinea Pidgin, this factual

evidence is insufficient to allow a judgement at this stage. However, I will outline what sort of factual evidence is available and how it can affect the evaluation of the various theories of origin. This evidence falls into three categories:

- i) linguistic evidence
- ii) extralinguistic, mainly historical, evidence
- iii) comparison with other pidgins

7.4.1.1.3.2. LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

In order to establish relationships between Pidgin and other languages, we need fairly complete grammatical descriptions of all the languages involved and a set of contrastive grammars that would reveal differences and similarities. Although a number of grammars of New Guinea Pidgin are available, none of them can be said to be even nearly complete and in many instances the model of description used suggests a closer similarity with European languages than is actually present. One must re-examine how far such similarities are just suggested by grammatical terminology and in what cases they are genuine. Such re-examination is particularly necessary in the case of those theories that propose a close relationship between English and Pidgin grammar. An examination of the minor rules of grammar may reveal a number of far-reaching differences. The writer himself, for instance, has found that in two areas of Pidgin grammar, the functional shift of word bases and reduplication, the grammars of English and Pidgin are fundamentally different, (Mühlhäusler 1975a, 1975c, 1976b), although more studies are needed to establish the full extent of these differences.

Grammatical descriptions of Pidgin before 1900 are rare and found scattered in travel accounts and letters. One is struck by the amount of grammatical variation found in these early documents. This suggests that the ancestor of present-day New Guinea Pidgin was not a unified 'Proto Pidgin English' but a number of varieties of pidginised English, some influenced by other Pidgin English varieties, some little more than broken English. This is confirmed by extralinguistic evidence concerning communication difficulties in these early varieties and their resulting limited usefulness.

Grammatical descriptions and dictionaries have appeared in increasing numbers since the turn of the century. Many of them have never appeared in print and are difficult to come by. Unfortunately, the description of other Pacific pidgins, such as Solomon Islands Pidgin and Bichelamar, is less complete and comparison therefore difficult.

7.4.1.1.3.3. EXTRALINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

Few people have written about New Guinea without making at least some remarks about Pidgin. Although we have few statements by professional linguists we still have a fair amount of more general information about the role of Pidgin since the beginnings of German colonisation. Again, however, the period before 1880 lies in the dark.

Two facts emerge from these early observations, namely that Pidgin was extremely limited in its vocabulary and its use, and secondly, that the number of Pidgin-speakers was very low, Pidgin not being used in inter-tribal communication.

There has been much speculation about the role of various forces in the development of early Pidgin. Whereas most earlier writers stress the importance of whalers and traders, more recently the influence of blackbirding and the Queensland sugar plantations has been put forward as an important factor. The importance of the Queensland plantations for the development of Pidgin has been discussed by various authors, for instance, by Hall (1955:33ff.), Salisbury (1967), and Laycock (1970b:105ff.). It appears that although New Guinea Pidgin is not a direct offspring of Queensland plantation pidgin, the two pidgins are interrelated to some degree.

What we need in order to clarify this problem is more research into population movements, shipping, and trading in the period before 1900. It would also help to know more about other *lingue franche* and about language policies at that time. The writer has found evidence that both Chinese Pidgin English and Bazaar Malay were used in German New Guinea between Germans and their Chinese and Malay labourers respectively. There are also indications that there was an effort to relexify Pidgin English with words of German origin. It is difficult to assess the importance of these factors but it is quite conceivable that they played a role in the development of New Guinea Pidgin.

The author has recently found evidence permitting him to propose that Samoan Plantation Pidgin, spoken by indentured labourers from the northern New Britain area, has played a fundamental role in the establishment of New Guinea Pidgin (Mühlhäusler 1976a, 1978).

7.4.1.1.3.4. COMPARISON WITH OTHER PIDGINS

Pidgin languages can be distinguished from other languages on the basis of two main criteria, namely that they have no native speakers and that they are reduced in grammar and vocabulary. Such languages show certain similarities even if they are historically unrelated.

Recent preoccupation of linguists with universals of grammar has led many pidginists to believe that some of these similarities can be explained in terms of language-independent universals of simplification. It is important to separate such universal tendencies from the idiosyncratic grammatical properties found in a particular pidgin language. Whereas, for example, the absence of inflection can hardly be an indication of the historical relationship of two pidgins, the presence of a transitivity marker in two pidgins is a strong indication thereof.

Several models of the social conditions under which pidgins develop have been proposed in recent years and some articles in Hymes 1971 provide good examples of such models. They could be profitably applied to New Guinea Pidgin. If it is true, for example, that stable pidgins do not develop unless the pidgin is used among speakers of at least three different languages, this would explain why there was no stabilised pidgin in New Guinea before the Germans created the social conditions under which a stabilised pidgin could develop.

So far the findings of theoretical pidgin studies have not been sufficiently used in the study of New Guinea Pidgin. However, this will certainly be done in the future considering the ever increasing interest in this language. It will, however, be difficult to come to more satisfactory answers about the origin of Pidgin unless more facts are known about its early history.

7.4.1.1.4. THE LINGUISTIC HISTORY OF NEW GUINEA PIDGIN

7.4.1.1.4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this section I will attempt to characterise the patterns of linguistic growth that have emerged over the last hundred years. The main emphasis will be on the growth of the Pidgin lexicon.

Pidgin languages differ from other languages not only synchronically but also diachronically. There is something about their history that distinguishes them from ordinary languages. The linguistic structure of a pidgin can be said to reflect its use. The smaller the number of situations in which a pidgin is used the less developed is its grammar and lexicon. New Guinea Pidgin typically reflects the growth of a trade jargon into a fully-fledged language. The growth of a pidgin is not only quantitative. I shall try to show how the very quality of grammatical rules has changed with its external growth. To do this it is necessary to distinguish between the following stages in the development of New Guinea Pidgin:

- 1) jargon pidgin
- ii) incipient stabilisation
- iii) nativisation
- iv) creolisation
- v) depidginisation and decreolisation

Although these five stages are seen as being in historical sequence we can also observe a similar sequence along the dimension of geographical isolation. This has been discussed elsewhere in this volume (in 7.4.1.4.3.) and will not be taken into consideration here. The five stages are of course abstractions and only serve as a frame of reference within a continuous development.

7.4.1.1.4.2. JARGON PIDGIN

The term jargon refers to the unstable varieties of broken English which, it can be assumed, were to be found in New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago before the arrival of the Germans. The linguistic material available suggests a great amount of variation from place to place. One-word sentences and very short sentences were the items commonly recorded. A large amount of extralinguistic information was necessary to supplement the insufficient verbal information. In spite of this, communication beyond the most rudimentary topics was not possible.

The size of the vocabulary was small; estimates range from 200 to 500 lexical items. More important, it appears that the lexicon was an unorganised list of words. We find confusion of parts of speech rather than systematic functional shift, *ad hoc* circumlocutions rather than rule-governed compounding. One of the main properties of a real pidgin, stabilisation, was absent in these early varieties. A documentation of Pidgin spoken before the turn of the century can be found in Churchill (1911) and Schuchardt (1881). Stabilisation of Pidgin began in the 1890s superseding the inadequate jargon varieties (Mühlhäusler 1975, 1978).

7.4.1.1.4.3. INCIPIENT STABILISATION

The German government began to exercise full control over New Guinea in 1899 when the first governor was appointed. With this, conditions were created in which it was possible for the indigenous population to communicate across tribal boundaries. This, together with the plantation system, can be said to constitute the main factor accounting for the stabilisation of Pidgin. A more detailed discussion can be found in Salisbury (1967). It is important that at this crucial

point in Pidgin's development, its original target language, English, was withdrawn. Therefore, new grammatical constructions and vocabulary had to come from sources other than English. The vocabulary was supplemented by words from Tolai and German. These loans still account for 10% and 4% respectively of the Pidgin vocabulary. In grammar, German influence is negligible whereas Tolai influences are said to be considerable. It has not yet been established how much of the newly stabilised grammar is due to independent internal growth of the language. A number of Pidgin constructions which are neither Tolai nor English may have to be explained in this way. During the stage of incipient stabilisation, Pidgin was heavily dependent on external sources (Mühlhäusler 1975b).

7.4.1.1.4.4. NATIVISATION

This stage is characterised by the independence of Pidgin from external influences. In the last years of German rule in New Guinea, Pidgin was spoken by a great number of people from diverse language backgrounds. The relative importance of a single substratum language - Tolai under whose influence Pidgin became stabilised - started to decline with the continued geographical spread of Pidgin. The growth of both grammar and lexis in the years following World War I resulted mainly from internal developments of the language. The Pidgin grammar that developed at this stage is still the standard grammar in rural areas of New Guinea. Limited access to English favoured the development of a sophisticated system of word formation which provided new terms for new fields of discourse. Standard grammars of Pidgin are Hall (1943) and Mihalic (1971).

7.4.1.1.4.5. CREOLISATION

Creolised Pidgin is Pidgin spoken as the first language by a new generation of speakers. It is favoured by high social and regional mobility as well as urbanisation. These conditions could not be found before the 1950s and even today the number of speakers of creolised Pidgin is very low.

Though not fundamentally different from non-creolised Pidgin, it shows a number of traits not found in other varieties of the language. A detailed theoretical discussion of creolisation can be found in Labov 1971. Several case studies of creolised Pidgin have been made by Sankoff (1975a) and Sankoff and Laberge (1973). The writer has recorded creolised Pidgin on Manus Island and in the Madang and East Sepik Provinces.

The general properties of creolised Pidgin are that the existing rules of Pidgin are supplemented by a small number of new rules. In many cases only the scope of old rules is widened to cover a wider range of lexical items. Creolised Pidgin is found in various places and the solutions to certain grammatical inadequacies may differ greatly. For instance, the relative construction found by the writer on Manus Island differs greatly from the one used in the Lae area as described by Sankoff (1975b). Creolised Pidgin among children appears to be more divergent from standard Pidgin than that of older speakers. The fact that speakers of creolised Pidgin have to communicate with speakers of ordinary Pidgin prevents the development of radical differences. This, however, may change if the numbers of speakers of creolised Pidgin increase.

7.4.1.1.4.6. *DEPIDGINISATION AND DECREOLISATION*

The development of English-medium primary schools since the 1950s has led to the re-introduction of English as an important target language of Pidgin. This has led to a rapid breakdown of parts of the established grammar. The variety which I have described in chapter 7.4.1.4.3. as Urban Pidgin is similar to jargon Pidgin in its instability. Both lexicon and grammar vary from speaker to speaker. However, intelligibility does not depend on the extralinguistic context but on the speaker/hearer's knowledge of English. A discussion of the linguistic implications of the mixing of Pidgin and English is found in Bickerton 1975 and I will therefore not discuss this point further.

7.4.1.1.4.7. *ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON THE LINGUISTIC HISTORY OF PIDGIN*

More general remarks about the linguistic history of pidgin languages have been made by Hall who has developed a 'life-cycle' model to account for the growth and decline of pidgins. It appears that the internal growth of pidgins is dependent on favourable external conditions. New Guinea Pidgin has maintained a steady rate of linguistic growth because of its continued usefulness as a lingua franca in an ever increasing number of fields of communication.

No historical grammar of Pidgin has been written so far. Such a grammar could provide a clear picture of the interplay of internal and external forces in the development of the Pidgin grammar and lexicon.

7.4.1.1.5. THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF NEW GUINEA PIDGIN

This has been discussed in chapters 7.4.1.4.2. and 7.4.1.4.3. in this volume and will therefore not be further dealt with here.

7.4.1.1.6. CONCLUSION

Our knowledge of the history of New Guinea Pidgin is restricted partly because of the lack of data and partly because of the absence of satisfactory models of the growth of pidgins. I have tried to show what data are needed to gain a better picture of its development and I have sketched a model for the linguistic growth of Pidgin. Collaboration between linguists, sociologists, and historians is needed to give an adequate description of the historical development of New Guinea Pidgin.

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