

7.4.2.8. NEW GUINEA PIDGIN TEACHING: AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS AND PIDGIN

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7.4.2.8.1. INTRODUCTION

When foreign explorers first ventured into the bush areas of Papua New Guinea to contact its native people, communication between the discovered and the discoverers was of a simple, concrete nature. The people's rhythm of life was inevitably entwined with the progress of the seasons and the growth of food crops - whilst the European visitor's movements were dictated by the weather and the availability of food.

The conversations between indigene and European therefore centred mainly around what was visible, concrete and of importance to the daily needs of each party. The Europeans were especially interested in carbohydrate foods and thus they learned native names for these, whilst the indigenes were interested in learning the white man's names for such things as axes.

Thus commenced the vocabulary of the agricultural worker - from the concrete things of farming - and, unfortunately, thus it remained to hinder agricultural development for many years. For whilst farming techniques were to develop over the years, the Pidgin language was not to develop parallel to it and communication between the farmer and the agricultural field officer was to remain at an unsophisticated level until the most recent years.

The reasons for this phenomenon are numerous and an attempt to deal with each in detail would result in a tome of great extent. However, this chapter will briefly discuss the following aspects:

The spread of agricultural terms.

The role of the Kiap (Administrative Officer).

The role of the Didiman (Agricultural Officer).
Non-involvement in the village.
The goals of the Didiman.
Technical agriculture.
Role expectancies and the modern Didiman.

7.4.2.8.2. THE SPREAD OF AGRICULTURAL TERMS

The attitude of expatriates towards the agricultural production methods, products and techniques of the indigenous farmer was one of utility and not education. Except in isolated instances, the expatriates were not concerned with the indigenous viewpoint and therefore limited the development of agricultural terminology to the naming and description of crops, tools, etc. The Germans, Americans and Australians gave pidgin many words and the people naturally seized on learning such words as being necessary to their trade with foreign planters and officials and to their employment as indentured labour.

Movement of labour from the Sepik and Highlands areas to coastal plantations accelerated the spread of an 'acceptable' Pidgin terminology - acceptable to the expatriate who needed a limited vocabulary to utilise his suppliers in the food trade, or to utilise labourers in his form of production; and acceptable to the indigene who could see advantages in trade and employment.

The language of agriculture thus grew around the needs of the expatriates as they saw them, and around the felt needs of the indigene whose horizons were limited by what the expatriates wished to teach him - and this was very little.

The indigenous farmer needed little Pidgin to fulfil his limited role in the commerce of the country: a role limited by his own ignorance and the dominance of the expatriates.

7.4.2.8.3. THE ROLE OF THE KIAP (ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER)

But gradually the colonial administrators perceived a need for the indigenous people themselves to establish permanent tree crops and to contribute to and become part of the future of their country.

The Germans were active to a limited but successful degree in pursuing such a policy in certain areas, but, it was not until Australia was given responsibility for the lands once known as German New Guinea, that this policy received any impetus.

Owing to reasons of politics, communication, soil types, climate and existing developments, much of the progress in this area of agricultural

development was made in the northern part of the country, called New Guinea. Kiaps, or government officers, were the agents of change in executing the policy and their approach was usually not too dissimilar from the approach they traditionally employed in their police and administrative duties.

Village people were selected to develop agricultural ventures and either by direct coercion or the fear of what might happen if they did not co-operate, they established small plantings of such crops as cocoa and coconuts. In many cases, of course, the kiap took great pains to explain the advantages of a cash economy and how cash crops would help the village to participate in this, but it was usually a matter of a one-way flow of information and little or no feed-back.

The language, in so far as agriculture was concerned, developed slowly as a result of this rather direct and 'directive' approach to agricultural extension. Pidgin was developing in other areas of thought, but agriculture was viewed as being of economic or technical significance only and its role in the social structure of the people was not readily seen by those involved in the practicalities of agricultural development.

Trade between indigene and European developed further and indentured labourers continued to travel between coastal plantations and their homes. The language spread.

7.4.2.8.4. THE ROLE OF THE DIDIMAN (AGRICULTURAL OFFICER)

The kiap had made the first thrust in the development of indigenous cash cropping. He had a limited knowledge of agriculture and thus failed to add very many new words to the lexicon of agricultural Pidgin; but didimen soon arrived with the prime aim of aiding indigenous agricultural development.

The first didimen arrived with university degrees and diplomas obtained in, mainly, Australian universities and agricultural colleges and they had a limited knowledge of tropical agriculture. They first had to learn what this country's cash agriculture was all about. Much of this learning took the form of research of a nature not designed to help the indigenous farmer - a situation which still exists in Papua New Guinea.

But gradually a service built up to encourage and assist indigenous farmers as well as the already entrenched and expanding expatriates.

During this era one can see the further development of Pidgin and the addition of many terms and words of an agricultural origin. But again, the indigene was limited to learning the names of agricultural

things and methods without gaining much insight into the reasons for various practices and techniques or any understanding of the alternatives available to him. The didiman was usually responsible for a large area of land including many thousands of people, and direct meaningful contact with individual farmers was necessarily limited. Often contact comprised little more than a brief inspection followed by specific technical advice - advice often assumed by the farmer to be an order - or of information passed on to the farmer by the kiap who had in turn received the information from the didiman.

Numbers of didimen increased rapidly, contact was improved and farmer-training of a formal nature was instituted on a large scale. But, unfortunately, the style of agricultural extension instituted by kiaps and expanded upon by the early didiman persisted. The didiman remained the reservoir of agricultural knowledge from whom droplets of information percolated down to the indigenous farmer as 'needed' by the farmer. Thus the language of farming slowly developed; new words and phrases were added to signify and describe new crops, tools and techniques actually seen or used by the indigenous farmers.

7.4.2.8.5. NON-INVOLVEMENT IN THE VILLAGE

The village farmer was gradually learning more about the process of law, the new society that was developing in his land and the role of the foreign government whose officers visited him frequently. He learned to perform the rituals of roll-calls, meetings and the selection of a village luluai (village headman), but his conceptual involvement in the whole process of change was limited. Learning was by rote, not as a result of involvement and conceptual expansion.

7.4.2.8.6. THE GOALS OF THE DIDIMAN

The lack of involvement became even more obvious when one looked closely at the plans the didiman had for him. The village farmer had developed a system of agriculture admirably suited to his ecological and social environment. His land tenure system developed around the agricultural potential of his land, his concept of ownership, the need for defence and certain socio-religious influences of which expatriates are still largely ignorant. His gardening methods were influenced by practical and ecological needs: crops were mixed to reduce the incidence of insect pests and diseases, they were not planted in rows and this reduced erosion, etc.

Our early didimen (of which the writer was one), failed to recognise these factors, or if they did they maintained a messianic attitude towards

their role and tempered this by a paternal attitude towards the traditional indigenous agriculture. The didiman had certain technical rules he needed to adhere to: coconuts must be planted on a 27 foot triangle, nurseries must be constructed (and in a certain way) and so on. The approach was an inflexible one which took little cognisance of the input needed by the farmer; and the rate of agricultural development suffered.

If the didiman had used the opportunity of coming to understand traditional agriculture a little better he would have found ways of introducing cash cropping in a way more acceptable to the village farmer and more successful agriculturally. But he did not, and his communication through the common language, Pidgin, developed to a minimal degree and only to the extent needed by the didiman to communicate the concrete matters of his task.

The result of this approach was that management decisions concerning agricultural ventures were necessarily taken by the didiman and not the farmer. The didiman had a particular view of how a particular crop and project should develop whilst the farmer was merely a source for labour and land. As techniques became more complex involving such things as pruning, thinning and the development of crude village production centres (such as coffee fermentaries) the farmer became even less involved in decision making for he did not have the knowledge to make the decisions, nor the words to convey his decisions to the didiman.

7.4.2.8.7. TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

Agriculture had become a technical area of activity divorced from the villager's mental activities but grafted onto his lengthening list of work and time obligations.

The didiman told the farmers, and the low level village worker, little of the technicalities, and the development of a technical agricultural lexicon within the Pidgin language was slow. That is, until the advent of the Agricultural Colleges (see below 7.4.2.8.8.).

To give an example of how technical matters were avoided here is an incident concerning coffee fermenting.

The coffee cherries are harvested when the colour is a deep red and when the outer skin is thus easily detached from the inner beans. After the process of pulping, i.e. removal of the outer skin, the inner bean is then placed in a fermentation trough (usually a hollowed out canoe or garamut, i.e. slit-drum) and allowed to ferment for about 30 hours. This ferment both removes a glutinous covering from the bean and thereby promotes drying and storeability of the bean, and develops flavour. Too short a ferment will reduce flavour development and drying properties, whilst too long a ferment will adversely affect flavour.

On this particular occasion the didiman was attempting to explain to the farmers how to test whether the ferment had been completed. This is usually done by taking a handful of the still-wet beans and grinding them together in one hand. The presence of too much gluten (representing more ferment time is needed) will allow the beans to slip around loosely in the hand, whilst an absence of gluten (meaning the ferment is complete) will cause the beans to rub against each other harshly and produce a squeaking sound.

The didiman was having difficulty in explaining the matter (having no coffee with him) but a villager solved his dilemma. He simply said that one should '*skrapim kopi long han bilong yu na sapos em i skwik olsem waitsan em i redi nau*', i.e. '*rub the coffee in your hand and if it squeaks like sand it is ready*'.

One can't help thinking how brave that farmer was to use such a word as '*squeak*' when the didiman no doubt felt that the introduction of such a word into Pidgin was not part of his role. He felt limited to the Pidgin of the past.

Even more importantly, the didiman did not see fit to prepare himself thoroughly with samples of well fermented and poorly fermented coffee to show the farmers precisely how important the little lesson about fermenting would be to them. The didiman obviously felt constrained by the language but not motivated towards developing it. This is further borne out by the fact that in describing the new process to the villagers he searched his knowledge of Pidgin at length to select the word *sting* (i.e. '*rotten*') to describe the fermenting process, rather than choosing the word '*ferment*' and thus adding a certain precision to his lesson and a feeling of knowledge gained to his audience. As it was, the medium of communication, Pidgin, was not developed, except by the contribution by the villager, and the task of developing conceptual thought towards agricultural production was hindered by creating another mystery rather than developing clarity of thought.

7.4.2.8.8. ROLE EXPECTANCIES AND THE MODERN DIDIMAN

As a result of these incidents of the past, the didiman came to fill a certain role in the eyes of the village agriculturalist. The didiman showed new skills and introduced new crops, new varieties and improved livestock. He used the existing knowledge of the farmer to describe these new things, but introduced little to the language except perhaps to name things such as *bulamakau* ('*cow*'), *kopi* ('*coffee*'), etc. The didiman was the decision-maker in regard to management of 'farms' and the villager merely followed meekly and understood little.

Then came two things which contributed to the change. One was the introduction of 'extension methods' and the other was the advent of Agricultural Colleges.

Senior officers in the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries became more and more aware of the need for Agricultural Officers to involve farmers more fully in the management of agricultural projects in the village. Whereas in the past, criteria of success had involved precise measurement of trees planted, projects started and produce sold and exported, the new approach involved an appreciation of the degree of involvement the farmer had in his project and the lessening amount of dependance he placed on the didiman to make his decisions for him.

But the new look didiman had his self-created hurdles to cross. By virtue of his past method of extension he had created a well-defined role for himself and it had become difficult to change this role in the eyes of the farmer. A didiman who left decision-making to the farmers was seen as one shirking his responsibilities and the farmer became suspicious of this new approach. In addition, the didiman was inadequately trained in the new methods and tensions inevitably developed between extension agent and farmer. The old methods were often (and are still often) reverted to, but certain far-sighted didimen saw the need to make the farmer responsible for his own success and to do this he had to develop and teach the farmer new words and new ideas.

Many of the words needed came straight from the English, such as '*profit*' (instead of win moni), '*market*' (instead of bung) and '*Development Bank*' (instead of haus moni bilong kisim dinau long en).

Much of this work was done by expatriate didimen whose limited knowledge of and experience with the indigenous intellect and society were impediments to the new experiment. But at this stage (mid-1960s) the Vudal Agricultural College and the Popondetta Agricultural Training Institute (now a fully-fledged College) started to produce graduates to swell the number and quality of indigenous extension agents. These people came in, admittedly, with a propensity for aping the worst attributes of the expatriates, but also with the potential of communication with the indigenous farmer.

Many of these first graduates were Papuan, i.e. from the Territory of Papua, and many spoke Motu. But to many Motu was a foreign language (even to the Papuans) and English, or a broken form of English, was their main means of communication. Their teachers were, in the main part, Australians who spoke English or Pidgin and to a lesser extent Motu. It would have seemed reasonable that Pidgin could have provided an excellent teaching language, but it was 'policy' that English should be used and, at any rate, many of the teachers thought Pidgin inadequate

to the task of teaching a technical subject. For example, it was seen to be better that such English words as '*non-glabrous*' or '*hirsute*' were used to describe a hairy leaf than the more direct Pidgin phrase of em i gat musen long en or em i gat gras long en. But whilst the students were expected to use such words in class one must suspect that in the dormitories and fields such names and ideas were quickly given Pidgin words and descriptions.

After some time 'policy' was loosened and Pidgin became a more acceptable language for instruction though it seems as if it was more acceptable in field instruction than in the classroom. In addition, the strictures of technical agricultural English were loosened and '*non-glabrous*' became '*hairy*', a word much closer to the Pidgin simplicity and less difficult for the students to learn and remember. Problems arose in that many of the students experienced difficulty in reading English publications, but their grasp of the basics of the subjects gave them the confidence to read such publications more frequently and to expand their knowledge as well as their rate of learning.

Pidgin became a language which breached the gap between the learning of basic agriculture and more advanced learning needed by agricultural extension workers, though one doubts that it will ever completely fill the vacuum unless the language develops and grows. And it becomes more and more the role of the Niuginian agriculturalist to aid in this growth of the language and to be somewhat courageous in innovating as the demands and needs of farmers dictate.

These indigenous agricultural extension workers have contributed much to this task as they have gone to work in different areas about the country. In Papua, where Pidgin is used widely by farmers, and in New Guinea we now see new words and phrases appearing in the conversation of farmers. A farmer often knows how many '*acres*' he has under '*pasture*', what his pasture mixture consists of - setaria, desmodium, and puraria, not just gras wantaim sampela rop. He knows how many '*heifers*' he has and which '*steers*' he will sell.

Admittedly many of these new words and phrases are merely names and labels for concrete visible objects, but concepts are also creeping into an intelligible form with the aid of the new extension approaches and the new indigenous agricultural extension worker. Farmers are learning more and participating more.

But the picture is not all rosy. Students entering agricultural colleges are becoming younger and their pride in their command of English is quite obvious even to the casual observer. They will often use unnecessary English words in explaining things to farmers, and, though

they may have succeeded in exhibiting a detailed knowledge of English and technical terminology, they often fail to get the message across. This characteristic is more frequent in the higher-educated diploma-level students than those of the certificate colleges, but does present a source of concern in both groups.

One can only hope that nationalistic feelings will erode such developments and that an increased professionalism amongst agricultural extension agents will place the need for successful communication ahead of short-lived prestige. The Vudal Agricultural College Board of Studies has recently suggested that students must master a vernacular before graduation. This will aid in reducing the problems of the future.

This does not mean of course that Pidgin in its present form will satisfy the needs of the future, nor that it satisfies the needs of the present. The Pidgin of the past will be adequate to the task of concrete and action-oriented things, but it will need a massive infusion of simple and uncluttered English and adapted English terminology to meet the needs of our farmers. Without such growth and development the farmers of this country will find that they are limited in their ability to participate in the formulation of plans of development in much the same way as they were limited by the language of the original expatriate settlers.

