

4.3 INFLECTIONAL MORPHOLOGY OF TOK PISIN

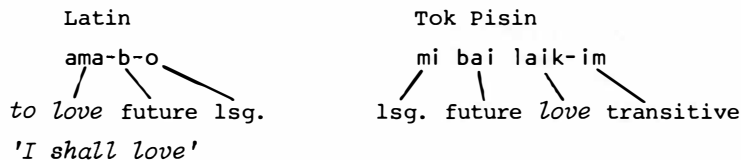
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4.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Morphology is the study of the internal structure of words, as opposed to syntax, which deals with the arrangements of words in larger constructions. The morphological component of a grammar is further subdivided into derivational (lexical) morphology, which describes the formation of new lexical items, and inflectional morphology, which deals with the morphological representation of grammatical categories such as aspect, tense and number of grammatical word-class membership.

The central unit of morphological analysis is the morpheme (or, in a process-oriented approach, the formative). Morphemes or formatives are minimal meaning-bearing stretches of utterance. Thus, the Tok Pisin form *woksaveman specialist* can be analysed into the morphemes *wok work*, *save to know* or *knowledge* and *man person*, *man*.

Pidgin languages, and Tok Pisin is no exception, tend to be deficient in the area of morphology. Tok Pisin has acquired over the years a moderately complex derivational morphology (discussed in the chapter on the lexical system: 6.8), but has begun to exhibit inflectional morphology only very recently. As a rule, secondary semantic information, such as grammatical meanings, is not expressed by means of bound affixes but represented by free forms. Compare an example from a highly inflected language (Latin) with Tok Pisin:



The preference for free forms in analytic languages such as Tok Pisin accounts for their regularity and the ease with which they can be learned. Their principal drawbacks are:

- a) Central and peripheral information are of the same phonological prominence.
- b) Word-order rules tend to get complicated.

Lack of affixation characterises languages which are shaped by the optimisation of perception (they approach the perceptual maxim of 'one form-one meaning') rather than the optimisation of production (i.e. the application of natural phonological processes). Optimisation of perception is closely associated with second-language learning and is therefore likely to diminish once a pidgin acquires a sizable community of first-language speakers.

As is the case with other areas of grammar, Tok Pisin is changing rapidly. It remains to be seen which of the more traditional inflectional processes survive and which new ones are added in the future.

4.3.2 INFLECTIONAL MORPHOLOGY IN TRADITIONAL TOK PISIN

Most available grammars list the following three inflectional features:

- im indicator of transitivity in verbs;
- pela adjective ending;
- pela used as a plural marker in pronouns.

Writers such as Hall (1955a:73ff) further suggest that the above morphological affixes can be used as the basis for establishing syntactic word classes in the language. Such a suggestion is not supported by the available data, however.

Discrepancies between morphological and syntactic behaviour are found in:

- a) Lexical derivation can shift morphological affixes from one grammatical category to another, as in:

longPELA bilong dispela bris	<i>the length of this bridge is 50</i>
i fifiti yat	<i>yards</i>
em i singaut bikPELA	<i>he shouted loudly</i>
yu no ken askim dispela askIM	<i>you should not ask this question</i>
kainkain ples i gat narapela	<i>every other place has a different</i>
kollIM bilong dispela samting	<i>term for this thing</i>

- b) The ending -pela is found with a subset of monosyllabic adjectives only and is furthermore frequently restricted to attributive position.
- c) -pela with adjectives in predicative position tends to be used to distinguish lexical meaning rather than grammatical category, as in:

em i drai	<i>it is dry</i>
em i draipela	<i>it is huge</i>

- d) -im is not attached to all transitive verbs and, in addition to transitivity, also signals causativity, reflexivity and reciprocity.

Criticisms a-d can be condensed to the statement that there simply is no neat one-to-one correspondence between the traditional morphological affixes and grammatical class membership.

The use of -pela to signal plurals of pronouns would seem to be a rather restricted use of a morphological affix.

As a matter of fact, -pela can only be added to the first and second person singular pronouns to yield corresponding plural pronouns:

	mi I	miPELA we (excl.)
	yu you	yuPELA you
but	em he	(em)ol they
	mi I	yumi we (incl.)

A synchronic statement that the ending -pela serves to form plural pronouns raises a number of questions, the most pertinent one being why mipela and not

yumi should be regarded as the 'plural' of mi. From a diachronic point of view, however, this statement is interesting since the present-day plural pronoun forms reflect two systems which were both in use when plural pronouns were introduced for the first time, one being the addition of -pela to singular pronouns (yielding mipela, yupela and himpela), the other one the addition of ol after the singular pronouns, yielding mi ol, yu ol and him ol, of which present-day em ol is still a reflection.

4.3.3 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The rapid increase in the number of speakers for whom Tok Pisin is either the first or the primary language in recent years has led to some significant new developments. Some of these have been summarised by Lynch (1979). The changes can be divided into the following categories:

- a) cases of morphological reanalysis;
- b) free forms becoming bound forms;
- c) borrowing of affixes;
- d) independent developments.

(a) The reanalysis of surface strings is a common cause for language change in the transmission of languages from one generation to the next. It is favoured by the absence of strict social norms and by imperfect adult language learning. For Tok Pisin, only one case has been reported to date.

Lynch (1979) observes that the pronominal plural marker -pela has been subject to reanalysis, following changes in the phonological rules of the language. An area where reanalysis is common is that of the non-singular pronouns:

(9)	DUAL	PLURAL
1 inc.	/yumitla/ yumitupela	/yumi/ yumi
1 exc.	/mitla/ mitupela	/mipla/ mipela
2nd.	/yutla/ yutupela	/yupla/ yupela
3rd.	/tupla/ tupela	/ol/ ol

The forms /tupla/, /mipla/, and /yupla/ show one kind of phonological reduction - loss of the unstressed vowel - but this is not of great interest here. Of special interest are the forms for the dual pronouns in all persons except the third person. Comparing these with the plural forms, in a truly *synchronic* morphological analysis we would have to analyse the first exclusive and second person pronouns as follows:

(10)	PRONOUN ROOT	+ NUMBER SUFFIX	+ NONSINGULAR SUFFIX (??)
	(mi '1 exc')	(-t 'dual')	-la
	()	()	
	(yu '2nd')	(-p 'plural')	

This gives quite a different picture from the traditional analysis of pronoun root + optional numeral (tu) + nonsingular suffix (-pela).

It remains to be seen whether this analysis reflects what speakers of Tok Pisin know about their language, or whether existing spelling conventions will dominate.

(b) Cases involving the attachment of free forms with grammatical meaning to free forms with lexical meaning have been reported by a number of authors. Perhaps the

most famous case is the reduction of the time adverbial *baimbai* 'future' to the forms *bai* and *ba* and the prefix *ba-* or *bə-*. A detailed case study is given by Sankoff and Laberge (1973) with some additional remarks being found in Stentzel 1978. Lynch summarises the most recent developments as follows (1979:7-8):

However, one point which needs mentioning here is that *bai* itself is undergoing further reduction, and appears to have now reached the stage of a prefix to verb phrases. Among L1-speakers, the most common phonological form of *bai* is /ba/ (phonetically [ba] or [bə]):

(16) /em bakam/ EM bai ikam
'He will come'

(17) /bami siŋaut o/ Bai mi siŋaut o?
'Will I call out?'

Before vowels, *bai* may further optionally reduce to /b/ (often phonetically [b:]):

(18) /bol ikam/ Bai ol i kam
'They'll come'

A second example of the attachment of free forms is the cliticisation of anaphoric pronouns discussed by Sankoff (1977b). In the course of the history of Tok Pisin both the original third person singular pronoun *i* and the later third person singular pronoun *em* became attached to the following verb and subsequently lost their pronominal force.

Most recently, with fluent second-language speakers or first-language speakers, in sentences such as:

wanpela meri em i go nau *so this woman went*
na narapela em i putim blakpela *and the other guy wore a black one*

the *em* is used as an emphatic topic-changing marker rather than an anaphoric pronoun. For many speakers *em* is no longer restricted to co-occurrence with singular nouns but can also appear with plural and dual subjects. In addition to the weakening of the role of *em* as an agreement marker, one can also observe its phonological reduction to *-m* and its attachment to the predicate. The two changes are illustrated in the transition from:

ol masta ol i kam	} <i>the European arrived</i>
to ol masta em i kam	
and ol masta mikam	

Further documentation is needed in this area of Tok Pisin grammar to establish how widespread this phenomenon is.

A last instance of developing verb morphology is the phonological weakening and cliticisation of a number of aspect markers including *save* 'habitual action' and *laik* 'imminent action'. According to Lynch (1979:8):

In L1-speech, phonological reduction has taken place in these verbs when they are used preverbally to mark aspect (though not in their regular verbal use, as in *Mi save long yu I know you* and *Mi laikim wanpela moa I want one more*). As aspect markers, *save* reduces to /sa/ and *laik* to /la/. Examples (19a) through (23a) below show the phonological realisation of (19) through (23) above:

(19) *Mi save kaikai banana. I eat banana(s)*
(20) *Mi save wokim dispela. I know how to do this*

- (21) Em i save pani tru. *He is very funny*
 (22) Mi laik go long Mosbi. *I want to go to Moresby*
 (23) Haus ia i laik pundaun. *The house is likely to fall down*
- (19a) /mi sakaikai banana/
 (20a) /mi sawokim desla/
 (21a) /em sapani tru/
 (22a) /mi lago lomosbi/
 (23a) /hausya lapundaun/

Whilst the development of affixation is most prominent with verbs, there are also signs of the development of nominal inflections. One such development is that of case prefixes out of the former prepositions long *in*, *at*, 'locative in general' and bilong *of*, 'possessive'. Lynch (1979:2) points out that:

There is considerable evidence that, due to phonological reduction, these two prepositions have become, if not prefixes, then at least proclitics to noun phrases.

Among L1-speakers, phonological reduction of these prepositions has taken place such that the final consonant /ŋ/ is rarely, if ever, pronounced; in addition, the first vowel of bilong is rarely, if ever, sounded. The proclitics are thus realised as /lo/ and /blo/ before consonant-initial noun phrases, and are generally unstressed in this position (which is why they should probably be seen as proclitics rather than prefixes). Examples:

- (1) /putim lotebol/ Putim long tebol
'Put it on the table'
- (2) /givim lotupla man/ Givim long tupela man
'Give it to the two men'
- (3) /dok blomi/ Dok bilong mi
'My dog'
- (4) /pik blolapun manya/ Pik bilong lapun man ia
'The old man's pig'

(c) Borrowing of inflectional morphology

1) plural -s

As early as 1956 Hall observed that educated speakers of Tok Pisin frequently borrowed the English plural suffix -s. His data suggest that -s becomes attached to both traditional and recently borrowed lexical items. An increase in this phenomenon has been observed by Lynch (1979) and myself (Mühlhäusler 1981a). Lynch speculates that pluralisation by means of -s is an interference phenomenon rather than a feature of Tok Pisin grammar proper, since (p.6): "plural suffixes are added to words derived from English but not (as far as I can see) to words derived from other languages."

My own observations do not support this statement and it appears that, in urban varieties of Tok Pisin at least, -s has become an integral part of grammar.

2) progressive -ing

The use of -ing as a verb ending by some speakers of Urban Tok Pisin in both spoken and written language appears to be a combination of borrowing and reanalysis. This means that initially English -ing is borrowed as a form only and reinterpreted as serving the function of the Tok Pisin transitivity marker -im. Only for a small group of speakers it is also used in the English function. The steps involved here can be illustrated as follows:

Stage 1:	mi ritim dispela buk	<i>I am reading this book. I read this book</i>
Stage 2:	mi riding dispela buk	<i>I am reading this book. I read this book</i>
Stage 3:	mi riding dispela buk mi bin rit dispela buk	<i>I am reading this book I read this book</i>

(d) Independent developments

Totally new grammatical or morphological mechanisms only seldom develop in natural languages, though in pidgins such developments are somewhat more frequent. A possible example to be mentioned here is the development, in the speech of some first-language speakers of the language, of number agreement between nouns and verbs. In the creolised Tok Pisin of Malabang village on Manus, verbs are frequently reduplicated (with no change of meaning) when the nominal subject appears in the plural. Examples include:

Bris i bruk. Tupela bris i bruk. Tupela i brukbruk.	<i>The bridge was broken. Two bridges were broken. Both were broken.</i>
planti pikinini i plaipalai ausait	<i>lots of children were playing outside</i>

As can be seen from the first example, we are dealing with an optional rule here. However, as I could confirm with my informants, since reduplication frequently does not involve semantic change in this variety it may well be developing into an obligatory grammatical feature.

4.3.4 CONCLUSIONS

The above remarks on inflectional morphology together with the observations made in the chapter on the lexical system (6.8) should be taken as a warning against a simplistic view of pidgins as languages without morphology.

Absence of affixation is characteristic only of the initial developmental stages of pidgins. Once the development approaches the creole end of the scale, morphological processes can become important. It would not surprise me if, in 25 years from now, Tok Pisin had changed from an isolating to an agglutinative or even fusional language.