

6.6 THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF TOK PISIN: THE WRITING OF DESCRIPTIVE TOK PISIN GRAMMARS

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6.6.1 INTRODUCTION

When the history of linguistics in the 20th century comes to be written, a separate chapter should be devoted to the question 'What did linguists regard as legitimate topics of investigation?'. For a long time only a few languages were thought worthy of attention, whilst the remainder were given labels such as 'ungrammatical or deviant'.

Grammarians in earlier centuries regarded the classical languages Hebrew, Latin and Greek as the only ones deserving grammatical study and it was commonly accepted that all other languages fell short of this ideal. Languages with no inflection, such as English, were said to be 'grammarless'. The rise of European nationalism brought a major reorientation, in that languages such as German, French and English were now regarded as systems on a par with the classical languages. At the same time, the belief that primitive peoples from other parts of the world communicated by means of barbarous tongues remained firmly established. In fact, it was hoped by 18th century linguists that the study of languages spoken by 'culturally primitive' and illiterate people could throw light upon the origin of human language (cf. Robins 1967:158ff). When unbiased observers began to look at the so-called 'primitive' languages however, they often met with intricacies of grammatical organisation that were not found in the languages familiar to them. Thus, the notion that there were developed and underdeveloped languages began to make way, in the late 19th century for the now generally accepted view that all human languages are of comparable grammatical complexity and that the many surface dissimilarities are all manifestations of a deeper universal 'human language capacity'.

However, the status of true languages has continued to be denied, until very recently, to a number of linguistic phenomena, namely child language, pidgins (and creoles), and second language learners' approximative systems. What is common to these is that they are linguistic systems in development.

The view that developmental systems, such as child language and pidgins, were deviant in some way was dominant prior to 1970, and linguists lacked the conceptual paradigm to describe the dynamics of language development in time and space. Thus, the utterances made by a child were regarded as faulty imitations of the parents' mode and Pidgin English was labelled 'bad' or 'broken' English. It has been shown by recent child language studies, however, that, far from being faulty imitations, the utterances made by a child reflect an innate language acquisition device. Language development follows a fixed course; corrections and teaching on the part of the parents are only minor factors in this development. In short, children are innovative rather than imitative.

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In spite of some pioneering attempts by scholars such as Schuchardt and Hall (Meijer and Muysken 1977; Hall 1966) in the field of pidgin and creole studies, the view that pidgins and creoles are parasitic rather than independent language systems is still widely found. However, a close study of pidgins reveals that they are systems in their own right. Like child language, pidgins are highly dynamic, changing from less to more complex systems as the communicative demands of their users increase. Moreover, the development of a pidgin cannot be explained in terms of random mixing or imperfect imitation, since it has been found that pidgins develop along universally preprogrammed lines, a fact which explains their amazing similarity in various parts of the world. As with child language, a pidgin illustrates the capacity of human beings to create efficient communication systems, the principal difference between the two being that children are communicating in an established language community whereas pidgins develop as communication systems for previously non-existent language communities.

As pidgins illustrate how adults learn and create new languages, their study has become a major research area in second language teaching and learning research. It is now becoming clear that the errors committed by, say, a second language learner of English are to a large extent systematic and describable in terms of natural developmental processes. In contrast to the development of pidgins, which takes place without formal tuition or pressure to conform to a pre-existing standard, a formal second language learning context introduces elements which may run counter to the natural learning order. A close study of pidgins as examples of naturally learnt languages may well result in more efficient second language teaching.

Today, no area of human communication remains that is not regarded as a legitimate field of investigation. What is more, developmental systems such as child language and pidgins are increasingly regarded as central to the study of human language and language learning capacity.

Our brief survey of the development of thinking about language can be summarised as follows:

Stage	Languages investigated	Regarded previously as
17th century	English, German, etc.	Deviations from classical ideal as embodied in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.
17th to 19th century	Languages of illiterate societies.	Lower on evolutionary scale than fully developed European languages.
First half of 20th century	Pidgins and creoles.	Impoverished versions of 'donor' languages.
From 1960	Child language.	Imperfectly learnt version of parents' language.
From early 1970s	Second language learner's approximative systems.	Imperfectly and unsystematically learnt version of target language.

Despite the fact that pidginists are now in a situation where the legitimacy of their subject matter is widely accepted, the problem of what to do with this newly gained respectability remains.

6.6.2 PRINCIPLES OF DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS AND THE DESCRIPTION OF TOK PISIN

6.6.2.1 General remarks

Whereas a number of grammars and grammatical sketches of Tok Pisin have been written (see chapter on history of research (2.1)), few have devoted much attention to questions such as the nature of the data, the aims of description, the methods used and the more fundamental problems of grammar writing. This, on the whole, has not prevented scholars such as Hall (1943a), Wurm (1971a) or Laycock (1970c) from producing highly useable grammars, which have helped a large number of people to understand and speak the language and to make sense of many of its grammatical complexities. However, a comparison of the grammatical statements made in these works with the texts appended to them soon reveals some interesting discrepancies and uncertainties. It is such cases, together with some more principled questions that will constitute the subject of this chapter.

Descriptivism in linguistics can be characterised by the following guiding assumptions:

- a) languages are to be studied on their own terms
- b) prescription is taboo
- c) speaking is primary, writing secondary
- d) synchronic studies should take methodological precedence over diachronic ones
- e) systems are invariant

Each of these assumptions will now be considered.

6.6.2.2 Linguistic independence

The idea which most strongly prompted serious pidgin studies is that all languages should be studied on their own terms and not as deviations from or manifestations of any specific or universal grammar. This idea is one of the pillars of linguistic descriptivism.

Descriptive linguists postulate a twofold independence: a) from other linguistic systems and b) from language external factors. In the history of Tok Pisin description these principles were not always heeded. Thus, Borchardt (1930) writes in the introduction to his *Guidance for learning the Tok-Boi*:

As Tok-boi, also called, Pidgin-English, is according to its character, a Kanaka language, it would be best, to start the teaching of a Kanaka language.

We take the handbook of the North-Gazelle Peninsula language by P. Bley, M.S.C. If we translate the separate lessons into Tok-boi, we will succeed in the quickest way, to obtain the knowledge of this South sea product Tok-boi, which is only handled correctly by the boys.

A similar view is expressed by Reed (1943:275) who claims that "the basic grammatical structure corresponds to the general Melanesian pattern", and it is only in the very recent past that this view has been seriously challenged (e.g. by Mosel 1980 and Mühlhäusler 1981a). The view that Tok Pisin has a Melanesian grammar has, in at least some instances, led to curious examples of prescriptivism. Thus Sadler (1973b:98,99) strongly objects to the use of *taim* in the meaning *when* as in *Taim Panu i stap long taun mi lukim when Panu stayed in town*

I saw him reflecting a widespread Lutheran Mission attitude that this is a non-Melanesian usage.

Hall, on the other hand, in his various writings (especially 1955a and 1966) subscribes to the view that the proportion of English structure in Tok Pisin is both greater and more fundamental than that of Melanesian structure (cf. 1966:117) and that the correspondence of English and Tok Pisin structure is highly systematic. He appears to imply that Tok Pisin could be described in terms of a small number of systematic rules which change English structures into Tok Pisin ones plus a small set of irregularities. A tentative list of such correspondences in phonology is given by Laycock (1970c:xivff) who points out, however, that "there will be many exceptions" (p.xvi). Hall would be very hard pushed indeed if he was asked to give similar correspondence rules for morphology and syntax. The problem with the alleged structural similarity between English and Tok Pisin is that it is felt to occur at some ill-defined deeper level. This assumption is also made by Hooley (1962). In his criticism of Hooley's article, Turner (1966:207) is quick to point out that:

Similarities were indeed discovered, but rather general ones, and it might be interesting to take two certainly unrelated languages, like Maori and English, and see what similarities were discovered there, and whether there is a basic similarity in all linguistic structure, in the sense that all can be described by rather similar transformational models. This seems an almost necessary assumption in applying the transformational model to two languages in the first place.

Some difficulties in detail emerge too. It is suggested that the passive transformation, a key one in assessing the value of transformation grammars, is applicable to Neo-Melanesian. Thus, as *They spilled the petrol* can be transformed to *The petrol was spilled*, so 01 i-kapsaitim bensin can be transformed to Bensin i-kapsait. There is a difference, however, in that Neo-Melanesian does not offer a parallel to the possible *The petrol was spilled by them*. This difference could be significant. The value of the passive transformation depends on the possibility of the preservation of the original subject in a 'by'-phrase. If we do not simply take Bensin i-kapsait as parallel to such English intransitive constructions as *the petrol spilled* or *the container overturned*, why should it not be compared with the Icelandic impersonal construction? Because it would be a single chance coincidence with Icelandic? But in Icelandic, as in Neo-Melanesian, there are dual pronouns. Vit *the two of us* includes the meaning of mitupela *another person and I*. In Icelandic there is a construction using a dual pronoun and a noun in apposition, as in vit Gunnarr which means *Gunnarr and I*. In Neo-Melanesian, the sentence Mi tupela misus bilong mi go long Mumeng *My wife and I are going to Mumeng* clearly could be interpreted as similar to Icelandic ones (and, more relevantly, to identical Polynesian ones).

Similarities between Tok Pisin on the one hand and Tolai or English on the other can be expected, though their existence is no justification for describing Tok Pisin as a parasitic system. Apart from the fact that many of its constructions

are the result of independent developments and hence typically not found in any of its contact languages, there is a significant number of cases where two interpretations are equally possible. As observed by a number of authors (e.g. Bateson 1944, Silverstein 1972), the grammatical surface structures of a pidgin can be such that to the European they appear European and to the indigene indigenous. This means that, for a number of Tok Pisin constructions, there are at least two equally valid analyses. In practical descriptions this important point tends to be overlooked.

An example is the treatment of what Hall (1943a:20) calls 'verbal suffixes'. From the viewpoint of English mother tongue speakers of Tok Pisin, Hall's analysis that the "adverbial suffixes are *awt out*, *ap up* and *-we away*. Of these only *ap* is used extensively: *bringap bring up*, *kamap rise*, *appear ...*", makes good sense. From the point of view of many indigenous users of the language however, *-ap* is an intransitive verb rather than an adverbial suffix, as can be seen from constructions such as:

bringap bokis ain i ap	<i>bring up the patrol box</i>
V _t + V _{intr} N _{cp} pred.marker V _{intr}	
verb chain	

A similar case, at least in the formative years of Tok Pisin, is that *i* which by some speakers was used as an anaphoric pronoun, by others as a predicate marker. In a language that changes as fast as Tok Pisin, multiple analysis and reanalysis of surface structures is quite normal and to ignore this would do injustice to the character of the language. Note that such multiple analyses may, but do not necessarily, reflect the dependence of aspects of Tok Pisin grammar on other systems.

Examples such as the ones just mentioned illustrate a possible discrepancy between the descriptive linguist's programmatic statement of 'describing a language in its own terms' and her or his descriptive practice. Structuralist linguists such as Hall often subscribed to the principle of preferential ignorance, i.e. the less a linguist knew about the language, the more objective her or his account of the observed data. Such a view ignores the many culture-related metalinguistic views and prejudices even the most objective observer will hold. Linguists brought up in a western tradition are bound to observe entities such as sentences, phonemes, nouns, verbs, adverbs and so forth and are likely to ignore grammatical elements which are not clearly referential, are ambiguous as to their segmentability and situation-creating rather than situation dependent (for a discussion see Silverstein 1981). There is nothing wrong with describing languages in terms of units such as the ones mentioned here as long as these units are defined by a linguistic theory and not thought to be god-given entities. However, no-one using the same entities to describe two different languages can claim to describe languages in their own terms.

This takes us to a third type of dependence of individual descriptions on other systems. Contrary to earlier views which related Tok Pisin to either English or Tolai, many linguists nowadays regard the language as a manifestation of universal principles of language development and thus aim at giving a description in terms of alleged linguistic universals. More has been said about this in the chapter on theoretical issues (6.7). The only aspect I wish to mention which is not present in traditional descriptive linguistics, i.e. an explanation of the origins of structures. A universalist approach, particularly when combined with the analysis of developments, attempts to explain why observed grammar is as it is and why other mathematically possible combinations of grammatical rules and regularities are unlikely or impossible. Given the fact that there

are no grammatical discovery procedures and that the idea of a totally objective observer is unrealistic, a knowledge of linguistic universals, in particular developmental ones, can be a great help to the linguist describing a pidgin. It allows her or him to exclude a number of unreasonable hypotheses right from the beginning and to concentrate on plausible structures instead.

Descriptions involving universals often refer to deeper causes, though considerable uncertainty prevails in this area. It is not possible, at this point, to explain grammatical structures of Tok Pisin either in terms of biological or neurological parameters or in terms of social pressures. Turner's statement (1966:207-208) that:

The structure of Neo-Melanesian derives from the social situation in which the intermediary language was used. Some grammatically important morphemes and some more general details of syntactic structure may derive from one or another of the 'terminal' languages but it is doubtful whether the importance of these is equal to the importance of the social setting in determining Neo-Melanesian structure.

ignores the difference between social situations triggering off certain linguistic developments and social situations directly creating linguistic structures. A worthwhile discussion of this problem is given by Keller (1982:1-27).

The principle of the independence of linguistic systems has been shown to be problematic both at the level of the language to be described (which may be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by outside forces) and at the level of linguistic description (since descriptions derive from explicit or implicit theories). As our knowledge of these matters expands, both the range and nature of the observed data and the language in which our descriptions are couched will change.

6.6.2.3 The role of prescription

One of the principal points made by most 20th century linguists is that grammars should be descriptive and not prescriptive. In the words of Dinneen (1967:6):

The linguist, as an initial part of his investigation, merely records what the speakers of the language say, just as he hears it.... It is not his task to lay down rules of usage.

Such a statement has to be seen as a reaction against the earlier practice of forcing the grammars of observed languages into the framework of Latin and Greek grammar. The importance of description and the rejection of prescription was further enhanced by the emphasis on social and linguistic relativism. Thus, according to the founder of the American descriptivist tradition, Boas, there was no ideal type of language to which actual languages approximated more or less closely. Instead, human languages were seen to be endlessly diverse and hence to be studied in their own right. Linguistic relativism is further reflected in the view that there are no primitive languages, that rather all linguistic systems are equals.

It is not surprising that the advocates of this view were concerned with the problems of objective observations and discovery procedures, which, when applied to a given set of linguistic raw data, would yield an objective analysis.

There is no reason to believe, however, that the aim of finding discovery procedures is a realistic one. Indeed, the availability of such procedures would make linguistics unique among the sciences. This has been realised in the more recent past and most linguists would now agree with Lyons' view (1981:43) that:

... there is no such thing as theory-neutral and hypothesis-free observation and data collection. To use a currently fashionable phrase, originating with Popper, observation is, of necessity and from the onset, theory-laden.

Given that this is so, it would seem most realistic and conducive to grammatical enquiry to spell out in detail one's theoretical position and assumptions, before undertaking the job of grammatical description. It will only be at a later stage of enquiry, i.e. during testing, that one can judge the appropriateness of a given framework to the data under investigation. The relationship between different models of linguistic description and Tok Pisin data will be discussed below.

It would seem then that the kind of data considered within one's theoretical framework, as well as the descriptive process itself, are bound to introduce some element of prescription. This, I would like to argue, is not necessarily a bad thing and, in the case of developing languages such as Tok Pisin, can indeed be beneficial to users and planners of the language.

By choosing the most developed varieties of the language as the basis for one's description, one may bring such expressively more powerful varieties to the attention of a larger number of speakers, a procedure strongly favoured by Wurm (1978). Similarly, by ignoring less regular variants, one can introduce greater regularity into planned and standardised varieties of the language. The conflict between description and prescription is greatest in grammatical models which insist on a strict separation of synchronic and diachronic grammar. If, on the other hand, the grammatical description is that of expansion and development, one can make prescriptions more like anticipated or predicted developments. Before such predictive regularisation can be carried out, however, we require, in the words of Wurm (1978:182):

... a detailed study and exhaustive description of such features and their variations in all observable forms of New Guinea Pidgin which would provide the basis for cumulative prescriptive statements.

6.6.2.4 The relationship between speaking and writing

The reasons for separating the study of spoken and written language and for regarding the former as the primary manifestation are given in Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, and have been repeated and expanded upon many times since the appearance of the *Cours* in 1914. Whereas 19th century linguistics and earlier language studies were often seen as a service discipline providing the background to the understanding of literary texts, 20th century linguistics, by stressing the primacy of the spoken word, also stressed its independence as a discipline.

An examination of the study of Tok Pisin reveals a paradoxical situation. Whereas the primary function of this language is clearly that of an oral medium of communication and whereas its emergence as a widely used written medium dates back only a decade or so, most descriptive linguists had to rely on two kinds of written data:

- a) short stretches of Tok Pisin scattered through English language travel books, novels and court proceedings;
- b) artificial sample sentences, which reflect written sentences in the language of the grammar writer.

Moreover, in the few cases where spoken language data were used, they almost inevitably were taken from narrative style, i.e. a highly monitored style which in many regards exhibits the functional and structural properties of written style in literate societies. The study of Tok Pisin is thus plagued by a heavy reliance on a scriptist tradition - in spite of programmatic statements to the contrary by some writers.

With the availability of better recording techniques and more sophisticated models of description, the problems just alluded to are beginning to be solved. Thus, a number of investigators have recorded unmonitored natural conversations (i.e. the type of language least influenced by writing) and have also begun to examine the differences between spoken and written Tok Pisin (e.g. Siegel 1981). A better understanding of written Tok Pisin is necessary because language planning is concerned with the written rather than the spoken form of the language. There may thus be a good case for favouring studies of the written language. Whatever form of the language is used as the basis for description, however, the nature of the data should be made perfectly clear in the text.

6.6.2.5 Synchronic and diachronic studies

The distinction between synchronic and diachronic language studies again stems from Saussure's *Cours*. Ever since Saussure's ideas became accepted in Europe, America and Australia, linguists have embraced the principle that synchronic atemporal study of language is not only possible but in fact should be the starting point of any linguistic analysis. Thus descriptivism is often taken to be synonymous with synchronic analysis. As observed by Robins (1964:4):

Descriptive linguistics ... is concerned with the description and analysis of the ways in which a language operates and is used by a given set of speakers at a given time. This time may be the present, and in the case of languages as yet unwritten or only recently given written form it will inevitably be the present.

Statements such as the above one are potentially misleading. Whilst it is true that an understanding of how speakers use a language in any given situation does not involve a knowledge of its prehistory, even language as used at one point in absolute time is not entirely atemporal. Thus, in a given communicative act, speakers of different ages using temporally slightly differing rules will be seen to communicate successfully. Within single speakers, stylistic shifts can most typically be projected onto change over time, the general principle being that synchronic variation is a reflection of relative time. In the case of Tok Pisin the exclusion of time is more damaging than in most other linguistic studies, as the structural changes here have been very considerable over a very short period of absolute time.

The exclusion of change and time from a linguistic description not only poses the almost insurmountable problem of which variety at which point in time to base one's description on, it also deprives the analyst of explanatory power. Whilst atemporal synchronic analyses merely describe more or less abstract

arbitrary language states, time-incorporating descriptions, i.e. those which consider those changes over relative time which are relevant to the functioning of the language at a given point in absolute time, have considerable explanatory power. Bailey's principle that developments explain resulting states but not vice versa not only suggests a commonsense approach to linguistic description, it also suggests how the many different branches of linguistics (sociolinguistics, dialectology, stylistics, etc.) can be integrated into one time-incorporating descriptive framework.

I feel it is justified to say that the abolition of the distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics is an important precondition for descriptively and explanatorily more adequate accounts of language.

Closely linked to the question of time is that of linguistic variation.

6.6.2.6 The place of variation in linguistic descriptions

Even if it was possible to describe a language 'on its own terms', the question of what constitutes 'a language' remains. Whereas descriptive linguists aim at describing a single invariant system, all languages, and pidgins even more so than 'normal' languages, exhibit linguistic variation. Variation is found along the following dimensions:

- a) temporal (older speakers using different forms from younger ones)
- b) social (social group membership can promote different norms and attitudes, affecting linguistic output)
- c) geographical (closeness or remoteness from centres of innovation promotes regional differences)
- d) stylistic (selfconsciousness or monitoring of speech results in selective suppression or promotion of grammatical phenomena).

It is important to note that all these variations are, in the last instance, a result of time, since rules of grammar begin at a certain point and then travel through geographical, social and stylistic space. Consequently one typically finds that the informal style of very old people equates with the more formal style of middle-aged people, or that geographical variants are also used to signal social or stylistic affiliation. The various aspects of variation in Tok Pisin have been described in detail elsewhere in this volume. Whereas a time-incorporating model of linguistic description, such as the developmental one (cf. Bailey 1977), has no problems in coping with variants found in a given speech community, linguists subscribing to strictly atemporal synchronic models are faced with considerable difficulties. Thus, in making sense of the enormous variation found in Tok Pisin, the following solutions might be adopted:

- a) Description of a common core grammar shared by all speakers of the language. Whilst this is theoretically possible (see Hockett 1958: 331ff), the grammatical core shared by all speakers of Tok Pisin would be very small indeed and its description give a very lop-sided picture of the language.
- b) Description of the overall pattern (again discussed by Hockett 1958:331ff), i.e. listing the sum total of all variants found at a given time. Hall's 1943a grammar, based on Tok Pisin as spoken by both Europeans and indigenes, is an attempt to do this. However,

a treatment of the numerous variations as free variants fails to do justice to their social and communicative functioning. Moreover, it is difficult in such a model to say anything about the relative importance of variants, as this depends on development and change.

- c) Concentration on a single variety. This view assumes that it is possible to find an invariant variety if sufficient external variables are kept constant. For example, it was believed by many descriptivist linguists that one could isolate so-called idiolects, i.e. varieties spoken by one speaker discussing one topic with one hearer in one situation. However, it has since become sufficiently clear (cf. discussion in Labov 1972a) that the notion of an invariant idiolect is a fiction and that, on the contrary, observed idiolects exhibit more variation than social grammars. Sadler's course (1973b) comes closest to an idiolectal description of Tok Pisin grammar and it is a very disappointing effort indeed.
- d) Common-sense grammars. Given the fact that most grammars of Tok Pisin have been written single-handedly by people who were simultaneously engaged in many different types of research and activities, it is not surprising that they took many shortcuts. Someone who is proficient in the language and has some background in linguistics is normally capable of making pretty good guesses about the relative importance of grammatical constructions. Thus, grammars such as those by Laycock (1970c), Mihalic (1971) or Wurm (1971a) select those aspects of Tok Pisin which are most widely spoken by conservative rural speakers in a selected part of the country, ignoring as much as possible individual and other differences. Whereas the result is not a scientific description (and no claims are laid by the authors), they fulfil an important role in practical life. However, since it is based on selective observation and personal experience or inclinations, discrepancies with the actual spoken language are common. They certainly do not attain the goal of observational adequacy, characterised by Botha as: "A grammar correctly presenting the observed primary data achieves the lowest level of success, observational adequacy." (Botha 1968:23).

Let me give some examples of the observational shortcomings of common-sense grammars.

- i) "Adverbs can be freely derived from adjectives by simply dropping the ending *-pela* where applicable." Restatements of this rule are widely found, e.g. Hall (1943a:27), Mihalic (1957:39), Wurm (1971a:58) and Laycock (1970c:xxvii). The latter three mention *nupela* *newly* as an exception. An examination of recorded Tok Pisin data, however, suggests that the dropping of *-pela* in the formation of adverbs from adjectives is by no means as common as suggested by the above authors, nor can a number of adjectives ever be used adverbially. This example illustrates the widespread tendency among common-sense grammar writers to treat variable rules as categorical ones.
- ii) The treatment of aspect markers as categories of the verb. Though it may be argued that a statement to the effect that the so-called class of aspect markers appears with verbs is observationally correct,

their appearance with nominal and other non-verbal predicates remains unaccounted for. This example illustrates selective perception, i.e. aspect markers are perceived in the most prominent verbal context but ignored in others.

- iii) The treatment of verbal reduplication. Both Hall (1943b:194) and Laycock (1970c:xxiv) imply that we are dealing with a list of lexical exceptions rather than a grammatical process. Mühlhäusler (1979c: 285), on the other hand, makes a case for a general rule governing verbal reduplication. A parallel case in Jamaican Creole has been discussed by DeCamp (1974). He observes that, in the case of Creole reduplication, "no informant habitually used the entire set of nine variants" (p.52) and continues to point out that "the total system appears only in the composite vocabulary of all my informants" (p.53). It is suggested that certain rules of grammars can only be discovered when examining data from a large number of different informants, i.e. that these rules are in social rather than individual grammars. As common-sense grammars (and idiolectal grammars for that matter) are not derived from the systematic study of large numbers of speakers, such regularities will usually go undiscovered.

6.6.2.7 Conclusions

Linguistic descriptivism is limited by a number of factors, the most important ones being technical difficulties and narrow theoretical assumptions. As regards the former, the absence of sophisticated recording equipment has left linguists, over a long period, with little choice but to abstract from actual data in one or the other of the ways just outlined. Today, it has become possible to record spoken language, used in its cultural setting. While it is now possible to bring about a much better fit between spoken language and linguistic description, problems remain. Transcribing tapes is time-consuming and not likely to lead to significant new insights unless done within a framework of sociolinguistic methodology. Thus, linguists will have to be competent to select representative informants in representative situations if they want to avoid haphazard results (for a discussion of the problems see Romaine 1980:163-198). Combining sophisticated data sampling techniques with sophisticated linguistic analysis is an extremely lengthy business however, and it is unlikely that more than small subparts of Tok Pisin grammar will ever meet the goals of both observational and descriptive adequacy. Only if such analyses can contribute to a better understanding of selected problems of theoretical linguistics, applied linguistics or practical communicative requirements, can a detailed investigation be justified.

As regards the theoretical assumptions which have shaped linguistic description for most of the first 70 years of this century, they must be seen against the background of the history of linguistics, in particular the attempts to set up linguistics as a separate field of inquiry. Many of the practitioners of descriptive linguistics, whilst paying lip service to such principles, have nevertheless taken shortcuts or even strayed outside the established boundaries when it came to actual description. As we get to know the nature of language better it becomes increasingly clear that the writing of any grammar, descriptive or otherwise, is not a mechanical process but depends for its success on the skills, insights and imagination of the linguist. Even if the process of grammar making will never be fully rationalised, it helps to be aware of the following problem areas as they relate to the description of Tok Pisin.

Whilst linguistic descriptivism shares many properties, in particular in the area of underlying assumptions, the descriptive practice of linguists often differs considerably. A brief characterisation of the principal descriptive models as applied to Tok Pisin will now be given.

6.6.3 MODELS OF DESCRIPTION

6.6.3.1 Introduction

There is a widespread confusion, promoted greatly by introductory textbooks of linguistics, between a grammarian's rule of grammar and the mental processes underlying the production of language. An example of this confusion is found in Fromkin and Rodman (1978:9):

When the linguists wish to describe a language they attempt to describe the grammar of the language which exists in the minds of its speakers To the extent that the linguist's description is a true model of the speaker's linguistic competence, it will be a good or bad description of the grammar of the language, and of the grammar itself. Such a model is called descriptive grammar.

Apart from using the word 'grammar' ambiguously to mean the speakers' internalised grammar and a description thereof, this statement offers a very limited view of the aims of grammar writing. It is difficult to see why the aim of psychological reality should be the only valid one (and there have been many voices in recent years advocating the abolition of this notion, see Black and Chiat 1981) and, even if it were, why linguists should then set out to develop invariant descriptions in spite of the fact that the most fundamental aspect of human communication is that all speakers can produce a large number of different linguistic varieties and understand an even larger one.

Available models of description which have been used in Tok Pisin grammars include:

Class 1: Invariant models

- a) classical grammars
- b) structuralist grammars
- c) tagmemic grammars (regarded by some as a subclass of b))
- d) transformational generative models
- e) eclectic approaches

Class 2: Variable models of description

- a) quantitativist models
- b) lectological models (implicational scaling)
- c) eclectic approaches

6.6.3.2 Classical grammars

The tradition of describing exotic languages in terms of Latin or Greek grammar is an important one in European linguistics. While it was superseded in theoretical linguistics at the beginning of this century, it has continued in school grammar writing and, in the case of Tok Pisin, missionary grammar

writing. Thus, in the earliest grammar of Tok Pisin (Brenninkmeyer 1924) we find examples such as:

a) Latin case for nouns (p.2)

Nominativ:	house	man
Genitiv:	belong house	belong man
Dativ:	long house	long man
Akkusativ:	long	man

Such a system is difficult to apply where the surface case in Tok Pisin differs from that in Latin or European languages as in *mi givim man long haus* which translates as *I gave the man the house* and not *I gave the man to the house*.

b) Singular-plural distinction

Brenninkmeyer (p.2) simply states "plural is formed by means of a preceding *all*, sometimes by means of the more forceful *alltogether*." (translation mine). He ignores that the singular-plural distinction is by no means obligatory for all nouns (as can be seen in many of his own sample sentences) and that its semantic conditioning differs considerably from Latin or English.

Other examples where classical categories are inapplicable to Tok Pisin are the distinction between intransitive verbs and predicative adjectives, the fact that particles such as *bin* or *bai* have aspectual rather than temporal meaning and the area of adverbials, where many Tok Pisin 'adverbials' are in fact verbs in a verb chain. The imposition of classical categories not only introduces unnecessary complications into the description (e.g. case system), it also tends to distort actually used grammar.

6.6.3.3 Structuralist grammars

A central aim of structuralist descriptions is descriptive objectivity, i.e. to account for directly observable data (such as are found in a corpus) rather than for the knowledge or skills necessary to produce such data. The only serious attempt to formulate a corpus-derived grammar of Tok Pisin is that by Hall (1943a). However, in spite of Hall's belief in objective grammar discovery procedures, the goal of accounting for even the very limited corpus used as the basis of analysis is only achieved in a haphazard manner. There are numerous examples of constructions found in the corpus but not discussed in the grammar and an equally large number of grammatical rules which are only partially or not at all supported by the corpus. An additional weakness results from the neglect of semantic criteria manifested, for instance, in the blurring of the boundary between syntactic processes and lexical derivation.

Whilst Hall's grammar remains an important step in the history of grammar making for Tok Pisin and whilst it has had considerable influence on later grammar writers, it clearly exhibits the limitations of outside observers who are not participating speakers of the language they describe. In the absence of any sure measures for outsider objectivity, the grammatical judgements of insiders remain a factor which cannot be ignored.

6.6.3.4 Tagmemic grammars

Tagmemics, like other directions within descriptivist structuralism, is closely associated with the notion of discovery procedures and therefore subject to the same criticism as structuralist grammars. In spite of numerous assertions to the contrary, the aim of proceeding from etic to an emic analysis¹ is a quite unrealistic one which has led to considerable methodological confusion (for a discussion see Taylor and Mühlhäusler 1982).

For most of their presence in Papua New Guinea, the members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), i.e. the main adherents of the tagmemic model, have not regarded Tok Pisin as a language worthy of study and have instead concentrated on indigenous vernaculars. Consequently, tagmemic descriptions of Tok Pisin are available only as drafts for limited circulation and have had very limited impact on grammar making for this language.

6.6.3.5 Transformational generative models

A distinction must be drawn between early transformational grammars based on the work of the American structuralist Zellig Harris and later Chomskyan ones. The former differed from straight structuralist grammars mainly in that they incorporated an additional grammatical operation (transformations), whilst continuing to be corpus and surface oriented. A good example of a transformational account of Tok Pisin grammar of this type is that by Hooley (1962). Since Hooley pays little attention to semantic considerations, his remarks on Tok Pisin grammar are more in the way of a formal game than insights into the ways in which the language is understood by its users.

The aim of later transformational grammars is to account for the competence of ideal speaker-hearers of a language, i.e. the knowledge that enables them to produce and understand such utterances as are found in it. There are a number of problems with this aim, the most serious one being the degree of abstraction necessary for characterising competence. The difficulties are aggravated in the case of pidgins, where speakers are, almost by definition, non-ideal second-language speakers. Whilst the aim of accounting for linguistic competence is in all likelihood a totally unrealistic one,² transformational generative grammarians have made some very interesting contributions to our understanding of complex structural properties of natural languages, by postulating ways of relating apparent surface disparities to deeper underlying regularities. Many of these insights are reflected in the most comprehensive transformational account of Tok Pisin, that by Woolford (1979a). However, the depth of her analysis has had the inevitable result of narrowing the scope of grammar covered. Large areas of Tok Pisin grammar have never been subjected to a transformational analysis and are unlikely to be in the future.

6.6.3.6 Eclectic approaches

Structuralist, tagmemic and, to an even greater extent, transformational generative grammars all aim at internal consistency and relatability to a general framework of grammatical description. All three models also adhere to the principle of outsider objectivity. Hence, one can expect very similar grammars from different people working within a given descriptive framework. The advantages of this are most obvious to theoretical linguists who, without knowing the

language, would like to use grammatical evidence from Tok Pisin in general linguistic argumentation. It is no accident that, in the wake of transformationalist concern with Tok Pisin, this language has become widely known to scholars of linguistics in many parts of the world.

Eclectic approaches to linguistic description, on the other hand, are oriented towards solving practical problems, including the very important one of being intelligible to a lay audience. Actual practice has shown that eclectic grammars are at their best when written by professional linguists who are competent in writing scientific descriptions but who have chosen to do otherwise for pedagogic or other reasons. Good examples of successful eclectic descriptions are those by Wurm (1969) and Laycock (1970c). Both writers are active users of the language and well aware of the relative importance of different areas of grammar in everyday communication. Much less successful are attempts by linguistically untrained laymen, such as Sadler (1973b), Murphy (1943 and later) or Healey (n.d.): the kind of shortcomings encountered are best illustrated by a few actual examples:

- a) Sadler (1973b) provides rules for Tok Pisin pronouns in not less than 11 out of 13 chapters, thus completely destroying the relatively straightforward basic grammatical properties of this part of speech. Put differently, Sadler completely fails to distinguish what is essential about pronouns.
- b) Murphy (1973 edition:25) comes up with the astonishing statement that "inflection forms a very important part of Melanesian Pidgin English". He asserts, confusing language with formal logic, that (p.41) "the native has actually a more logical approach to answering a negative question" and abounds in vague statements such as (p.46):

In Pidgin English, many words depend on their contextual nature for their proper meaning, i.e. on their position in, and relation to, context, and by the use of special modifiers usually and regularly associated with such words to indicate a special particular meaning not indicated by the word standing alone.
- c) In the following passage, Healey (n.d.) confuses the origins with the structure of grammatical processes, inflection and derivation, as well as making some other dubious statements (p.31): "Most Tok Pisin verbs are transitive and indicate or transfer the action from the subject to its object. There are additionally intransitive verbs ...", and (p.31):

Some Tok Pisin verbs are inflected by the addition of a suffix *im*. Some are single syllable, some double or multiple syllable. Nouns may be converted to verbs with the addition of the suffix *im* as in *sovel a shovel*, *sovelim to shovel*. Sentences have been converted into verbs as in the example *sanapim* literally *stand up him* to mean *erect*. Similarly *pulimapim* meaning *to pur* (sic!) or *fill up* obviously stems from *fill up him*. There are many others.

Such examples could be multiplied. They illustrate the general point that, in tracing the linguistic history of a pidgin, one has to beware not only of phoney examples given by earlier writers but also of inappropriate analyses. Whatever practical uses eclectic grammars may have, they are not a very good source of evidence for linguistic arguments, even less so than other invariant descriptive statements.

This completes our brief survey of static models of description. We now turn to two alternative models, i.e. models which regard linguistic variation as the central linguistic data.

6.6.3.7 Quantitativist models

As the name suggests, these models, associated with researchers such as Labov, are concerned with the incorporation of quantitative information into linguistic description. This is typically done by measuring the frequency of occurrence of a selected construction within a socially or otherwise defined group of language users. Thus, it may be found that a certain construction is frequent among young children, less frequent among middle-aged people and pretty well absent among very old speakers.

The necessity to correlate linguistic and extralinguistic variables before quantitative statements can be made constitutes the principal weakness of this model. First of all, it is not clear why linguistic structures should be correlated with one kind of social group and not another, since individual speakers belong simultaneously to many social groups. Secondly, there may be numerous cryptocorrelations which are simply not accessible to outside observers, and thirdly, for correlations to be meaningful, it is not enough to carry out an atemporal (synchronic) analysis. If the rate of linguistic change differs from that of social change (and there is little reason to assume that their pace is the same), whatever correlations one might establish for a given point in time are temporal accidents rather than reflections of general principles.

The work that has been carried out using this model, principally by Sankoff and her associates, is saved from the above criticism by the fact that in many analyses linguistic structures are correlated with age (e.g. Sankoff 1977c), thus portraying the temporal dimension of correlations. However, the general problem of getting representative samples of speakers, for whom a quantitativist analysis could yield, in principle, statistically significant observations, has as yet not been solved for Tok Pisin. Consequently, whatever quantitativist work has been carried out is more in the nature of preliminary observation than genuine description.

6.6.3.8 Lectological models (implicational scaling)

Lectological models were introduced by DeCamp (1971b) and subsequently developed by scholars such as Bickerton and Bailey. They purport to describe the patterns underlying linguistic variation. Whilst lectological models are concerned primarily with linguistic data, it is possible, in principle, to also correlate such findings with extralinguistic parameters and to carry out quantitative analyses.

The main principle underlying patterned linguistic variation is that grammars develop over time by the addition of new rules and rule variants. Rules which are introduced at one point in time among one group of speakers will need time to travel to other grammatical and social environments, i.e. it takes time for rules to become more general and it also takes time to overcome social, stylistic or geographical obstacles to expansion. Whereas the sequence of grammatical change is the same along all dimensions (rule A always being added before rule B which in turn is added before rule C, a fact which can be expressed by

means of an implicational scale $A < B < C$), the actual time involved in rule expansion may change from speaker to speaker, style to style, region to region, etc. thus making for synchronically observable variation. Therefore the principal task of variation linguistics is seen as describing the implicational patterns underlying all variants of a language. As has been already pointed out, the enormous complexity of languages makes it humanly impossible to describe the full extent of variation in all areas of grammar. Instead, and this has been the practice in the case of Tok Pisin, researchers have to be content with locally restricted analyses such as that of object deletion (Lattey 1979), variable presence of the predicate marker (Woolford 1979c) or plural marking (Mühlhäusler 1981a).

For fully developed first languages, implicational scales are mainly devices for representing variation caused by rule addition over time. Since new rules are added to grammars for many reasons (natural factors being only one of them), implicational scaling does not explain or predict in such languages. In the case of pidgins, this is different: implicational order here typically reflects the natural expansion program underlying the development of a pidgin from a rudimentary to a fully developed second-language system. If the order in which the presence of one construction implies that of another is indeed universal, we could expect this order to be manifested in all expanding pidgins. It is hoped that the studies carried out for Tok Pisin will be supplemented with comparable ones for West African Pidgin English and other varieties of expanded pidgins.

Whereas implicational scales are primarily of theoretical interest, their practical applications should not be underestimated. A knowledge of the developmental patterns of Tok Pisin can provide valuable information as to the best writing systems or the acceptability of proposed instances of planned grammar.

6.6.3.9 Eclectic approaches to linguistic variation

It should have become clear that available models of linguistic variation are of considerable technical complexity and, moreover, require analytic techniques which are beyond the resources of most investigators. Nevertheless, a knowledge of the extent and social meaning of Tok Pisin variation is necessary for teachers, planners and users of the language.

I have found that the most useful basis for a readable variation grammar is to follow existing folk classifications, mainly those for sociolects (Rural-Urban-Bush varieties and Tok Masta) and regional lects (coastal-mountain-islands). This in fact is the approach taken in the chapter on variation (3.2) and in the descriptions by Laycock (1970c) and Wurm (1971a), who concern themselves with the rural variety of Coastal and Highlands Tok Pisin respectively. This approach can further be supplemented by a number of general principles, including:

- a) the younger a speaker the more grammatical categories they will use;
- b) formal education promotes restructuring in the direction of English;
- c) old plantation areas are likely to exhibit Malay and German influence in their vocabulary;
- d) negative attitudes towards Tok Pisin tend to promote idiosyncratic usages.

Whereas the results of such an eclectic approach are highly useful to speakers and learners of the language, pretheoretical categories, such as Urban Tok Pisin, should not be confused with theoretical constructs or descriptive statements about objectively observable varieties.

6.6.3.10 Descriptive models: outlook

In the description of Tok Pisin, practical rather than theoretical considerations have prevailed and are likely to do so in the future. This means that, as with other minor languages, many descriptive frameworks which have been applied to the major European languages have never been applied to Tok Pisin, examples being stratificational grammar, systemic linguistics, glossematics or Montague grammar. Had such models been applied, the enormous variability of the language would have pointed to important discrepancies between abstract static models of description and the reality of a changing highly flexible language. Whereas until recently descriptive linguists were forced to devise either unrealistic abstractions or intuitively more satisfactory but methodologically suspect eclectic descriptions, the availability of variation models has greatly promoted hopes of achieving observationally, descriptively and explanatorily adequate accounts of Tok Pisin, albeit only in restricted areas of grammar.

To date all available grammars have been written in expatriate languages (mainly German and English). With the availability in Tok Pisin of the meta-linguistic vocabulary to discuss grammatical properties, the day may not be far off when a grammar of Tok Pisin will be written in the language itself.

6.6.4 CONCLUSIONS

The approach taken in this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- a) Descriptive grammars reflect the folk-views, pretheoretical assumptions and/or the theoretical orientation of their writers. There are no neutral objective descriptions.
- b) Descriptive grammars are limited by a number of practical considerations, such as size of corpus or speakers investigated, time needed to achieve greater delicacy of analysis, and readability to the intended audience.
- c) Descriptive grammars of Tok Pisin typically reflect the needs of expatriates rather than Papua New Guineans, a situation which in the long run can hardly be desirable.

Many of the above considerations are merely implicit in the descriptive grammars examined and individual writers were found to fluctuate a great deal in their methods and goals. I feel it is unreasonable to expect exhaustive grammatical descriptions of all or even the majority of grammatical phenomena of Tok Pisin but I would like to see greater explicitness when it comes to stating goals and theoretical assumptions.

One of the reasons why exhaustive grammars are unlikely to be forthcoming is the lack of time and resources. A more powerful reason is that the view presented, or at least adhered to, by all writers of descriptive grammars is that it is possible and desirable to portray grammar as a self-contained area

governed by fixed rules and that the job of speaking Tok Pisin involves applying such rules to existing lexical items. This, however, may turn out to be an extremely narrow and fairly useless assumption. Rather than concentrating on rules of descriptive grammar, linguists should look at the patterns underlying communication in Tok Pisin, as well as other verbal and non-verbal means. Areas where insights may be gained include the study of discourse structures, code-switching behaviour, non-verbal behaviour and the influence of cultural patterns on linguistic structures. A further important area for a second language such as Tok Pisin is an examination of communication breakdown and difficulties.

Put differently, it would seem that available descriptive grammars provide us with sufficient insights into the core grammatical properties of Tok Pisin and that further research in this narrow area is soon likely to reach the point of limiting return. More than ever before it is necessary to find out more about the use of the language and the ways in which it can bring about improved communication in polyglot Papua New Guinea.

NOTES

1. According to Cook (1969:19):
... the non-essential unit is called an etic unit, and it is the first approximation of the analyst to the unit from the point of view of an outsider. The essential unit is called the emic unit, and it is the unit of language from the point of view of a native speaker of the language.
2. Things are made worse by the problems of delimitating linguistic competence from the other kinds of competence with which speakers of 'natural' languages are equipped.

