

3 *Borrowing into Pacific languages: language enrichment or language threat?*

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1 Introduction¹

Although it would be difficult to find any language in the world in which there has been no lexical borrowing, the process attracts a range of attitudes, some positive and some negative. A more positive view treats borrowing as enriching a language. Certainly, English is widely regarded as having been magnificently endowed with vocabulary borrowed from a wide variety of languages over the last thousand years or so. However, borrowing is not always viewed so positively. The influx of words of English origin, for example, is often condemned by native speakers of French, and this is reflected in the kinds of proscriptions promulgated by the *Académie Française* in France and the *Office de la Langue Française* in francophone Canada, whereby forms such as *le jumbo-jet* are recommended for replacement by genuinely gallic-looking forms such as *le gros-porteur* (lit. 'big-carrier').

The greater Pacific is the world's linguistically most diverse area in terms of its genetic diversity, with its various Austronesian languages, its Australian languages (which may or may not constitute a genetic unity), as well as a wide range of 'Papuan' groupings in Melanesia. It is also demographically diverse, having large numbers of languages with very small speaker populations. Because of this, these languages are often seen as being particularly vulnerable to pressures from outside languages (Dixon 1991, 1997; Mùhlhäusler 1996). Many languages—particularly in Australia—have already been lost, sometimes almost completely without trace.

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Language shift is invariably preceded by a period of bilingualism. The influence of language contact engendered by societal bilingualism can usually be most readily seen in the form of lexical borrowing between languages. Because of its salience, this typically attracts a considerable amount of comment, sometimes neutral, sometimes positive, but more usually negative, especially with regard to words originating from whatever happens to be the sociopolitically dominant—and therefore threatening—language. In this paper, I propose to examine the extent to which borrowing in Pacific languages should be seen as threatening the future viability of these languages, and the extent to which it could actually be seen as enriching them, thereby potentially giving them a more secure future.

2 Borrowing and community attitudes

Where lexical borrowing is judged negatively, it seems to run up against basically two different kinds of objections from within speech communities. There may, on the one hand, be a range of aesthetic objections, perhaps because borrowings violate the traditional phonemic or phonotactic system of a language. Speakers of French, for example, may argue that *le weekend* rather than *la fin de semaine* is ‘unattractive’ on these kinds of grounds, i.e. it doesn’t sound like a ‘proper’ French word (nor is it spelt like one).

Of course, the rejection of borrowings on aesthetic grounds will almost certainly have underlying sociopolitical motivations. Speakers of English do not complain about the unattractiveness (or orthographic strangeness) of forms of French origin, such as *purée*. Quite the contrary, in fact, as anybody who has been to a restaurant with pretensions to grandness will realise, with the menu liberally sprinkled with words of French origin, even where there are perfectly good traditional English equivalents.

Sociopolitical considerations are clearly involved in the attitude of European New Zealanders to the ethnonym *Pākehā*. Many Europeans strenuously reject the use of this term of Māori origin, arguing that the etymological meaning of the word is ‘long white pig’ or ‘white slug’, along with a number of other mutually incompatible sources (Bayard 1995:152–160). Although such etymological claims are quite incorrect,² the hostility that we find from some *Pākehā* towards Māori is undoubtedly reflected in the widespread rejection of this particular borrowing.

On the other hand, borrowings are sometimes condemned because they are seen as a kind of linguistic foot in the door, producing a disruption in the structural integrity of the recipient language, and possibly even leading ultimately to its complete replacement by the major donor language. While no speaker of New Zealand English would ever consider condemning the ethnonym *Pākehā* as the first stage of a takeover from English by Māori in the country, part of the prescriptive reaction against words such as *le weekend* in French is undoubtedly related to such fears.

One could argue that the more a language is perceived to be under threat from another language, the more likely it is that the speakers of the threatened language will be prescriptively resistant to an influx of words from the threatening language. For a long time,

² The correct historical origin of the word is not known with any certainty.

Māori has been a seriously threatened language with a contracting number of native speakers, belonging to an increasingly elderly group. Speakers of Māori today typically react quite strongly against the presence of words of English origin in their language, and the officially sanctioned Māori Language Commission (*Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori*), in one of its major tasks as lexical expanders for the Māori language in New Zealand, turns to direct lexical borrowing only as a last resort when coining new terminology. It is even attempting, by creating new words on the basis of Māori elements, to rid the language of some well-established borrowings that have been in use for over a century and a half (see Harlow, this volume).

By way of contrast, speakers of New Zealand English will quite happily refer to local flora and fauna with words of Māori origin, e.g. *rimu*, *pohutukawa* (k.o. trees), *pukeko* (k.o. bird), *weta* (k.o. insect). Even the most red-necked Pākehā will probably not be aware that *rimu* has the competing name 'red pine', and if anybody tried to use this name, I suspect that the general response would be a blank look. *Rimu* is simply the only word that most people know and use.

Many would see the Māori view of lexical borrowing as rather extreme, with speakers of other languages typically reacting to borrowings from English with much more tolerance. An informal body known as the Polynesian Language Forum (also known as *Leo Pasifika*) was established at the instigation of the Māori Language Commission in the early 1990s to facilitate the sharing of lexical solutions to the problem of the expansion of Polynesian languages into new domains, though to date only representatives of the Māori, Hawaiian and Tahitian communities have regularly met to discuss these issues.

Invitations have been extended to other Polynesian nations, and even to Fiji, to send representatives to meetings of the Forum. While some groups—e.g. Cook Islands and Rapanui—have sporadically sent representatives, most have never bothered to attend. The attitude at large in places such as Tonga, Fiji and Samoa seems to be that lexical development is not particularly important. If speakers of any of these languages come across a new concept, for which they do not have a word, they are much more likely simply to adapt an English word. While non-Polynesian Pacific societies were not included within the purview of this linguistic forum, by and large the source of new lexical items seems to be just as minor an issue for speakers of the languages of Micronesia and Melanesia.

This is not to say that people all over the Pacific do not pass prescriptive judgements about words of foreign origin in their languages. In Vanuatu, for example, people *do* make prescriptive judgements on the use of words of Bislama origin when speaking their vernaculars. For the most part, however, the only time I have heard such judgements explicitly expressed is when I am recording a vernacular text for linguistic analysis, and a speaker is perceived as having 'polluted' the 'pure' vernacular data with occasional *ad hoc* borrowings. Spontaneous speech in less monitored contexts is seldom subject to these kinds of judgements (even though such borrowings will invariably be present).

People's expressed attitudes towards lexical borrowings are often at considerable variance with their observed linguistic usage. In this regard, I will cite the words of an old man from Erromango in Vanuatu, who specifically asked to be recorded on tape in order to 'set the record straight' with regard to certain words which, he felt, had been subject to undue

influence from borrowings from Bislama. The extract is as follows (with borrowed words underlined):

*Yacamnacyogi yoconam gi nocwo
kokomlenomonki nacave.*

I want to talk about how we drink
kava.

*Yacamnaigi yacanwi hogku se gi kastom
enogkoh.*

I want to say how it was in our
tradition.

*Kokemlenomonki nacave, nogkon cumagku
'kumpai sel' o 'kumpai kap'.*

When we drink kava, some people
say 'get a shell' or 'get a cup'.

Ei, tawi ra kastom lanwis.

No, that's not in the traditional
vernacular.

Lanwis nimsin 'kaiti lou'.

The vernacular [word] for it is *kaiti*
lou.

This speaker was complaining about the widespread use of borrowed words such as *sel* 'shell' and *kap* 'cup' in relation to kava drinking, and he wanted younger people to know that there is an appropriate traditional expression which he felt ought to be used instead. However, he has himself used the borrowed word *kastom* 'tradition' (for which he could have said *nompi itetwai*) and *lanwis* 'vernacular' (instead of indigenous *nam*). In fact, in the very phrase in which he so strenuously decries the illicit use of borrowed vocabulary, he uses an entire borrowed phrase *kastom lanwis* (rather than indigenous *nam itetwai*).

3 Attitudes of linguists

Linguists generally take a far less prescriptive attitude than non-linguists towards borrowings, regarding the adoption of words of foreign origin in a language, for the most part, as a fairly harmless matter of lexical change that serves to expand the vocabulary of a language in new domains of language use (e.g. Crowley 1997:154–156; Lynch 1998:208–210). Some borrowing may not be regarded as strictly necessary in this sense, but even with seemingly unnecessary borrowings, linguists have generally not offered particularly harsh judgements (e.g. Clark 1982; Crowley 1997:157).

A linguist may also take a very different perspective to a non-linguist regarding the extent to which borrowings may represent a serious threat to the future viability of a language. Clearly, the simple absence or presence of borrowings cannot by itself point to the health of a language, otherwise English—with its massive amount of borrowed vocabulary—would have to be regarded as one of the more endangered languages around. Language threat must obviously be evaluated in terms of a whole range of interrelated considerations, including the sociopolitical and demographic position of a speech community within the broader society in which it is spoken, as well as a range of more specific considerations such as the attitudes to

the language of its speakers, and the extent to which a language does or does not receive institutional support.

However, while linguists typically express overtly non-judgmental attitudes towards borrowings in Pacific languages, there is still an element of implicit prescriptivism in much of the published lexicographical record on Pacific languages. A surprising number of dictionaries of these languages do not include entries for words such as 'money', 'kerosene' and 'car'. However, in most parts of the region today, people are totally familiar with these items, which have become central elements in their daily lives (Crowley 1993:120–121). On the other hand, published dictionaries typically do include a considerable amount of archaic and obsolescent vocabulary relating often to cultural traditions that have not been practised for many generations.

Few linguists provide any explicit explanation for the lack of lexical expressions for items of modern technology and recently introduced cultural practices, though I am fairly sure that the main reason is that such meanings are often expressed in the form of borrowings from a European language. This seems to make them something less than 'real' words in the language in the eyes of most linguists. Typically, the only time that such meanings are included in a dictionary is when a locally created form is used, rather than a borrowed form.

I should point out that I am not attributing such prescriptivism to linguists totally by inference here as I have been guilty of such practices myself. For instance, my own dictionary of Paamese (Crowley 1992) has an entry for 'money', which is expressed by the indigenous form *ahat*, originally meaning 'stone'. On the other hand, I provided no entry for 'kerosene' because the word that the Paamese use is *karsin*, which is a direct borrowing from Bislama (coming ultimately from English). In fact, in Crowley (1992:xviii–xix) I explicitly presented a number of criteria by which I excluded from my dictionary borrowed words that have been incorporated into the Paamese lexicon.

Apart from such implicit prescriptivism, most linguists seem to regard borrowing, for the most part, as both natural and relatively harmless. Occasionally, however, one finds views expressed which are at considerable variance with this position. Mühlhäusler (1996) regards lexical borrowing as a far more insidious process, threatening not only the structural integrity of languages, but, in the longer term, their very survival. His basic thesis is that the morphological, syntactic and lexical systems of Pacific languages are currently undergoing decay and homogenisation in the direction of English.

He refers to the dramatic reduction of the polysynthetic morphology of Tiwi in northern Australia among younger speakers as an example of this incipient process (Mühlhäusler 1996:286–287), and he also mentions the radical simplification that has taken place in the noun class systems of some languages (Mühlhäusler 1996:287–288). Verbs in Numbami in Papua New Guinea are required to take inflectional subject prefixes, but Mühlhäusler (1996:289) points out that verbs borrowed from Tok Pisin are exempt from this requirement, thereby threatening the integrity of the grammatical system.

These kinds of change, Mühlhäusler argues, are promoted by the incorporation of loan words which are not fully adapted to the original grammatical patterns. Such changes, he argues, will eventually lead to a situation where Pacific languages are essentially just local relexifications of European structures. In the long run, he sees most Pacific languages as

being under threat, with English likely to replace them, a view which is shared by Dixon (1991, 1997).

The problem with Mühlhäusler's stance here is that he does not cite any detailed studies showing the structural impact of borrowings on the vast majority of Pacific languages. Many languages, for example, do not treat borrowed and indigenous verbs differently, e.g. Manam (Lichtenberk 1983:621–623). In yet other languages borrowings have indeed created some new grammatical patterns, though these are not reflections of English structures, but creative indigenous responses to the need to incorporate new kinds of words into the grammatical system of the language. In the remainder of this discussion, I will describe in some detail the impact of borrowings on Sye, with which I have some personal familiarity, as a way of subjecting Mühlhäusler's views to empirically based critical evaluation.

4 Bislama borrowings in Sye

Sye is the language that is currently spoken on the island of Erromango in southern Vanuatu. In common with most other areas of Vanuatu, the English-lexifier contact language known as Bislama is widely known on the island. English or French are taught to all children in primary schools on the island, though once children complete their six years of primary education, they seldom use these languages in spoken form.

Erromango was the site of some of the earliest sandalwood stations in Vanuatu, with extensive contact with outsiders going back to the mid 1850s, and more sporadic contacts going back to as early as 1825. Bislama has therefore been in continual use on the island—and the other southern islands of Tanna and Aneityum—for longer than in most other parts of Vanuatu. Despite this, there are no signs that Bislama is likely to replace Sye, at least in the short to intermediate term.³ Young children almost invariably grow up speaking exclusively Sye, and often do not acquire a knowledge of Bislama until the ages of eleven or twelve, when they are in their later years of primary education, and they move to another island to begin their secondary education.⁴

A small amount of Bislama vocabulary has already more or less definitively replaced some indigenous Sye vocabulary. The following fairly common words have become so well established in the Sye lexicon that I was unable to elicit any precise indigenous equivalents, even from older speakers: *lat* 'body fat' (< English 'lard'), *makas* 'kava dregs' (< English 'bagasse'⁵), *vat* 'fat', *poila* 'boil (on body)'. Numerals higher than five have also been almost completely replaced with words of Bislama origin, with only a small number of older people remembering the original counting system (and then some only imperfectly).

³ This contrasts with the view expressed forty years ago by Capell (1954:107) that '... this language will possibly cease to be spoken unless an effort is made to stem the death rate'.

⁴ At the same time, if there were to be any large scale movement of people from overpopulated islands into Erromango's tempting empty spaces, or a massive infusion of outsiders associated with the logging industry, this situation could change.

⁵ This term originates from the Queensland sugar plantations of the nineteenth century, where the word was used to refer to the crushed cane.

In addition to these words, the following is a list of some frequently encountered words of Bislama origin that are clearly in the process of displacing original Sye words, though the indigenous equivalents can generally be cited by people when they make a special effort:

<u>Recent word</u>	<u>Indigenous word</u>	
<i>kel</i>	<i>nahiven nevi</i>	'girl'
<i>kauri</i>	<i>nendu</i>	'kauri'
<i>huk</i>	<i>kilkil</i>	'fish hook'
<i>naif</i>	<i>nautugo</i> ⁶	'knife'
<i>heik</i>	<i>nalumam</i>	'egg'
<i>suwit</i>	<i>ompu</i>	'sweet'
<i>kinu</i>	<i>lou</i>	'canoe'

Finally, there is a larger set of recently introduced words that are widely encountered as competing with indigenous vocabulary, though the original Sye forms are still widely used as well. Such forms include the following:

<u>Recent word</u>	<u>Indigenous word</u>	
<i>stori</i>	<i>uvuvu</i>	'story'
<i>vamle</i>	<i>nompunara-</i>	'relative'
<i>ndip</i>	<i>natmonuc</i>	'chief'
<i>poi</i>	<i>nevyarep</i>	'youth'
<i>prata</i>	<i>avenhai</i>	'brother'
<i>papa</i>	<i>nate</i>	'father'
<i>mama</i>	<i>namou</i>	'mother'
<i>stret</i>	<i>itrogko</i>	'straight'
<i>ailan</i>	<i>nompuwo</i>	'island'
<i>kava</i>	<i>nacave</i>	'kava'
<i>ompi trog</i>	<i>emlu</i>	'drunk'
<i>ompi reti</i>	<i>tavehveh</i>	'ready'

While these examples may make it appear that the indigenous lexicon of Sye is under threat from Bislama—especially since even some core cultural concepts are included—it

⁶ In Sye orthography, *g* represents a velar nasal, while *c* represents a voiced velar fricative.

should be pointed out that the direction of transfer on Erromango is by no means exclusively from Sye to Bislama. Erromangans speaking Bislama to outsiders on their own island liberally sprinkle their Bislama with vernacular words, especially—though by no means exclusively—in areas where Bislama does not have readily available lexical equivalents. We therefore find borrowings such as *nacune* ‘begin to feel the effect of kava’, *novunu* ‘small amounts of food eaten taken while drinking kava to clean mouth’, *umrip* ‘kind of local food’, as well as the names of many trees, birds and fish.

It is also clear that the influence of the vernacular on local Bislama is not restricted to the introduction of the occasional lexical borrowing, as Erromangan Bislama shows clear evidence of phonological and structural influence from the vernacular as well.⁷ When speaking Bislama, Erromangans often stress polysyllabic words on the penultimate syllable, as in Sye (Crowley 1998:17), even with Bislama words that are normally stressed on the initial syllable, or when an ordinarily unstressed epenthetic vowel appears in the penultimate syllable. We therefore frequently find differences in pronunciation, such as these:

<u>Bislama elsewhere</u>	<u>Local Bislama</u>	
<i>kálabus</i>	<i>kalábus</i>	‘prison’
<i>tóslaet</i>	<i>tosílaet</i>	‘torch’

Erromangan Bislama also exhibits a number of grammatical features that distinguish it from most other varieties of Bislama, with these features clearly reflecting substrate patterns:

- (i) Erromangans frequently make only a singular–plural distinction in their Bislama pronominal paradigms, avoiding the commonly used dual and trial forms, reflecting the lack of separate dual and trial forms in the Sye pronominal paradigms (Crowley 1998:40–44). Thus, while Bislama speakers from other islands typically distinguish *yutufala* ‘you (dual)’, *yutrifala* ‘you (trial)’ and *yufala* ‘you (plural)’, Erromangans normally use *yufala* with dual, trial and plural reference.
- (ii) The interrogative *wea* ‘where’ often appears in the Bislama of Erromangans between a transitive verb and its object, rather than appearing after the object as we would expect in the Bislama of other parts of Vanuatu. Thus, the more general pattern:

- (1) *Yu karem ston wea?*
 you get stone where
 ‘Where did you get the stone?’

often appears as follows on Erromango:

- (2) *Yu karem wea ston?*
 you get where stone

⁷ McKerras (1996:415–416) makes very similar observations about the effects of Bislama and Uripiv (from Malakula) on each other.

This again reflects a substratum pattern in which the interrogative clitic *-ya* attaches obligatorily to a transitive verb (Crowley 1998:239–240), as in the following example:

- (3) *Kik koc-va-ya nvat?*
 you 2SG-get-where stone
 'Where did you get the stone?'

While Sye has been influenced by Bislama, it is also true that Bislama has been influenced by Erromangan, which raises a very important question: which of the two languages is 'dominant' in this kind of situation? It is surely somewhat oversimplistic to point to the existence of words of Bislama origin in Sye and assume from this that Bislama must automatically be considered a threatening language.

Returning to the influence of Bislama on Sye, while forms of Bislama origin have certainly entered the Sye lexicon, very few Bislama borrowings have affected the grammatical structure of the language in any way, despite the unsubstantiated claim by Tryon (1996:181) regarding 'the replacement of a number of grammatical features in local languages by Bislama equivalents'. The only borrowings that have entered closed word classes that I have encountered are the adverbials *olpaut* (replacing *nevrer*) meaning 'anywhere' and *mas* (replacing *itogku*) meaning 'must'. It should be noted that in Sye the latter belongs to a larger subset of clause-initial adverbials rather than the closed set of verbal auxiliaries as in Bislama. Thus, contrast the following:

- (4) *Yu mas karem ston.*
 you must get stone
 'You must get the stone.'
- (5) *Mas kik k-ampai nvat.*
 must you 2SG.FUT-get stone
 'You must get the stone.'

Most borrowed verbs in Sye do not accept the inflectional prefixes required by indigenous verbs. Rather, they are preceded by the dummy verb *ompi* 'do' which 'carries' the prefixes. Thus, contrast the indigenous verb *orgi* 'hear' and borrowed *stori* 'tell story': *y-orgi* '(s)he heard' as against *y-ompi stori* '(s)he told a story'. Borrowed verbs are therefore assigned to a new open class of uninflectable verbs, which are obligatorily preceded by a dummy verb. This new construction clearly does not reflect an imported pattern. Nor is it an indigenous pattern, as speakers of the language have spontaneously created this construction.

Discussions of the impact of borrowings on indigenous structures often show little appreciation of how many borrowings are typically present in ordinary discourse in Pacific languages. While we are all quite aware that borrowings can be encountered in most kinds of discourse, and that in some kinds of discourse they are even quite prevalent, there are surprisingly few comprehensive studies providing quantitative information about the distribution of loan words in ordinary usage in Pacific languages. One would expect that if the structural impact of borrowings is to be as great as has sometimes been suggested, the proportion of borrowed to indigenous vocabulary in everyday discourse should be quite high. Not only that, but the proportion should be demonstrated to be increasing rapidly over time, with younger people borrowing much more heavily than older people.

In order to provide some kind of statistical test, I examined a total of 24 Sye narrative texts that I had recorded on tape, comprising just under 15,000 words of text in total. The overall incidence of borrowings in my sample was 2.76%, though this figure could be considered to be somewhat exaggerated because I counted repeated instances of the same word as separate tokens. For instance, in one story I recorded a total of thirteen tokens, yet this involved only three separate words: *towa* 'door' (rather than *nogun selat*), *stori* 'story' (rather than *uvuvu*) and eleven separate instances of *mama* 'mother' (rather than *namou*).

By far the largest category of borrowed items were nouns, accounting for 67% of all tokens. Given that nouns in Sye exhibit little inflectional morphology, borrowings in this word class have much less potential to disrupt indigenous grammatical patterns than would be the case in a highly inflected word class, such as verbs. Borrowed verbs, in fact, accounted for only 16.5% of borrowings, while the remaining 16.5% of borrowings came from other minor word classes (including numerals). Of borrowed nouns, the majority (54%) were additive in the sense that they expressed introduced meanings for which there has never been any indigenous form (e.g. *tipot* 'teapot', *krokotail* 'crocodile', *windo* 'window'), rather than replacive, i.e. competing with, or completely replacing, a previously existing indigenous form.

The sample was also broken down for age, with a distinction between older speakers (i.e. those in their 40s and older) and younger speakers (i.e. those in their 20s and 30s). In addition, the texts of younger speakers were divided up according to whether they dealt with traditional or modern matters, and texts dealing with modern themes were then divided according to whether they dealt with life on Erromango today, or whether they dealt with life in town or overseas.⁸ The following results emerged, with the percentages indicating the proportion of borrowings out of the total sample:

	<u>Traditional</u>	<u>On-island modern</u>	<u>Off-island modern</u>
Older speakers	1.24%	—	—
Younger speakers	1.93%	2.65%	6.16%

The higher proportion of borrowings in texts dealing with modern off-island matters is hardly surprising, given that the stories dealt with matters such as somebody's first visit to a zoo in Australia—where crocodiles and kangaroos figured prominently—and the experience of a cyclone in town, where there was discussion of power blackouts and refrigeration problems. What is particularly interesting, of course, is the fact that there is so little difference between the proportions of borrowed vocabulary when the older and younger age groups are compared. The difference between 1.24% and 1.93% is not suggestive of any major change given the difference in age between the speakers involved.

As far as grammatical morphemes are concerned, there is no evidence from my spoken corpus of Sye that any clause-internal markers have been borrowed, nor is there any evidence for the loss of any inflectional categories in the language. It should be kept in mind that Sye

⁸ Older speakers preferred to avoid producing texts dealing with anything but traditional themes, so I was unable to compare the behaviour of older and younger speakers across these three categories of texts.

has one of the more complex systems of inflectional verb morphology that I have ever encountered in any Oceanic language, yet the system shows no signs of restructuring (Crowley 1998:77–143). Not only do clause-internal grammatical morphemes show complete resistance to borrowing, but markers of subordination are all exclusively non-borrowed forms.

The language has a fairly unusual system of echo-subject prefixes on verbs to express coordination (Crowley 1998:246–262), yet there is no evidence that structural pressure from Bislama (or English) is leading to the breakdown of this category.

There is, however, one aspect of the grammatical system of Sye that does appear to have been significantly influenced by borrowings, and this involves free-form linkers of high-level constituents. I have observed fairly frequent use of forms of Bislama origin which function as discourse markers linking larger chunks of narrative text. Thus, *ale* (< French 'allez') and *okei* (< 'okay') fairly frequently mark transitions from one part of a narrative to another. I have also encountered the sporadic use of Bislama *mo* 'and' (< English 'more') as a discourse connective in this way (though never as a clausal or phrasal conjunction). It should be pointed out, however, that these borrowed discourse connectives do not replace traditional patterns of discourse linkage. Rather, they are used alongside them, so we still find evidence of the productive use of head-to-tail linkage that abounds in Melanesian narrative style.

Of course, since we are dealing with discourse strategies here, we are moving to some extent out of the traditional realm of syntax and entering the area of stylistics. That this aspect of a language's system should be relatively open to influence from another language is not surprising given the widespread observation that it is between higher-level constituents that we most frequently find evidence of code-switching in studies of bilingual behaviour (Poplack 1980).

Despite the fact that Sye is borrowing vocabulary from Bislama, arguments that Pacific languages are undergoing major structural homogenisation in the direction of English are very much at variance with the facts that I have just described for Sye. English, of course, is almost never used on Erromango outside the context of primary school classrooms, so it is unimaginable that there would be any way for English to influence the language, except perhaps indirectly via Bislama. As I have just demonstrated, since Bislama has had minimal structural impact on Sye, there is no viable vector for the introduction of English patterns into Sye grammar.

5 Conclusions

The situation that I have described for Erromango is hardly unique for Melanesia. In Paamese, for example, verbs are also required to take inflectional prefixes for a wide range of categories (Crowley 1982:129–142). Only a small number of verbs belonging to the earliest stratum of borrowings behave exactly like indigenous verbs, e.g. *kōm* 'comb one's hair'. The vast majority of borrowed verbs do not accept inflectional prefixes, requiring instead a preceding copula to carry the inflectional prefixes. Thus, contrast *ni-kōm* 'I will comb my hair' with *ni-he rīng* 'I will telephone'. The copula could originally only be followed by a noun (e.g. *ni-he asuv* 'I will be the chief') or an adjective (e.g. *ni-he mariso* 'I will be big'). With such forms, a new pattern has emerged in which the copula can now be followed by a

verbal constituent as a result of such borrowings. Thus, Paamese and Sye have both innovated structurally in order to accommodate borrowed verbs. However, they have innovated in different ways, and neither has converged in the direction of English.

It would probably be pointless to attempt a major survey of textual corpora for Pacific languages to seek out generalisations about what sorts of forms have been incorporated from other languages, as I am fairly confident that the patterns will be more or less as I have already described. Small numbers of borrowings have probably replaced some indigenous vocabulary in many languages, though in most cases the amount of vocabulary that has been lost in this way represents a very small proportion of the total lexicon.

The borrowing of grammatical items has been much more restricted, and the introduction of borrowings has generally not affected the grammatical structures of Pacific languages in any significant way. Where the grammars of Pacific languages have changed in order to accommodate borrowings, these have for the most part involved creative adaptation of indigenous patterns rather than simply incorporating English structures. The only elements of structure that seem to have been systematically affected are at the discourse level, where patterns are arguably more diffuse in any case.

Basically, what we find is that borrowed vocabulary has enabled speakers of Pacific languages to talk about things that their languages traditionally had no names for, such as teapots, days of the week and introduced flora and fauna. In this sense, then, borrowings have enriched these languages, in the same way that borrowings have enriched the English language.

To suggest—as Mühlhäusler (1996) seems to—that people should not accept borrowed vocabulary is basically to argue that Pacific languages should not be used to talk about anything except purely traditional precontact topics. This would surely be a recipe for language loss as Pacific languages would inevitably be able to be used only in a very restricted range of domains. Not only has Mühlhäusler seriously overestimated the structural impact of borrowings on Pacific languages, but he attempts to deny Pacific islanders their right to interact with the modern world through the creative use of their own languages.

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