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# Towards a Framework for Comparing Sociolinguistic Aspects of Isolated Language Variety Communities

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## Towards a Framework for Comparing Sociolinguistic Aspects of Isolated Language Variety Communities<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Long

### 1 Introduction

In recent years, an increasing amount of attention has been focused on isolated dialects, or dialect enclaves, particularly in work by Walt Wolfram, Peter Trudgill and their associates. Trudgill (1997) has identified links between isolation and linguistic structure, namely morphological and phonological features. Here, I shift the emphasis from linguistic structures to sociolinguistic aspects of the communities in using the isolated language varieties, in an attempt to construct a framework for contrastive studies.

### 2 The Language Varieties

#### 2.1 Selection of the Language Varieties Discussed

My analysis centers upon the northern Pacific Bonin (or Ogasawara) Islands, with comparisons to the island communities of Pitcairn-Norfolk and Palmerston, both in the South Pacific, Tristan da Cunha and the Falklands in the South Atlantic, and Ocracoke, off the coast of North Carolina.

I have chosen these language communities because they share the following traits. (1) The language varieties (LVs) are spoken by groups of speakers who have been isolated geographically. As we see below, the LVs of the Bonins, Pitcairn-Norfolk and Palmerston originally developed within language contact situations, but their speakers were isolated from the outside world. (2) All are recently established island communities: Bonins (1830), Pitcairn (1790), Palmerston (1862), Tristan da Cunha (1817), Falklands (1833), Ocracoke (1770). (3) Unlike many tiny, isolated languages, these are varieties of a major language—English (and in the case of the Bonin Islands, Japanese as well). (4) Although their geographical isolation has tended to insulate them from the influence of other LVs, including mainstream ones

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at NWAV 29 on October 7, 2000. This paper was prepared independently of Walt Wolfram's (2000) on a similar topic, given on the same day. I have not been able to respond to or incorporate any of his ideas into this paper, but I hope to do so in the future. This research received funding from the Ministry of Education, grant #12039233.

such as the standard, the fact that they are used only by a tiny number of speakers contributes to their instability. (5) In some cases larger numbers of outsiders (speaking mainstream varieties of the language) live alongside the speakers of the traditional variety, further complicating the situation. (6) The local LVs have low status (albeit to varying degrees) and the mainstream varieties serve as an acrolect for the speakers. (7) Finally, these communities are the subjects of current research, a fact which I hope will facilitate a real-time discussion with the researchers involved.

Because of the large differences among the isolated LVs discussed and the communities in which they are used, some of the comparisons made are tenuous. Moreover, more information is available on some aspects of some LVs than others, but these weaknesses are in the nature of a working paper.

## 2.2 The Bonin Islands Language Variety Discussed Here

For most of the cases dealt with in this paper, the relationship between the LV and the community is unproblematic and self-explanatory. For example, we know that Palmerston uses a non-standard variety of English, so code-switching refers to alternation between the local basilectal variety and an acrolectal variety of (Standard) English. However, the linguistic situation of the Bonin Islands is more complex and requires explanation.

There are five interrelated language varieties to consider when discussing the Bonin Islands: (a) Bonin Standard English; (b) Bonin Creole English: an English-lexified variety which probably developed through the abrupt creolization of a locally-formed pidgin; it was used on the islands in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Long 1999), but now survives only in residual features in other varieties (Trudgill, Schreier, Long and Williams forthcoming); (c) Bonin Mixed Language: a mixed language as defined by Bakker and Mous (1994), basically consisting of an English lexicon on a Japanese grammar and retaining the phonology of both source languages (Long forthcoming); (d) Ogasawara Dialect of Japanese; and (e) Ogasawara Standard Japanese. It is the Bonin Mixed Language (BML) to which I generally refer in this paper. It can be compared to the other five LVs because of its large English component, the bilingual English abilities of most of its users, and the fact that it functions as a basilect for the Standard English acrolect.

## 3 Linguistic Factors

### 3.1 Genetic Classification

Our LVs differ in their genetic classifications, but we may think of them (in rough terms) as located along a kind of contact continuum, depending upon the degree to which language contact played a role in their evolution. Most extreme among these is the Bonin Mixed Language. The classification of the Pitcairn-Norfolk language variety (P-N) is controversial, but it seems safe to say that, although it may indeed function as a cant (as Laycock 1989 contends), the role of language contact in its development is undisputed, as is the fact that it has many creole characteristics. Very little linguistic research has been conducted upon Palmerston English, but it is clear that it, too, developed out of a language contact situation, although there may be less restructuring than with P-N, rendering the variety closer to mainstream English (Ehrhart-Kneher 1996). The three Atlantic varieties fit more neatly into the traditional dialect category, although Daniel Schreier (1999) has pointed out that non-English speaking settlers may have played a role in the formation of Tristan English, and Wolfram and associates have pointed out the importance of dialect contact in the development of the Ocracoke variety (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997:7-15).

### 3.2 Linguistic Proximity to Mainstream Varieties

As a result of the opposing factors of contact and isolation, the LVs have varying degrees of mutual intelligibility with mainstream varieties of English. Utterances in the BML are virtually incomprehensible to monolingual speakers of English or Japanese, although individual words retain the phonology of their source language and are thus understandable.

A visitor in 1903 comments that, "All the inhabitants of Pitcairn speak perfect English, but when speaking among themselves they cannot easily be understood by a stranger." This seems an appropriate summation of the situation on both this island and Norfolk today.

Reports regarding the intelligibility of Palmerston English (to speakers of mainstream English) indicate that it is unique but not unintelligible. A report from 1954 maintains that "their talk is quite easy to follow." Another referring to roughly the same period states, "when I was a child growing up with some Palmerston Islanders, it was barely intelligible" but that "In Palmerston now [1975] however, I could understand the people with little difficulty" (Ehrhart-Kneher 1996). Compared to the Pacific LVs, the three Atlan-

tic varieties exhibit a much higher degree of intelligibility with mainstream English.

## 4 Geo-political Factors

### 4.1 Geographical Isolation

The Bonin Islands lie 1000 km (620 miles) from continental Japan and about the same distance from the Northern Marianas. They were not actively claimed by any nation until 1872 when they became part of Japan. During the initial Japanese colonization, the ethnic-Japanese colonizers maintained contacts with Hachijo-jima, while the original Westerner/Pacific Islander population developed ties with the English-speaking communities in Yokohama and Kobe. Before the war, islanders maintained close ties with the Japanese possessions to the south of them (Palau, Saipan, Yap; Long 2000). During the U.S. Navy administration (1945-1968), they had a close relationship with Guam. Since their reversion to Japan in 1968, they have been closely related to Tokyo.

Pitcairn is an overseas territory of the U.K., located in the Southeastern Pacific, over 2400 km (1500 miles) east of Tahiti. It was chosen by the Bounty mutineers precisely because of its seclusion: it was not correctly located on any navigational charts of the day. It remained so isolated that at one point its inhabitants were moved all the way across the Pacific to Norfolk Island. Today, Pitcairn has no airfield and can be reached only by infrequent freighter ship. Norfolk is currently a territory of Australia, located 1125 km (700 miles) northwest of Auckland and 1450 km (900 miles) east of Brisbane. It has an airfield with frequent commercial flights to both Australia and New Zealand.

Palmerston is currently part of the Cook Islands. It lies, however, over 320 km (200 miles) from the nearest island of Aitutaki, and has been isolated from the rest of the country. Because of their heritage, the islanders are said to have felt closer to the U.K. than Rarotonga. Today the island is reachable only by sea, and the ship service is unscheduled and infrequent.

Tristan da Cunha is often called the most isolated island in the world. It is an Overseas Territory of the U.K., but it is located in the South Atlantic 2,778 km (1726 miles) west of Cape Town, South Africa, and 2,334 km (1450 miles) south of St. Helena Island, its nearest neighbor. There is no air transportation, nor even an airfield. There are no regularly scheduled passenger ships, but freighters from Johannesburg call on the island two or three times a year.

The Falklands lie in the South Atlantic over 700 km (435 miles) northeast from Cape Horn in South America. They are an overseas territory of the U.K., but maintained close ties, until the 1982 war, with nearby Argentina. There is an airfield with frequent commercial flights to South America.

Ocracoke is located only a few kilometers from the coast of the United States, but it has been relatively isolated from continental North Carolina because of continually shifting, but generally unfavorable, topographic conditions as well as by socio-political differences (aligning themselves with the North during the Civil War).

### 4.2 Minute Populations

In addition to geographical distance, the tiny populations of the LVs are a factor in their isolation. The descendents of the original Bonin Islands settlers number only a couple of hundred people, and are outnumbered by the ethnic Japanese islanders eight to one. Pitcairn has a population of about 70, but almost all residents are descendents of the original islanders. The same is true of Palmerston's 49 inhabitants, and Tristan's population of about 300. The Falklands have a large U.K. military presence, but they do not mix much with the local population of about 2200. In Ocracoke, the descendents of the original settlers number about 375, but they live alongside relative newcomers about their equal in number.

## 5 Social-Psychological factors

Socio-psychological factors related to language variation include both the conceptualization of a LV and attitudes towards it. Conceptualizations of a variety would include questions such as the following. Do speakers see differences between their speech and other varieties? Do they regard their speech as a unique dialect or simply as "the way we talk"? Is the variety known by a specific name? Attitudes differ from conceptualizations in that they involve value judgments about the variety sounding (un)educated or the (un)desirability of passing it on to younger generations, and so on.

### 5.1 Conceptualization of the Language Variety

Of all the LVs under consideration here, only P-N has been referred to as a "language", although this conceptualization is by no means held unanimously. Kärllgård (1993) relates an incident dating back a century (1903) in which an outsider has been unable to understand the islanders when they talk among themselves. The islander informs him that they were talking their

"own language". In the 1930's several non-linguist writers referred to the language variety as "Pitcairnese" (see specifics in Kärllgård 1993). In the early sixties, Ross and Moverly's book entitled *The Pitcairnese Language* both reflected perceptions of the variety as a "language" and in turn perpetuated them among specialist and non-specialists alike. Other 20<sup>th</sup>-century writers have referred to P-N as a "dialect" but this conceptualization is still more generous than the "bad English" characterizations typical of similar non-linguists' writings on non-Standard language varieties, particularly contact ones.

There are varying characterizations of the Bonin Mixed Language, but it is not generally even viewed as a dialect, much less a language. Many people, both local speakers and outsiders alike, view it as simply "mixing the two languages together". Significantly, however, a few islanders do view it as a unique language. Two Westerner Bonin Islander women born and raised on the island during the Navy occupation spoke to an American interviewer in the late 1980's about their language use as children. In the transcribed conversation below, they speak of the BML as an entity unto itself.

- IVer: Did you speak both Japanese and English at home?  
 ISL: Uh-uh. (negative response)  
 GSC: Uh, no. Japanese was at home. English was at school. And when we played, it was all in Japanese, but some words were a mixture . . .  
 ISL: mixture of Japanese  
 GSC: It was made up. It was just the words that island people would know, so that other Japanese wouldn't know what we were talking about. It came in handy, didn't it?  
 ISL: Island lingo, which is a mixed, made-up word. We literally translated Japanese into English, but it's not found anywhere else.

This same conviction is seen below in the comments of a male contemporary of these women. I conducted an interview with him in 1999 (carried out in Japanese because it was used for a radio documentary). The English translations below are my own.

- SM: There is a language that we made ourselves, us kids, among ourselves. Not the language that our parents spoke, not Japanese, and not English; our unique language that we made as kids when we talked among ourselves. I spoke it too. But then the reversion came and we forgot it. People who went off to America before the reversion still remember it and use it there among themselves to commu-

nicate. When they come back here and use it to me, I don't understand.

- Long: Because you forgot it?  
 SM: Yeah. It's like Ainu talk, not understandable. I don't know what they're saying. And they say, 'Don't be silly! It's the language you used as a child, isn't it?'  
 Long: But doesn't it come back to you after 2 or 3 days?  
 SM: Well, sometimes when my mind goes back to that situation. But I've practically been brainwashed [to speak proper Japanese].

## 5.2 Attitudes of Speakers towards their Variety

Attitudes toward isolated LVs are a key factor in understanding both synchronic aspects of their usage, and diachronic changes over time. Many of the varieties discussed here are viewed negatively by their speakers, but there is a great range in this negativity. Kärllgård calls P-N a "low-status language," but the attitudes held by P-N speakers themselves, as well as those views expressed by outsiders, seem surprisingly positive in comparison with the other LVs. As we saw above, a P-N speaker is quoted in 1903 as saying that he has been speaking his "own language" (Kärllgård 1993). To day, as well, the expanding domains of P-N (see section 6) reveal comparatively positive attitudes.

Attitudes of Bonin Islanders towards the BML exhibit a love-hate dilemma which will be familiar to sociolinguists of non-standard dialects. We saw some rather positive attitudes in the quotes in the previous section, but negative attitudes abound below in the transcriptions of a group discussion from 1979. These young adults were attending the elementary school at the time of the reversion to Japan in 1968. Thus they experienced education both in English under the Navy and in Japanese under teachers newly arrived from Tokyo. The following excerpts were translated by the author.

- IVer: By the way, at home, you were speaking Japanese, weren't you?  
 A: At home it was Japanese. But it was not like the Japanese we are speaking now.  
 B: To give the simplest example, we used Japanese like *omae* [Jap. 'you'] and *mii* [from Eng. 'me'] from the time we were children.  
 IVer: You can all speak English and Japanese as well. That's great.  
 A: Our teacher K used to tell us, 'You guys are pitiable because can't really speak English or Japanese.' And it's true.  
 C: Our English grammar isn't right, so we can't write properly.  
 D: In that sense, we are the most half-baked.

- E: Now, at present, our Japanese and English comprehension is about half and half. With F and them, their English is a bit better than their Japanese. Because they had a longer time in English education than we did.
- F: From the viewpoint of my generation, we are envious of E and those students who had more Japanese language education.
- E: Those people older than F understand English perfectly.
- F: But the tradeoff is that their Japanese is weak.
- B: We received enough Japanese education to be able to read a newspaper. But the paperwork in everyday life, for example tax returns and things, whether or not we can effortlessly manage those, or expeditiously take care of paperwork that comes in at work or not, that's doubtful. Our generation may not be able to do that, but our children have been raised in a Japanese language society, so they don't have the problem of being half-baked. In all things, we just didn't have any leeway.

(Ogasawara Elementary School 1979)

The negative attitudes displayed here are strikingly different from the relative pride expressed in the comments of Pitcairn Islanders, and more intriguingly from the opinions expressed by other Bonin Islanders of the same generation.

It is unclear how natives of Palmerston conceive of their LV, or what their attitudes regarding it are, but with the evidence that does exist, and in light of the standardization reported to be underway there, we have no reason to assume they are positive.

The three Atlantic varieties are generally conceived of as regional dialects or as simply "not talking right". Wolfram and associates report that many Ocracokers, even the younger and more mobile ones, have a strong sense of pride in their local identity, but that these attitudes do not necessarily translate into a positive attitude toward the traditional local dialect (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997: 23-24).

### 5.3 Attitudes towards the Standard

Many non-standard speaking communities suffer from what Japanese sociolinguist Takesi Sibata calls a "dialect inferiority complex" and Labov has termed "linguistic insecurity". The isolation of the communities discussed here has not shielded them from this affliction; if anything, it has exacerbated the situation. Speakers in these communities are reported as having positive opinions of Standard English, although their ideas of Standard Eng-

lish differ depending upon their political affiliations. The Bonin Islanders had United States English presented as the Standard to follow during the Navy era, and their English today reflects that.

On Ocracoke, some of the disappearing island features are being replaced by Northern variants, as opposed to Southern ones from the North Carolina mainland (Wolfram, Hazen and Schilling-Estes 1999:49-50) suggesting their shifts are not necessarily toward a Southern U.S. standard.

### 5.4 Attitudes of Outsiders towards the Local Variety

The attitudes of outsiders towards the LV of the Bonins have been overwhelmingly negative. During the Navy administration of the island, the Bonin Mixed Language was largely criticized as the failure on the part of its speakers to properly separate the two languages when they spoke, and its use, along with the monolingual use of Japanese, was discouraged by American teachers brought in by the Navy. When Japanese mainlanders came to the island as administrators, teachers, and journalists after the 1968 reversion, most showed strongly negative attitudes towards BML. They viewed it as a failure to separate the languages and use proper Japanese.

Attitudes toward P-N are generally more favorable than those exhibited towards the other LVs. Some writers describe the local language variety as "a kind of gibberish" (1856), but comments of this type are matched or outnumbered by less negative terms such as "an extraordinary patois" (1905). A visitor in 1901 expresses the somewhat negative view that the language of Pitcairn is "at best a species of pidjin [sic] English" but the same writer terms this "a language of their own" (all quoted in Kärllgård 1993).

We have little information about the way outsiders perceive the speech of Palmerston, but the information we do have about the variety and its social situation do not give cause for optimism in this regard.

The attitudes of outsiders toward the dialects of Tristan and the Falklands have yet to be explored, but the number of outsiders who interact with the islanders is much smaller than in the Bonins or Ocracoke, and thus their feelings may be of less consequence.

Wolfram and his colleagues have shown that mainlanders view the dialect of Ocracoke either with a disdain typical of Americans' attitudes toward non-standard (and sub-standard) dialects, or as object of curiosity (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997: 131-133).

### 5.5 Role of Local Identity

The role which a LV plays in the creation and maintenance of a separate local identity is a topic of vital importance. The necessity to maintain one's identity has played a key role in the development and usage of non-standard language varieties on the Bonin Islands. The islanders of Western and Pacific Island descent began to see themselves as a single group with the incursion of huge numbers of Japanese settlers in the late 19th century. Ironically, the arrival of United States troops after World War II gave the islanders an 'Other' on the opposite side of the ethnic spectrum further defining what did and did not constitute a Bonin Islander. Since the reversion to Japanese authority, the importance which islanders place on maintaining a separate and unique identity seems to have waned drastically, a factor which has contributed to a sharp decline in the use of BML (and the use of English in any form, for that matter).

The importance of a unique identity has played a key role in the history of Pitcairn-Norfolk as well, and speakers are reported (particularly at key points in the history of the language) to have viewed themselves as different from both other English speakers and from Tahitians. On Ocracoke, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1997: 23-25) report that middle-aged males may be fortifying their local dialects in the face of increasing in-migration by mainlanders.

## 6 Domain Factors

The domains in which a language variety is used are of particular concern because languages often shrink as they are replaced by other varieties in successively informal domains. Conversely, it is possible for low-status LVs to expand and increase their legitimacy by replacing higher status language varieties in increasingly formal domains.

### 6.1 Use as a Written Medium

The existence of an orthography facilitates the use of a LV as a written medium. Pitcairn-Norfolk stands alone among the language varieties discussed here in that attempts have been made at developing spelling conventions. Kärllgård (1993) includes some examples of written Pitcairn from letters and school children's compositions. Pitcairn-Norfolk also differs from the other language varieties in that attempts (albeit limited ones) have been made to publish in the language. Portions of the Bible, for example, have been translated into the Norfolk variety.

The BML basically retains the phonological traits of its two source languages and could be written satisfactorily simply by mixing Japanese and English standard orthographic practices. Its users are literate in English or Japanese or both, and tend to use one language or the other when writing.

### 6.2 Role in Mass Communication

Language usage in the domains of publishing and other types of mass communication needs to be examined. On the one hand, the sheer smallness of the communities examined in this paper limits their possibilities for mass communication. (Most could not support their own TV station, for example.) But by the same token, the small community size, high percentage of speakers, and easily definable community boundaries (all are islands) could facilitate media in the local language varieties such as radio broadcasts or weekly newspapers.

### 6.3 Place in School Curriculum

Another area of comparison is the existence of pedagogical or reference materials for the language varieties. Have vocabulary lists been compiled? Does a grammar exist? Is there a textbook for outsiders trying to learn the language? Several written materials geared towards learning P-N exist, including a 1986 dictionary of Norfolk English, and 1988 a language textbook, but virtually none exist for the other five LVs.

Are these materials being employed in local schools to teach the young indigenous islanders or their newcomer classmates? In none of the communities discussed here is the local LV the medium of education, but it is worthy to note that the inclusion of P-N has been proposed and considered on Pitcairn.

On Ocracoke, special units focusing on language variation were designed by Wolfram's team and implemented in the junior high school. In the Bonins, there is no special school curriculum regarding the local language situation, but local teachers have prepared thorough textbooks with color illustrations for both junior and senior high schools, detailing the unique history of the islands.



## 7 Usage Factors

### 7.1 Linguistic Repertoires of Speakers and Codeswitching towards Outsiders

One important question when assessing the extent of a minor language variety's usage is whether or not the speakers use it when speaking to outsiders. This factor is related not only to the ability of speakers to codeswitch and use a more prestigious variety, but also their propensity to do so.

Users of the Bonin Mixed Language are bi- or trilingual, able to speak also Standard Japanese or Standard English or both (Long 1998), and they ordinarily codeswitch into one of these standard languages for outsiders.

Laycock (1989) convincingly demonstrates from two hundred years of first-hand reports that Pitcairn Islanders have always possessed a more or less mainstream variety of English alongside their local language, and the situation has been similar on Norfolk. Accordingly, as we have seen, records indicate that P-N speakers have, for a couple of centuries, consciously codeswitched between "their own language" when talking among themselves, and mainstream English, when conversing with outsiders. This conscious and clear-cut codeswitching is consistent with Pitcairn-Norfolk speakers' conceptualization of their variety as a separate language.

The few extant reports concerning Palmerston English do not indicate the kind of codeswitching so widespread on Pitcairn and Norfolk (Ehrhart-Kneher 1996). Palmerston English seems to be closer to mainstream English than P-N. If this is true, then codeswitching may be less common because it is less necessary for communication with outsiders. It is also likely that the comparative lack of contact with outsiders has been a large contributor to this single variety usage (mono-varietalism?). Similarly, the close resemblance to mainstream English of the Ocracoke, Tristan and Falklands varieties means there is greater mutual intelligibility, making bidialectalism and codeswitching less critical and less common than in P-N.

### 7.2 Acquisition by Outsiders

Some of the LVs (Pitcairn, Palmerston, Tristan) consist almost entirely of the original populations with outsiders arriving only in the form of individual teachers or clergy (and the occasional linguistic fieldworker), or as military personnel, large in number, but having limited contact with the locals (as in the Falklands). In other cases (Bonins, Ocracoke, Norfolk), numbers of recently transplanted outsiders outnumber the indigenous populations.

In the case of the Bonins, the question of transmission to non-group members is not a simple one. Outsiders do not ordinarily acquire the Mixed Language and it is a language of intra-group and not inter-group communication. On the other hand, there are numerous cases on the Bonins in which ethnic Japanese became acculturated into the "Westerner" community, mainly upon marrying into it. They frequently acquire a "Westerner" identity, and some of the speech patterns associated with it, whether this be (in three specific cases) Bonin Creole English, or BML, or a working knowledge of Standard English for communicating with the Navy.

There is anecdotal evidence of outsiders learning and using the LV of P-N, not on Pitcairn Island itself where there are few people in general and almost no outlanders, but on Norfolk, where a transplanted community of Bounty descendents numbers about 700, or about half of the total population.

### 7.3 Transmission to Young Speakers

Transmission of the LV to younger generations is the most critical factor of all, because in its absence the LV is moribund, i.e. bound for extinction. Non-transmission means that younger generations are acquiring or using an alternate variety.

In the case of the Bonins today, this alternate language variety is Japanese (a variety which closely resembles that of Tokyo). The middle-aged parents of today's children grew up with a strong influence from United States English. Island children were taught by American teachers, and went on to attend high school in Guam while boarding with a Navy family. Accordingly, they are all able to speak fluent and natural English, a variety of Pacific United States English with a phonology resembling that of Hawaiian Standard English. Middle-aged speakers today still use the BML, but only when talking among themselves or to certain older islanders. To their children, they use Japanese almost exclusively. (Those who live outside of Japan use the local varieties of Standard English toward their children.) These children are in the minority among their peers as well. Their classmates are either the children of mainlanders newly moved, or only temporarily relocated to the island, or they are the descendents of the ethnic Japanese islanders who lived on the island before the war but who spent the following quarter century on the mainland because the Navy would not allow them to return home. At any rate, the children of today do not use BML, and all language varieties on the Bonins (see section 2.2) except for Standard Japanese are headed for extinction.

In the Atlantic varieties of the Falklands and Tristan, the geographical distance from the speakers of other varieties of English (such as standard va-

rieties) greatly retards islanders' acquisition of them. In other words, the isolation of the local LV facilitates (to a degree) their survival. Nonetheless, the 20th century transportation and communication developments which have shrunk the rest of the world have touched the lives of the speakers in these communities, albeit not to the same extent (Sudbury 1999, Britain and Sudbury 1999).

There are also community-specific factors which have affected the amount of contact these peoples have had with the outside world, and thus the extent to which mainstream English has influenced them. Speakers of the Tristan LV experienced mass evacuation to England for about two years beginning in 1961, due to volcanic activity on their island, and were thus exposed to other varieties of English. Falklanders have experienced a limited injection of mainstream English due to an increased U.K. military presence after the 1982 war. This military presence has not been, however, as long nor as deeply penetrating as that of the Bonins.

Wolfram and associates show that younger speakers do not use as many features (such as local lexical items, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997), in as many situations (*ibid* 122-124), and with the same degree of frequency and as older speakers do (Wolfram et al. 1999: 66-73, 132-141; but see exceptions, 86-100). They also report that many of the older islanders are disturbed by the prospect of the traditional island dialect disappearing.

Ironically, it may be in the areas such as Ocracoke and the Falklands which seem to have relatively less linguistic capital invested in their LV which will sustain them the longest. In Pitcairn, the large linguistic difference between the local variety and mainstream English has been a factor in the strong feelings its speakers have towards it and the importance they place on its usage and its preservation, but it is also this great difference which threatens the future of the local variety. People enjoy using Pitcairn because outsiders cannot understand it and it is something uniquely theirs, but this same uniqueness limits P-N's desirability as well.

## 8 Conclusion

Inspired by Bakker and Mous's (1994) template for comparing Mixed Languages, I have attempted to construct a template, a framework, for the comparison and contrast of sociolinguistic aspects of isolated language varieties. It is my hope that this can contribute to the construction of a more complete typology of the sociolinguistic factors which affect these varieties. We would benefit not only from a deeper understanding of these individual factors, but also of the interplay among the various factors, and the possible correlations between the sociolinguistic features and the language systems which have

developed under the various combinations of these factors. A better grasp of these factors would aid us in trying to reconstruct the complex historical situations in which the LVs developed, in our understanding of the present situation in which these LVs are found, and even in anticipating future problems which may incur.

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## The Importance of Variation Research for Deaf Communities<sup>1</sup>

Ceil Lucas and Robert Bayley

### 1 Introduction

We examine the importance of variation and other linguistic research for Deaf communities.<sup>2</sup> Sociolinguistic variation in American Sign Language (ASL) was initially addressed by Carl Croneberg in the *Dictionary of American Sign Language* (DASL), the first dictionary of a sign language based on linguistic principles (Stokoe, Casterline, & Croneberg 1965). This work was followed by studies of lexical, phonological, and grammatical variation. The treatment of variation in the DASL will be reviewed and research on variation described, with emphasis on the findings from a large-scale study of phonological variation. We will show that research on linguistic variation and other aspects of sign languages impacts Deaf communities in three ways. First, the recognition that ASL exhibits sociolinguistic variation like other systems that we recognize as languages reinforces the hard-won status of ASL and other sign languages as real languages. Second, the study of variation in sign languages reinforces the position that systematic variation, or "orderly heterogeneity," is integral to the structure of all languages (Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog 1968). Understanding the nature of a language requires an understanding of variation. This in turn relates to the increasing awareness of modality differences between spoken and sign languages. Third, the findings from research on sign language structure and variation have had a direct impact on the educational and employment opportunities available to Deaf people.

### 2 Perspectives on ASL

Users and observers of ASL have long been aware of variation in the language. Evidence can be seen in writings about deaf people's language use

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<sup>2</sup> 'Deaf' refers to individuals and groups who regard themselves as culturally Deaf; 'deaf' refers to audiological status. Glosses of ASL signs are written in small capitals.