

King Binoka of Abemama and the Pacific Pidgin lineage

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1 Background

The atoll of Abemama, now part of the Republic of Kiribati in the central Pacific, has played a very unusual role in the history of the islands of this region. During the nineteenth century, the people of this atoll were able to control the impact of European cultural, political and economic intrusion in a way that turned out not to be possible in any other part of the Pacific. This period of holding Europeans at bay ended in 1892, just after the death of King Binoka, who had exercised almost totalitarian power over the atoll for a decade and a half, with the hoisting of the Union Jack and the establishment of British government control throughout the Gilbert Islands.

Abemama is also famous as the place where the noted author Robert Louis Stevenson stayed for eight weeks during 1889, before he chose to live, and eventually die and be buried, at Apia in Western Samoa. His book *In the South Seas*, published posthumously in 1900, includes accounts of his travels through the Marquesas, Hawaii and the Gilberts. The account of his stay on Abemama is of particular interest because of his close association with King Binoka towards the end of his reign. King Binoka is especially interesting as a character because of his command of what Stevenson (1900:298) called a 'queer personal English'. It is the characteristics and significance of this English that I wish to examine in this paper.

2 Pidgin in the central Pacific

Clark (1979-80:27-35) refers to the emergence of whahe terms 'South Seas Jargon' throughout much of Polynesia and Micronesia in the first

decades of the nineteenth century. The spread of this means of communication was largely associated with the whaling industry with its multilingual crews and their dealings with people on shore. By the 1830s, Clark (1979-80:28) observes, a visitor could expect to find speakers of South Seas Jargon on almost any island in Polynesia and Micronesia.

The precise nature of South Seas Jargon is not really known because documentary attestations are sporadic and variable in quality. Clark (1979-80:35) speaks of a language having a vocabulary of perhaps only a few hundred words. He says that we might expect, on a priori grounds, that South Seas Jargon would have been structurally highly unstable, given the limited amount of contact involved between whalers and Pacific Islanders. However, he also cautiously states that documentary records of South Seas Jargon speech are too restricted in scope and geographically too dispersed to allow us to say conclusively that this was the case.

An element of dispute has emerged about the nature of the structure of South Seas Jargon. Mühlhäusler (1979:56-59) agrees with Clark, suggesting that this was a jargon with unstable structure and no recognisable 'speech community'. Keesing (1988:15-25), however, takes the view that in the islands of the central Pacific, i.e. Pohnpei, Kosrae, the Gilbert Islands and Rotuma, this 'jargon' was considerably more stabilised and structurally more developed than has been accepted in the past. Not only this, but the fact that there were constant sexual dealings between whaling crews and Micronesian women prompts him to argue that there were even fluent first-language speakers of 'South Seas Jargon'.

Clark (1979-80:35) mentions the work of Ken Rehg, who reported the existence on the Micronesian island of Ngatik of a special 'men's language' consisting of ordinary Ngatik words with an admixture of English, including some words that apparently derive from South Seas Jargon. In the 1830s, the local males were apparently massacred by a group of European sailors, who then took up with the local women. The products of relationships such as these could perhaps have been a community of fluent speakers of creolised 'South Seas Jargon', though obviously the present-day 'men's language' of Ngatik would be a very poor guide to what this might have been like structurally.

Establishing the nature of South Seas Jargon is of considerable importance in order that we can properly understand the development

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of other Pacific Pidgins, including the existing varieties of Melanesian Pidgin, i.e. Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, Pijin in Solomon Islands and Bislama in Vanuatu. South Seas Jargon, when it first became established in the islands of New Caledonia and southern Vanuatu in the 1840s, represents a direct forerunner to what was subsequently known there as Sandalwood English. This then had a major input into the Plantation Pidgins that developed in Samoa and Queensland which in turn had major inputs into the modern varieties of Melanesian Pidgin.

3 Abemama and early European intrusion

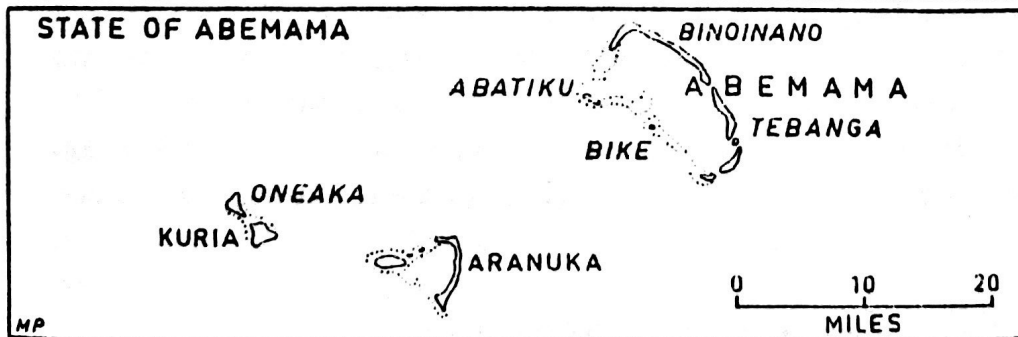
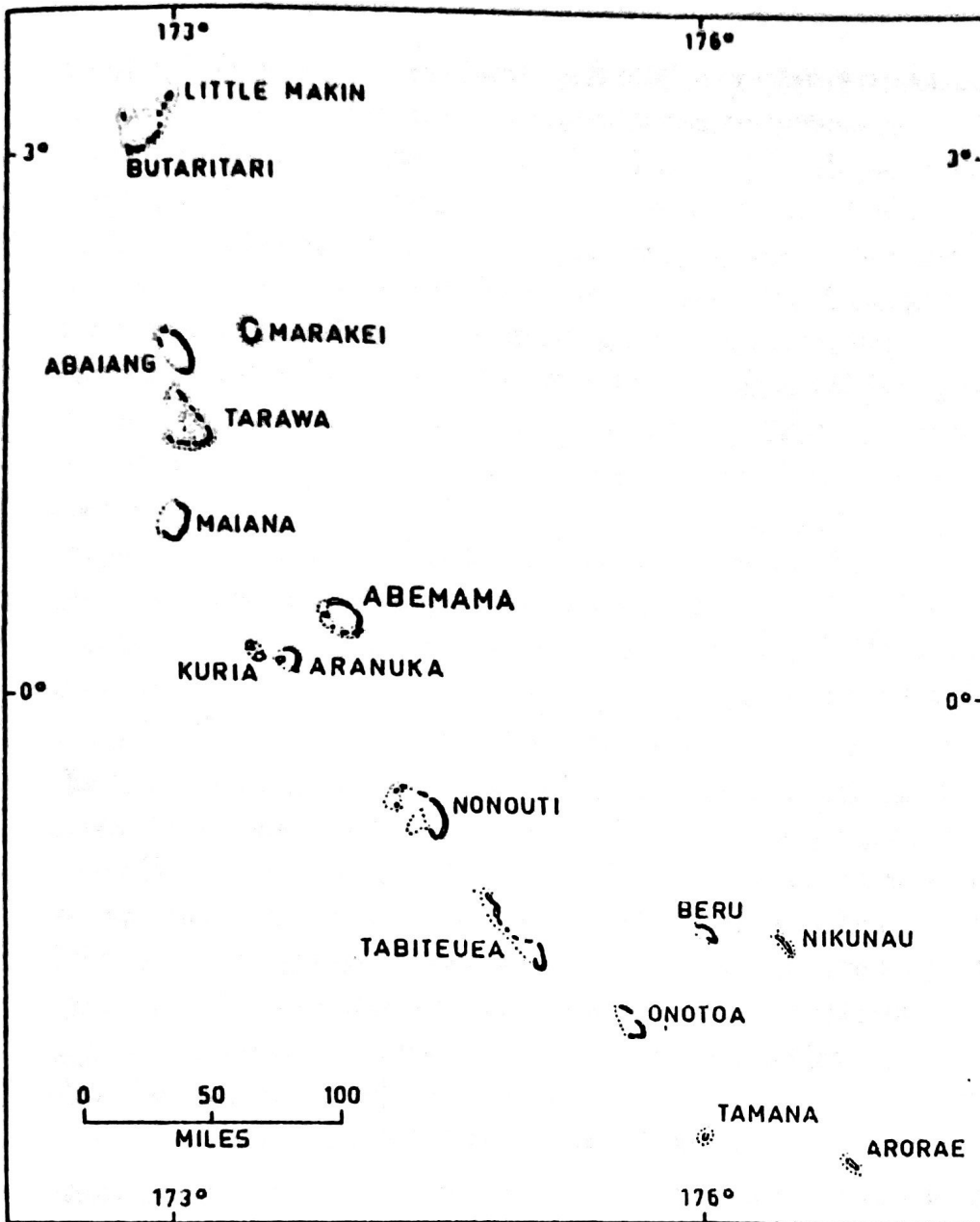
European contact with the atoll of Abemama in central Kiribati began when Captain Bishop in the *Nautilus* paid a brief visit in 1799 (Maude 1970:204). Regular contact was not to commence until 1821, however, when whaling ships started to call. Initial contacts between Europeans and the people of Abemama were not friendly, but by the 1830s, amicable trading relations had become established. In 1835 a sea slug station was opened on Abemama, and the first European beachcomber landed on Kuria, a dependency of Abemama, in 1838 (Maude 1970:205). During the 1840s, Abemamans were conducting a roaring trade with the crews of the increasing numbers of whaling vessels, with the chief commodity being the sale of the sexual favours of serf women (Maude 1970:206).

By 1851, the Europeans on Abemama had, by various means, made themselves extremely unpopular and King Baiteke, who had just come to power, ordered that every foreigner but one on Abemama and its dependencies of Kuria and Aranuka should be killed (Maude 1970:206). Foreign trade fell into the hands of Richard Hansell, an American who was spared from the massacres, apparently because he was sympathetic to the viewpoint of the king, and was able to express this because he spoke the Kiribati language with native-speaker proficiency (Maude 1970:207).

Foreign traders calling at Abemama were henceforth restricted to the unpopulated islet of Abatiku, located at the mouth of the lagoon, which functioned as a strictly controlled port. Anyone wishing to trade in King Baiteke's domain was required to anchor there and wait for the arrival of an emissary of the king's administration. The captain would

inform the emissary through an interpreter that he wished to buy coconut oil, and this request was then ferried back to the mainland for the king's consideration. If the request was approved, trade was conducted in a specially constructed building on Abatiku, away from the general population of Abemama, though a canoeload of local women was generally provided as commercial sexual partners, and they stayed on board ship for the duration of the visit (Maude 1970:208). King Baiteke himself was seldom seen by Europeans as he rarely visited any of the trading vessels that called at his domain (Maude 1970:211). Recruiting of labourers from Abemama for overseas plantations, which was drastically affecting other parts of Kiribati, was also prohibited on the atolls of Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka (Maude 1970:218).

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Map 1: The islands of Kiribati and the Kingdom of Abemama (Maude 1970:202)

King Baiteke's eldest son, Binoka, was born in the mid-1840s, at the heyday of the period of unrestrained foreign commercial contacts. A mission-trained i-Kiribati teacher from the northern atoll of Butaritari was brought to Abemama in 1870 to provide Binoka, by then in his late twenties, with an education. He learned some arithmetic, some geography and also how to read and write in Kiribati (Maude 1970:213). Stories circulated later as to whether the heir apparent became star pupil through his own intelligence or by having competitors decapitated, but all questions ceased when schooling was made a royal prerogative in 1878 and competition was eliminated (Maude 1970:213). At any rate, Binoka's education produced a man who was determined to benefit in whatever way he could through contact with Europeans, and he became a firm admirer and acquirer of European material goods. With his education, Binoka became his father's emissary in dealing with trading vessels, a role which he apparently relished as a source of material possessions and prestige (Maude 1970:217).

In 1878, King Baiteke abdicated in favour of Binoka and handed over to him his highly efficient and centralised administration. Binoka at this time was in his thirties. The new king was not the efficient ruler that his father was. He almost ended up signing Abemama away as a German protectorate shortly after his accession to power (Maude 1970:214), and he alienated both nobility and commoners with his wild temper, territorial expansionism, ruthless control of power internally, and his wish to curry the favour of Europeans. His reign saw several revolts which were successfully, though brutally, suppressed.

King Binoka's reign saw the slow erosion of the administration that he had inherited from his father. He himself was grossly overweight and suffered from asthma (Maude 1970:222). Despite his many wives, he was reportedly impotent and produced no heirs (Maude 1970:212). He died in 1891, when he was only in his forties, and in the following year, the Union Jack was hoisted over Abemama and its dependencies.

4 South Seas Jargon on Abemama

From what we know of whaling and sea slug operations elsewhere in the Pacific, we would expect that during the course of the 1830s and 1840s, some Abemamans would have acquired some kind of competence in what has been referred to above as South Seas Jargon. I

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know of no references specifically to the speech of people from Abemama in this period which would confirm this presumption, though Clark (1979-80:30) and Keesing (1988:17-20) both provide a number of examples of speech from other Micronesian islands that arose under comparable conditions. In severely curtailing the contact between Abemama and the outside world after 1851, King Baiteke would probably have effectively prevented the further spread of any knowledge of South Seas Jargon in his domain.

Whether King Baiteke was able to speak South Seas Jargon himself is not known, though the fact that he chose a trading master for the reason of his ability to speak in 'English' (Maude and Leeson 1968:259) suggests that he did not. King Binoka, however, played a much more hands-on role in trading with Europeans, and we have plentiful evidence that he did speak 'English'. What we do not know is exactly how he learned it. We cannot rule out the possibility that he learned it as a child when foreign trade on Abemama was completely unrestrained, though he would not yet have been ten years old when King Baiteke imposed his restrictions on foreigners. As mentioned above, Binoka became his father's trading emissary shortly before he came to power himself, so it is perhaps more likely that it was with his contacts with Europeans when he was in his early thirties that he first learned his 'English'. Thus, King Binoka's speech should reflect the South Seas Jargon that was spoken in Kiribati in the 1870s, though there is still an outside possibility that it could reflect the speech of an earlier period.

Our knowledge of the nature of King Binoka's English comes largely through Robert Louis Stevenson's fascinating account of his two month sojourn on Abemama in 1889, before he finally settled in Apia in Western Samoa. While in Samoa, Stevenson seldom dealt with commoners, preferring the company of chiefs (Mackenzie 1978:159). He apparently also led very much a chiefly lifestyle while on Abemama. Apart from an i-Kiribati retinue of five who were allowed into Stevenson's compound, which he called 'Equator Town', all of the dealings of his party were directly with King Binoka himself (Stevenson 1900:318). In fact, even these personal servants were only to receive orders from the king, and not from members of Stevenson's household (Stevenson 1900:301). In Stevenson's book *In the South Seas*, we are therefore treated to frequent accounts of Stevenson's conversations with the king.

There are several published references to the nature of King Bi-

noka's 'English'. Stevenson (1900:298-99) describes it as:

... his queer personal English, so different from ordinary "Beach de Mar", so much more obscure, expressive, and condensed.

Stevenson's cook made a similar observation on the unusual nature of the king's speech:

The king spoke English, but a variety entirely his own. It was quite different to the Bèche-de-Mer of the wild islands¹, or the pidgin English spoken by the Asiatic Polynesians. [MacCallum 1934:262-63]

With so little record of how other people on Abemama spoke 'English', it is difficult to know in what ways King Binoka's speech could have been so noticeably peculiar. One observation suggests that it was possibly his wider range of vocabulary, rather than its structure, which impressed European observers:

His vocabulary is apt and ample to an extraordinary degree. God knows where he collected it, but by some instinct or some accident he has avoided all profane or gross expressions. "Obliged", "stabbed", "gnaw", "lodge", "power", "company", "slender", "smooth" and "wonderful", are all a few of the unprecedented words that enrich his dialect. [Stevenson 1900:319]

In the absence of any contrast with other speakers of South Seas Jargon on Abemama at the same time, it is difficult to know what Stevenson meant when he described King Binoka's speech as 'obscure'. This could perhaps be interpreted as meaning that he spoke with unusual fluency, which might have made his non-standard grammatical structures more difficult for English-speakers to pick up.

As an indication of the nature of the information we have on King Binoka's speech, we can refer to the following account by Stevenson of how the king went about assessing the characters of visiting Europeans, in this case Stevenson (1900:300-310):

... The counts upon which whites have been deported are mainly four: cheating Tembinok'², meddling overmuch

¹ That is Vanuatu, or perhaps Melanesia in general.

² Tem is an honorific before men's names in Kiribati.

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with copra, ... 'peaking³, and political intrigue. I felt guiltless upon all; but how to show it? I was informed abruptly that I had stood the ordeal. "I look your eye. You good man. You no lie," said the king I no tavyv good man, bad man. I look eye, look mouth. Then I tavyv. Look eye, look mouth," he repeated.

The total corpus of King Binoka's speech in Stevenson's account comes to about 350 words. Given the paucity of data on South Seas Jargon, especially data coming from a single location and at a single point in time, this source goes a long way towards providing the raw material for an improved idea of the nature of Pacific Pidgin in the early stages of its development.

Clark (1979-80:28-35) lists a number of diagnostic structural and lexical features that he attributes to South Seas Jargon speech. Each of these features will be tested in turn against attestations of King Binoka's speech:

- (a) The use of the preposition *olsem* 'like, as'. This occurs several times in King Binoka's speech, e.g.
I give them tobacco. They work for me all the same brothers. [Stevenson 1900:322]
- (b) The use of *baimbai* as a future marker. Sentences with unambiguously future reference are difficult to find in quotations of King Binoka's speech by Stevenson, though it would appear that he generally did not mark futurity. Stevenson's cook, however, does provide an example of a sentence in the future marked with Clark's diagnostic *baimbai*:
I likum mobetta, my cook no savee how, bimby cook he come my outcche, get good boone (wife). [MacCallum 1934:268]
- (c) The use of *planti* 'much' as a prenominal modifier. King Binoka is attested as having used this construction, e.g.

³This is the verb 'speak', presumably in this context meaning 'speaking out of turn'. King Binoka had trouble with English 's'. Sometimes he omitted it, and at other times, he pronounced it, but for him it was in complementary distribution with 't', 's' occurring before 'i' and 't' elsewhere, following the pattern in his own language. Thus: 'suppose' became 'tuppoti' (Stevenson 1900:299) and 'savvy' became 'tavyv' (Stevenson 1900:315).

"Plenty money!" cried he, with contemptuous displeasure. [Stevenson 1900:341]

- (d) *Sapos* occurs in South Seas Jargon as a marker of conditional clauses, and this feature is also common in King Binoka's speech, e.g.

Tuppoti mitonary think 'good man': very good. [Stevenson 1900:299]

- (e) Preverbal *tumas* 'very, a lot' is a feature attributed to South Seas Jargon. This is not present in King Binoka's speech, though he is reported as having used *tumas* post-verbally, feature which is reminiscent more of later Melanesian Pidgin than the earlier South Seas Jargon:

I think he tavy too much. [Stevenson 1900:315]

- (f) Clark also associates a number of lexical items with South Seas Jargon, namely *gat* 'have', *save* 'know, understand', *nogud* 'bad', *pikinini* 'child', *bulamakau* 'cattle, beef', *kaj* 'get, receive' and *kaikai* 'eat, food'. The first two of these are well attested in King Binoka's speech. The use of *save* is illustrated by the preceding example, and the use of *gat* in the example below:

Me got plenty powa, just like Victoreea. [MacCallum 1934:26263]

The use of *nogud* is not actually attested in King Binoka's speech, but it does occur in the speech of another dignitary from Abemama who was commenting to Stevenson on King Binoka's capriciousness:

Suppose he like you, he good man ... no likee, no good. [Stevenson 1900:327]

The king is not attested as having used *kaj*, but Stevenson's cook does refer to a commoner during the same visit as having said the following:

Him fella along hole plenny sick, catchem die. [MacCallum 1934:47]

The absence of *pikinini*, *bulamakau* and *kaikai* is not significant since there is no reference to children, cattle or food in utterances attributed to King Binoka.

There are some other South Seas Jargon structural features that Clark recognises as being diagenetic which are not present in King

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Binoka's speech. These include the pre-verbal past tense marker *bin*, the early comitative use of the preposition *long*, the pronominal plural marker *ol* and the verb *stap* meaning 'be (in a location)'. The absence of these particular features should not be regarded as significant, however, as Clark (1979-80:30) notes that they are only rarely attested in other South Seas Jargon texts anyway.

There are several structural features of later Pacific Pidgins of which Clark noted as having ambiguous status in South Seas Jargon texts. The speech of King Binoka can therefore possibly throw some light on the development of these features. These are each discussed separately below.

(a) The genitive preposition *blong*

Clark (1979-80:31) points out that there is only a single instance of a South Seas Jargon speaker using *blong* prepositionally, from a speaker in Fiji in the 1840s:

How you do? Ah! You come see me; all white men see me; man belongen ebery place see me; me like um man belongen noder place. [Erskine 1853:461]

He suggests that the appearance of *blong* in this quotation perhaps represents an idiolectal aberration, as this was not otherwise destined to develop until later, and only in Melanesia. However, King Binoka is also reported as having used this construction:

"A cobra berong me," observed his majesty with a wave of his hand; and he counts and sells it by the houseful. [Stevenson 1900:293]

There are two possible ways of interpreting this. First, that Clark was correct in suggesting that the Fijian speaker just referred to from the 1840s represented an aberration, and that the preposition *blong* was indeed a later development. After all, the Fijian is not reported as having used *blong*, but 'belongen', suggesting that he may still have been treating this as a verb rather than a preposition, i.e. 'belonging'.

This would allow for the possibility that prepositional *blong* could have evolved independently in later Melanesian Pidgin, as well as in the Pidgin learned by King Binoka in the Central Pacific. King Binoka could also have picked up this usage from European sailors, many

of whom must have also had contacts with contemporary Sandalwood English. If *blong* did develop initially in Melanesia, this could have diffused to South Seas Jargon in Micronesia and elsewhere in the Pacific, though this would require revision to Clark's (1979-80:35) statement that the South Seas Jargon spoken in Polynesia and Micronesia shows little sign of development throughout its history.

A second possible interpretation is that Keesing (1988:22) may have been correct when he argues that prepositional *blong* was a very early South Seas Jargon feature rather than a later development. There is very little that allows us to decide between these arguments, however, so the stage at which the preposition *blong* evolved is still not clear.

(b) The transitive suffix *-im*

The quote from the Fijian speaker just noted in the 1840s also suggests the possibility that *-im* was being used as a transitive suffix in early South Seas Jargon. If this utterance is accepted at face value, the development of this feature would need to be brought forward by several decades. Clark (1979-80:31) suggests that this possibly represents a transcription error on Erskine's part, as he may have unintentionally attributed to the speaker features of pidgins that he was familiar with in Australia and elsewhere.

Keesing (1988:22), on the other hand, concludes on the basis of the same evidence that this feature was also present in early South Seas Jargon. He provides no other early examples of V-*im* + NP which would back up his point, though he does claim that King Binoka's speech also attests to the presence of *-im* as a transitive suffix in South Seas Jargon (Keesing 1988:46-47). There is plentiful evidence in King Binoka's speech that the third person singular object pronoun was *im*, possibly cliticised as *-im*:

I think I no got him⁴. [Stevenson 1900:294]

You give him. Mo' betta. [Stevenson 1900:341]

I likum mobetta [MacCallum 1934:268]

⁴The pronunciation here was probably *im*. This would be suggested by most English native-speaker models, and also by the fact that King Binoka's own language has no /h/ phoneme. Thus, English 'house' is repeatedly represented in King Binoka's speech as having no initial aspirate, e.g. "outch" [Stevenson 1900:299].

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However, these examples do not offer evidence of the use of *-im* as a transitive suffix in King Binoka's speech. In order to demonstrate this clearly, we would need to find examples of VP-*im* NP sequences. King Binoka consistently placed his objects directly after the verb with no intervening *-im*, e.g.

My patha tell me he see: you think he lie? [Stevenson 1900:334]

Everybody make medicine. [Stevenson 1900:335]

There is only a single example in his speech which possibly points to the reanalysis of the pronoun as a transitive suffix:

I take him all. [Stevenson 1988:294]

This example is ambiguous, however, as it is not clear whether the 'all' is meant to be a third person plural object pronoun, or whether the object is 'him' with a following quantity modifier. Another possible example comes from a commoner quoted by Stevenson's cook:

Him fella along hole plenny sick, catchem die. [MacCallum 1934:47]

As mentioned below, however, this recording is possibly suspect. No other sources point to the use of 'die' as a noun so perhaps MacCallum, whose book was published half a century after the events actually took place, could well have been influenced by his later experiences. Thus, Keesing's point again remains unproven.

(c) The predicate marker *i*

Clark (1979-80:30) expresses doubt about the existence of this feature in South Seas Jargon, and Mühlhäusler (1987) argues that this feature did not begin to develop until the late nineteenth century. In Crowley (1990:230-52), however, I argue that there is considerable evidence that the beginnings of this development were under way during the sandalwood era in southern Melanesia between the 1840s and the 1860s, where NP *i* VP sequences occur in 25% of all possible environments. King Binoka is also attested as having copies of *i* between a nominal subject and a predicate, e.g.

Miss Stlevens he good man, woman he good man, boy he good man; all good man My patha he go, my uncle

he go, my cutcheons he go, Miss Stlevens he go: all go.
[Stevenson 1900:345]

Of twenty subject plus predicate constructions in King Binoka's speech, he separates the subject and the predicate with *i* in thirteen instances, i.e. 65% of the time. This compares with my own count of contemporary Sandalwood English predicate constructions marked by *i* of 55%, which is roughly of the same order (Crowley 1990:243). Thus, even if early South Seas Jargon did not have a predicate marker, it appears to have developed later in Micronesia, again contradicting Clark's claim that South Seas Jargon did not change significantly outside the Melanesian area between the time of its initial establishment and its eventual decline.

There are some other features of later Pacific Pidgins present in King Binoka's speech which Clark did not refer to in his study. The use of *long* as a spatial preposition appears to be a later Melanesian development, with early South Seas Jargon spatial noun phrases being consistently marked by zero (Crowley 1990:196). King Binoka frequently also used zero to mark location and goal, so perhaps this is another feature that should be added to Clark's inventory of South Seas Jargon features:

I send him away ship⁵. [Stevenson 1900:299]

All go schooner. [Stevenson 1900:346]

In modern Bislama and Solomons Pijin, the adverbial *mobeta* 'preferably/ought' is used, e.g.

Mobeta yumi no go.

'We ought not to go.'

This does not occur in the corpus of South Seas Jargon material referred to by Clark, but it does occur frequently in King Binoka's speech in ways that are similar to, though not identical with modern usage in Melanesian Pidgins:

Tuppoti you mi'take, I 'peakee you. Mo' betta. [Stevenson 1900:296]

This suggests that perhaps *mobeta* should also be added to Clark's inventory of South Seas Jargon features.

⁵ From the context, it is clear that this means 'I sent him away on a ship'.

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Another interesting example involves what was destined to become the adjectival and pronominal suffix *-fala*. Clark (1979-80:40) regards this as a later Melanesian development, but Stevenson's cook records this from an Abemaman commoner as a pronominal suffix in a form that was not destined to survive into any variety of modern Melanesian Pidgin:

Him fella along hole plenny sick, catchem die. [MacCallum 1934, quoted in Keesing (1988:47) without page reference]

Keesing (1988:47) himself concedes that this could have been a recorder's error - and this source was published fifty years after the events that are being quoted - so even if *-fala* was present in the Central Pacific by the 1870s we need not assume that it was necessarily present in early South Seas Jargon. It too could have diffused later from Melanesian Pidgin to the Central Pacific.

Despite the suggestions that some features of later Melanesian Pidgins may have diffused to the Central Pacific, there are many well attested features of Melanesian Pidgins for which there is no evidence of their having spread. Thus, King Binoka did not use the interrogative *wanem* 'what', the pronominal quantifier *olgeta* 'all', Head + Modifier nominal constructions based on the *man-bus* pattern and the spatial preposition *long* (Clark 1979-80:40). If diffusion is to be invoked to account for the presence of later features in King Binoka's speech, this diffusion apparently operated selectively.

5 King Binoka's speech - jargon or pidgin?

The appearance of Keesing's (1988) book *Melanesian Pidgin and the Oceanic Substrate* has opened up a debate on the precise nature of what we have been referring to as 'South Seas Jargon'. While Clark (1979-80) proposes the cautious view that while we might expect this to have been structurally both highly restricted and highly variable, the documentary evidence is too restricted to allow us to decide conclusively whether this was indeed the case, or whether a somewhat more elaborated and stable lingua franca had emerged. Despite his caution on these grounds, he does come down in the end in favour of assuming a form of speech that lay somewhere between the non-structured interlanguage of learners and a restricted pidgin (Clark 1979-80:32). Mühlhäusler (1979:56-59), however, assigns this lingua franca unam-

biguously to what he refers to specifically as a 'jargon', a restricted and highly unsystematic form of communication. Keesing (1988:1325) argues that even before it penetrated into southern Melanesia and developed into Sandalwood English, 'South Seas English', especially as it was spoken in the Central Pacific, including Abemama, was structurally much more stable and elaborated than has so far been accepted.

It is only because the documentary evidence is so poor that this debate has been able to emerge. From what we have seen of the circumstances under which 'South Seas English' became established on Abemama, with local women satisfying the sexual needs of European sailors as part of an organised business, Keesing's (1988:21) argument of a creolising community seems plausible on a priori grounds. However, there is no clear indication that there were mixed-race children, or that any children that might have been born in these sorts of circumstances grew up with their fathers. After the restriction on trading by King Baiteke in 1851, contact between the local population and European sailors was severely restricted, and shipboard prostitution only involved short-term arrangements.

King Binoka's speech will unfortunately not definitively resolve the controversy about the nature of 'South Seas English' either. To do this, we would need to have similarly detailed observations on the speech of his father, King Baiteke (if in fact he spoke 'South Seas English'), or his father's trading masters and we do not have this. Alternatively, we would need to have clear evidence that King Binoka acquired his own knowledge as a young child.

One thing that we can probably assume is that early 'South Seas English', whether it was a pidgin or a jargon, would not have been more stable and elaborated than the speech of King Binoka, and that it could only have been as stable and elaborated, or less so. Thus, it is still of some importance to attempt to determine the precise nature of King Binoka's speech.

As we have seen, King Binoka's speech certainly exhibits a wide range of diagnostic South Seas Jargon structural and lexical features, as defined by Clark. There is some evidence, with respect to the behaviour of *tumas*, *blong* and *i*, and possibly some other features as well, that King Binoka's speech also included some features that probably represent later developments in Melanesia. However, there is no conclusive proof to indicate whether speakers in the Central Pacific in-

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herited these from an earlier elaborated and stable pidgin, or whether they had diffused later by means of shipboard contact with contemporary Sandalwood English. Thus, early South Seas Jargon could still have been structurally restricted, having become more expanded by the time that King Binoka learned to speak it, assuming that he learned it in the 1870s.

The other important factor to consider is that of structural stability. I have already referred to variability in the distribution of NP + VP and NP : VP constructions in King Binoka's speech. There is also variability in possessive constructions, with *blong mi* alternating with *mai* in the first person singular. Subject pronouns are sporadically dropped, e.g.

My chieps no 'peak do what I talk. [Stevenson 1900:299]

Despite this evidence of structural variability in King Binoka's speech, however, the corpus is still too small to allow us to conclude that he was a speaker of an unstable jargon (or, indeed, an interlanguage) rather than a stable pidgin. A similarly small sample of the ordinary speech of any individual in any language would probably end up producing a very messy looking grammar. Most of the kinds of variability that we find in King Binoka's speech are also evident in documentary sources reflecting the speech of Melanesians, so this does not necessarily indicate that early 'South Seas Jargon' was any more unsystematic than other varieties of Pidgin in the Pacific. In any case, the 'queer' and 'personal' nature of King Binoka's speech, and his unusually large vocabulary, has already been referred to, and observations such as these may well indicate that King Binoka anglicised much more than his subjects, who may have spoken a more stable *lingua franca*.

Keesing (1988:25) argues that a 'relatively developed Pacific *lingua franca*' was introduced into southern Melanesia in the 1840s, and that the 'South Seas Jargon' widely referred to in the literature was structurally rather more complex and more stabilised than other scholars have allowed in the past. His contention cannot be proven or disproven, however, in the absence of substantial documentary evidence. King Binoka's corpus comes nearest to being substantial enough. While his reported utterances do suggest that there may have been a degree of grammatical evolution in South Seas Jargon during its lifespan over and above what has been accepted by others, the proposition that early

South Seas Jargon was structurally relatively developed still remains unproven as King Binoka's speech most probably dates from three decades later than the crucial formative years of the lingua franca.

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