CONVERSATIONS WITH CHRIS

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I knew Chris Corne only through his words. They were enough to make me feel like I knew him personally, and like I had lost a friend when I heard of his death. The words, however, are all still around now, and, as it turns out, still provide me with plenty of food for thought. I'll use these words here to express who he was to me, and what he has left me with: papers, email messages—with subject headers such as 'Miracles'[1] and closing lines I did not always understand such as 'rounout moman sibondjele'—gratitude, and a big debt. I was already once before at a loss for how to thank him for having helped me out, a perfect stranger, with such fervour, wit and kindness:

RS.[2] I'm almost overwhelmed by this helpfulness traveling over the net.
CC. No, that's OK, you're working on things that appear to be directly relevant to stuff I'm interested in. Ergo, if I'm as helpful as I can be now, then there is a possibility that you may remember this when you have written your stuff up, and send me a copy. This cynical honesty ought to fix any feelings of being overwhelmed you may have... But seriously, I would appreciate being kept informed.

Cynical honesty may be better called generosity and graciousness. The problem now is that I can't send him a copy to keep him informed, despite the fact that I do remember him. With this short paper I nevertheless try to make good in a small way on the debt by continuing to think through some of the insights he

provided me with. I hope to reflect who he was by letting him speak for himself.

I met Chris through his online paper *The Melanesian character of Tayo,* hosted at Parkvall's recently defunct CreoList Archives.[3] I was blown away by reading it and wrote to him:

RS.   Thank you for your very interesting on-line paper on Tayo.
CC.   You seem to be the only person who's read it!

In the unlikely event that this remark bears any truth at all, his paper—a revised extract from Corne (1995)—deals with several areas of Tayo grammar, comparing and contrasting these with Cèmuhî and Drubéa substrate languages, and with the French lexifier. He begins with a description of Tayo pronouns and shows that while forms are derived from French strings and while the basic semantic and syntactic organisation is Kanak, certain features, such as the existence of an 'unmarked dependent & subject index pronoun' *le*, cannot be traced back to other languages, thereby establishing the idea that innovation plays a crucial role in Tayo grammar. In order to assess whether these findings can be generalised, he then moves through relativisation and thematisation, interrogatives, imperatives, existentials and causatives, always pointing out parallels to Melanesian languages and French and always emphasising the clear Tayo innovations, as well as ongoing changes in the language. He concludes that '[t]he areas of grammar studied here have shown that Tayo is in no way a modification of French, nor a relexification of a Kanak language, but that it is a new creation which is essentially Kanak in inspiration' (Corne 1997: 16).

I, on the other side of the globe, in the isolation of the snowy Canadian countryside, was working hard on my MA thesis, trying to account for the morphology of the personal pronouns of Solomon Islands Pijin (SIP). I was similarly faced with the insufficiency of a straightforward calquing or relexification explanation, finding that morphology was a completely innovative piece of language genius. Nowhere was it as clearly phrased or as well put as in Corne's paper, except that it dealt not with Pijin but with Tayo: 'The Tayo pronominal system is thus a new creation whose general inspiration is clearly Kanak but the detail of which is unique to Tayo' (Corne 1997: 5). It could as well have read 'The Pijin pronominal system is thus a new creation whose general inspiration is clearly Eastern Oceanic but the detail of which is unique to Pijin'.

However, I was ignorant of Tayo. I did not know where this creole was spoken, let alone by how many people, and since when. I asked, and Chris answered: by about two thousand people in New Caledonia, half of them in the village of St. Louis, established in 1860, with the first monolingual generation dating back to at least 1920. From the first instance, he was as friendly and egalitarian as he was deadpan:

RS. Is there any good excuse for someone who is supposed to research the Melanesian Pidgin field to know nothing about the existence of Tayo?

CC. None whatsoever. Bibliography attached.

He then quickly asked for and immediately read my manuscript (Selbach 1997), in which I make the point that the Pijin pronominal system (Table 1) is morphologically innovative in that it is, unlike its input languages (English and Eastern Oceanic languages), maximally regular and economical. Person morphemes (*mi, iu, hem*) that stand alone in the singular combine with a number morpheme (-*fala*) for the plural pronouns, which can be further specified for dual or trial by infixing of morphemes -*tu*- or -*tri*-. This yields a morphologically and lexically efficient and economical fifteen-pronoun paradigm, with only one suppletive form, in the third person plural, *oketa*, which also doubles as the nominal plural marker.

The categories these pronouns describe are identical to those found in the Eastern Oceanic languages of the substrate (Keesing 1988), but the morphology is not based on Austronesian patterns, where singular and plural pronouns typically form a dichotomy of morphologically distinct sets (Wiesemann 1986: 3). That is, while the equivalents for numerals 'two' and 'three' may form dual and trial pronoun forms as in Pijin, in Austronesian languages, these numerals typically attach to a plural base unrelated to the singular base. In Pijin, English lexemes that were available for labeling the categories of Melanesian—such as *we* or *us*—were rejected, cf. Keesing (1988). Instead, new forms —such as *mifala*—were created with structures which are unique to Pijin. Hence, observations on different parts of the grammar of different languages (primarily of syntax for Tayo, morphology for Pijin) had led us to very similar conclusions. Tayo and Pijin were, it seemed, each unique in comparison to their lexifiers and substrates.

Table 1 juxtaposes strong pronouns of the creoles and their input languages. It compares what Keesing calls 'focal pronouns' of Pijin, what Corne terms 'independent pronouns' of Tayo, the object and emphatic pronouns of English

and French, and the focal pronouns as reconstructed for Proto-Eastern Oceanic (PEO) by Pawley (72). Cèmuhî and Drubéa, the two substrate languages which Corne (1995, 1997) uses in his comparative study, are classified (in *Ethnologue*, http://www.ethnologue.com/) as members of the Remote Oceanic sub-branch of Eastern Oceanic. Keesing (1988) in turn shows that the significant bulk of substrate languages for Solomons Pijin are South East Solomonic languages, the second sub-branch of Eastern Oceanic; he uses reconstructed PEO to demonstrate these languages' commonalities with Solomons Pijin. I here use it as the common ancestor of both groups of substrate languages, Remote Oceanic and South East Solomonic, and thereby as representative of both creoles' substrates. Following entirely Keesing's line of reasoning and argumentation for Solomons Pijin, I suggest that PEO can be useful in such a table of comparison.[4]

	SIP	TAYO	ENGLISH	FRENCH	PEO
1sg	mi	mwa	me	moi	*i-nau
2sg	iu	twa	you	toi	*i-koe
3sg (an.)	hem,	lia, (lya)	him/her	lui/elle	*inia (*ia)
(inan.)	(Ø)	sa	it	ça	
1excl.dl[5]	mitufala	(nude tu sel)			*kamidua
1incl.dl	iumitufala	nude			*kitadua
2dl	iutufala	ude			*kamudua
3dl	tufala	lede			*kidadua
1excl.pl	mifala	nu	us	nous	*kami
1incl.pl	iumi				*kita
2pl	iufala	uso	you	vous	*kamiu
3pl	oketa	sola, (lesot)	them	eux, (ceux-là)	*kida

Table 1: Independent (or Focal) Pronouns[6]

Table 1 shows that, as far as the categories of personal pronouns go, the three Melanesian languages Solomons Pijin, Tayo and Proto Eastern Oceanic conceptually resemble each other more than they do the European ones,

English and French. Both creoles retain the dual also found in the substrate. They both ignore, or otherwise reject, gender distinctions made in both lexifiers. At best, the tripartite gender distinction in English and French is replaced by an animate-inanimate distinction in Tayo and Pijin. This distinction is made more obviously in Tayo with its separate lexical forms *lia* (also *lya*) and *sa*, and more subtly in SIP by a tendency to omit the pronoun with inanimate referents, meaning a strong preference of third person pronouns (*hem*, *oketa*) to refer to animates.[7] In short, as Corne (1997: 4) says of Tayo: 'the semantic organisation of the system is essentially Kanak'.[8]

However, while this system transfer is almost perfect, there are exceptions to the substrate rule, and there are differences in what Tayo and SIP chose to transfer or retain. Pijin is more conservative of Eastern Oceanic patterns, as it retains the inclusive-exclusive distinction with pronouns *iumi* and *mifala*. Pijin also, arguably, has lexicalised trial pronouns (*mitrifala, iutrifala*, etc.). Tayo has not. Tayo's substrate languages Cèmuhî and Drubéa also have inclusive and exclusive forms, but Tayo conflates the categories with one general first person plural pronoun *nu*. The periphrastic *nude tu sel* available for expressing the dual exclusive appears to be an optional alternative in Tayo. Hence, despite the obviously strong Melanesian influence of Eastern Oceanic language patterns, both creoles have their own idiosyncracies regarding category transfer. This selectivity again bears on the autonomy of the creoles. What we have here is not 'a matter of the straightforward relexification of a Kanak language' (Corne 1997: 4).

In discussing pronominal syntax, Corne points out more such instances of Tayo innovation that set it off slightly from the fundamentally Melanesian base. While the system is divided into dependent and independent elements as in Cèmuhî and Drubéa, the 'subject index' *le* is one such innovation that 'seems not to have any direct, single model' (Corne 1997: 4) in Cèmuhî or Drubéa. It is an innovation, according to Chris, since the pronominal syntax system of Cèmuhî is more complex, and that of Drubéa less complex.

At the same time, it is once again striking to at least superficially compare the two Melanesian languages in this area of syntax: Corne's 'subject index pronouns' are the terminological counterparts to Keesing's 'subject referencing pronouns' (SRP).[9] These both stand in contrast to a second set of pronouns which Corne terms 'independent pronouns', and which Keesing calls 'focal pronouns' (FP). Furthermore, the relationship between the phonological shapes of the two sets within each language is comparable, as in both cases the independent/ focal pronouns are either (a) phonologically identical with the

respective index/reference/copy pronoun counterpart, or (b) phonologically expanded with respect to the index form. The following examples illustrate this: (a) Tayo *nu* (1pl. independent) and *nu* (1pl. subject index); Pijin *mi* (1sg. FP) and *mi* (1sg. SRP); (b) Tayo *mwa* (1sg. independent) and *ma* (1sg. subject index); Pijin *hem* (3sg. FP) and *i* (3sg./pl. SRP). Clearly, there is a shared pattern where phonological focussing (in their being literally more pronounced) corresponds to syntactic focussing of independent/focal pronouns.

The third pronominal category which Corne describes for Tayo—that of the unmarked dependent and subject index pronoun *le*—would then appear to remain unmatched in Pijin. Nevertheless, this one-member category bears several at least superficial resemblances to Melanesian Pidgin's contentious 'predicate marker' *i*, known itself under such various names as agreement marker, resumptive pronoun, and *modalité personelle* (see Crowley 2000), and included by Keesing (1988) in the SRP category. This general third person subject referencing pronoun *i* of Pijin is unmarked for number and perhaps underspecified for person features, and is thus the least marked of the SRPs. Similarly, Tayo '[*le*] is unmarked for number and person, and is always a subject index' (Corne 1997: 2). Hence there is some descriptive resemblance and partial terminological overlap between the unmarked subject index *le* and the subject referencing pronoun *i*.[10]

It may also be of interest to compare the two forms themselves:

CC.   I agree with you that [...] you have to look at the new system as well as its constituent bits and pieces.

Apart from being among the shortest, phonologically least salient members of the pronoun paradigms, both *i* and *le* are the only two pronouns that must find their origin in their lexifier's subject pronouns, rather than the object pronouns; *i* is historically derived from English *he* (Keesing 1988), *le* from French *il est* (Corne 1997: 6).

Lastly and perhaps least surprisingly, as far as creoles go, both languages build possessive pronouns periphrastically: compare Tayo *pu mwa* and Pijin *blo mi* to French *mon/ma/mes* and English *my*. Once again, here morpho-syntactically, Tayo and SIP have more in common with each other syntactically than with their lexifiers.

Why, with such doubly strong substrate evidence on hand, did we concentrate on innovation and creativity? Corne (1997: 17) insists '[t]his view [relexification] captures a part of the truth. [...] But it is only a *partial view*,

since no account is taken either of innovations or of the French [or English] input in the formation of the new language' (my addition in square brackets; emphasis mine).

RS.   ie. to remind that not all is substrate, superstrate or UG.
CC.   Hear hear!

These innovations we continued to stress, seeing in them important keys to understanding language contact. Chris called me a natural recruit to Baker's creativist approach, and I was flattered—to be a natural recruit, and then to something so noble-sounding! However, in our exuberance for the uniqueness of Tayo and Pijin, our discussion ignored their sameness. Surely, we neglected this sameness because we were both sufficiently convinced by ample evidence from the Pacific that a basic substrate hypothesis should serve as the point of departure. Corne (1995) makes this very clear by his use of the term 'Melanesian typology' in describing Tayo. And perhaps we continued to stress innovation because we hoped that innovation might provide a key to understanding the mechanisms within the process of language contact and creolisation. While the innovation may appear a small detail, it is a highly significant one that can give a tiny bit more insight into the minds of speakers who have something to communicate, and who sustain mental concepts across the different languages that they speak. I for one believe this still. Nevertheless, I regret not having discussed the similarities, the partial view, with Chris, as it now seems to me to open the door to a host of important questions.

Firstly, it occurs to me that these Pacific languages—New Caledonian French-lexified Tayo and Solomon Islands English-lexified Pijin—provide a case where the term 'creole' ceases to be the 'fundamentally useless' one that it can be made it out to be, as in Corne (1995: 121). Rather, it can become a useful term to discuss languages that have something in common, and which have evolved in comparable environments, circumstance and times, thereby allowing us to meaningfully compare what speakers and language creators do with the tools that the input languages make potentially available. This, of course, brings us to the question of Transfer Constraints (Siegel 1999): When creoles do not do the same thing with those tools available from their speakers' first languages, then shall we find principled reasons, such as relevance or congruence (Siegel 1999) to account for this difference? Why, for instance, did Tayo speakers not salvage the inclusive/exclusive distinction while Pijin

speakers did? Might we be tempted to propose that adequate congruence was easier to come by with English tools than French, or alternatively, can we search for a reason that in the Solomon Islands, inclusion or exclusion has greater (perhaps social) relevance than in New Caledonia? Or, maybe even more interestingly, are there in some cases absolutely no explanations with sufficient predictive strength, and must we leave some things up to chance, and the whim of speakers?

Since the majority of vernacular pronoun features are treated with the same respect for tradition, Tayo and Pijin may provide further evidence for the strength of areal factors, cf. Ross (2001) on 'metatypy' in the Pacific. There are marked features in the two creoles' pronominal systems which are areally strong, and not present in the lexifiers, such as dual number and animacy distinctions. Tayo and Solomons Pijin provide excellent testing grounds which, at the very least, provide a robust example of the instantiation of substrate hypotheses of creole genesis. This is true when each case is taken separately, as Corne and Keesing have done, but is doubly strengthened when they are taken together as Pacific creoles.

An irony that threatens to emerge even from a meaningful and comprehensive linguistic comparison of the two creoles—New Caledonian French-lexified Tayo and Solomon Islands English-lexified Pijin— is that even if such a study revealed significant parallels in the grammars of Pijin and Tayo, we might come no further along, but rather full circle, in any attempt to account for creole genesis with the classical theories. While superstrate and bioprogram hypotheses would continue to have difficulty holding up in the Pacific, we would still be faced with choosing between substrate, diffusion or revised monogenetic theories (among others).

I wish I could have asked Chris about these matters. For one thing, he'd rule out a Pacific monogenetic explanation appealing to the shared history of the two languages and perhaps influenced by an earlier Pacific nautical pidgin (Keesing 1988). Corne (1995) makes clear in the extended version of the paper that Tayo has had an isolated history, and in his emails he expressed his (apparently independently motivated) scepticism for Roger Keesing's thesis. I asked why:

CC.   The basic problem seems to be K's idea that there was a central-Pacific floating community that generated the forerunner of MPE, whereas it's pretty clear that the real action was taking place in Oz.

Nevertheless, he did not attempt to sway me from my convictions. Instead, he pointed out something very important: language influence can happen at any point. Regardless of the historical situation, this point is well taken and must indeed be appreciated. The couching in social activity of language is not expendable:

CC.   language is a social phenomenon as much as a linguistic one, esp. so when what we are talking about is the creation of a new system to solve an urgent communication problem.

Creoles are best defined in sociohistorical terms, and indeed, there are striking sociolinguistic parallels between Tayo and Pijin as well. Children have a tendency to simplify their parents' language, whether Tayo or Pijin. According to Jourdan (1985, 1989: 27), reduction and streamlining are the major contributions that children make in the continued shaping of Pijin. Corne (1997: 1) describes phonologically reduced forms preferred by younger speakers for several Tayo pronouns, and finds that speakers under forty do not use the dual pronouns at all.

The continued presence of the lexifier, particularly in the urban centers—French in St. Louis, English in Honiara—adds bilingualism as an important influence on the new languages. Young speakers of Tayo gallicise, young speakers of Pijin anglicise. Corne (1997: 5) observes: '[T]he usage of the different age groups at St. Louis today shows a system which is changing, at least partly because of French/Tayo bilingualism.' Compare this to Jourdan (1989: 34) on Pijin as spoken in Honiara: '[T]he influence of English is not linked to creolization (nativization) of Pijin, but rather to the bilingualism of its speakers and their high degree of fluency and contact with English.' Yet '[u]rban Pijin is developing through exploitation of its own grammatical system' (Jourdan 1985).[11] Apparently, it is still too soon to get away from Tayo/Pijin parallels and commonalities. Indeed, postcolonial after-effects are being felt in some of the same ways. Corne will again most aptly conclude, as he does his on-line paper:

It may be noted in passing that the settlement and socio-demographic history of St-Louis and the linguistic data advanced here provide mutual support: the social history prefigures the results of the linguistic analysis, just as these last reflect that history. Corne (1997: 17)

One thing seems clear: the social and linguistic similarities of Tayo and Pijin are deserving of thorough empirical plodding before we can take the above ideas any further. I try to heed the following words of warning Chris threw firmly at me:

CC.   That's about the limit of my tiny brain. I'll have to leave all them big questions to fellas like you to play with.

Such sarcasm from the same man who stated simply:

CC.   creolisation and decreolisation are the exact same process, in which congruence—a specious surface similarity—seems to play a big role.

and who has thus supplied some of the most insightful and daring answers I've heard: it's in the detail; it's in the speech act; it's in prestige and social factors.

I would have loved to meet him in person. I very much anticipated one such occasion, the symposium *Language Contact and Change: When Languages Meet* at the 1998 Australian Linguistics Institute in Brisbane. Chris Corne was to me the most anticipated person at the Brisbane event. Rebel and trickster, he sent an audiocassette and overheads instead, and thus somehow kept us guessing.

Chris threw me a lifeline when I needed one, as I think he keenly saw my isolation and need for guidance, and a laugh. His taking me seriously, offering a hand to guide me along, telling me what to urgently read and who to immediately contact, his openness to discussion, the thoroughness and humour in his explanations—all this made me imagine him as the representative of a grand, invisible community of scholars. Chris himself never materialised in front of me, but the grand research community certainly has. I have since met many of its members and accepted their hospitality and generosity. They are wonderful people and researchers, and those around me now are a constant reminder of the qualities that make Pacific scholars stand out. The most important lessons from Chris are that humanity and research go together. His interest was content-oriented; he cared about his work and about others interested in it. He also had serious fun with it, and always played down his role. Our conversation ends like this:

CC.   Rachel, Sorry, what sarcasm was that? The bit about the 'big questions'? Yeah, it's sarcasm if you like, but I guess I meant to imply that I for one do not feel

competent to deal with such matters, I'm an 'empirical plodder', in Bickerton's immortal words.

Cayenne is the main town in French Guiana, South America. Rounout < un autre, moman < moment, si/bon/dje/le < si bon dieu (vou)ler [veut]. I.e. Au revoir, Deo volente.

Tasol.

Babaille,

Chris

Notes

1 When Chris' 'ol' Babbage engine' had successfully sent or received an attachment, rather than the usual 'unreadable garbage'.

2 Emails exchanged with Chris during the spring of 1998 guide this new discussion. They are inserted unchanged, except for the addition of initials RS for myself, and CC for Chris, replacing his ### system.

3 Mikael Parkvall assures me that the archive material should soon become available online again, though the location is not yet known. Until then, I would refer the reader to Corne (1995). Without these archives (formerly at http://creole.ling.su.se/creole/Papers_On-line.html#Tayo) and Mikael's initial help in contacting Chris Corne, none of the following conversation is likely to have happened.

4 I nevertheless use it here with some reservation, as I believe Chris would probably dislike this simplistic use of a reconstructed protolanguage. He paid great attention to detail and gave me the distinct impression that he preferred reality to theoretical constructions. He may have also objected to a common Eastern Oceanic ancestor of Tayo and Pijin substrates.

5 PEO and arguably SIP also have trial forms for all persons that are not included in this table for reasons of simplicity.

6 Data in this table (and the following discussion) for Tayo from Corne (1997), for SIP from Keesing (1988), and for PEO from Pawley (1972) as cited in Keesing (1988: 71). Alternative or optional forms are given in parentheses.

7 In SIP all pronouns may be dropped. See Meyerhoff (2000) for an in-depth investigation of what governs the dropping of personal pronouns in Bislama, a sister dialect of Pijin.

8 Keesing (1988) has, of course, stressed all these points for Solomons Pijin.

9 Corne (1995: 126) specifically considers and rules out: 'pronominal trace', 'resumptive pronouns', 'agreement particles', and 'clitic pronouns' as alternate terms for 'subject index'. He accepts as alternative designation 'predicate marker' and 'copy pronoun'. Keesing (1987) still uses 'copy pronoun' as an acceptable equivalent term for 'SRP', but retracts this in a note following the paper.

10 Especially given the debate and multiplicity of analyses in decades of Melanesian Pidgin predicate marking literature (cf. Crowley 2000), it is at least conceivable that some of the disparity between Melanesian Pidgin's two and Tayo's three pronoun categories may lie partly in the analyses and could be theoretically reconciled. I would absolutely not venture to propose anything close to a unified account of personal pronouns and predicate marking for Tayo and Pijin. I merely wish to point out the at least superficial resemblances in the descriptions given by Corne and Keesing of the systems in Tayo and Pijin respectively. I base this suggestion on very limited information, and do not consider the full range of functions of *i* and *le*.

11 Jourdan (2000) follows up on the argument of the autonomy of Pijin from a different avenue, that of Pijin kinship terminology.

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