

PAPUANS AND PIDGIN: ASPECTS OF BILINGUALISM IN NEW GUINEA\*

D.C. Laycock

(Australian National University)

Bilingualism in a multilingual situation as found in New Guinea can be studied from a number of different aspects, only a few of which are touched on here. It is only in recent years however that extensive bilingualism has been the case; to understand why, it is necessary to look at the linguistic background.

In New Guinea and the surrounding islands there are upwards of five hundred, possibly as many as a thousand, different languages, showing every possible relationship to each other from near-dialect to 'probably unrelated'. In this situation one would expect a fair amount of bilingualism, but in fact in pre-European times native knowledge of other languages was apparently not as extensive as was, for example, the knowledge of other languages on the part of Australian aboriginals. There are a number of reasons for this:— (1) there was often extreme dissimilarity between neighbouring languages; (2) the major language groups in New Guinea are relatively large, larger than in Australia, so that it was possible to travel a fair distance without encountering very different tongues; (3) many factors operate against contact between different linguistic groups. In the Sepik area the main social unit was the village, and even trading with other villages of the same linguistic community was fraught with suspicion. Trading was carried on across linguistic groups—often in the form of 'silent trading', where, for example, hills natives would lay down their yams and sweet potato against the fish from the river, until an agreement was reached—but the more normal social interaction with other linguistic groups was warfare, where a knowledge of the other language was not necessary.

Nevertheless, many natives did pick up at least smatterings of neighbouring languages, sometimes of several different languages, and there existed in native communities, as with us, a small proportion of people with an interest in foreign cultures and languages. In complex linguistic areas like the Sepik it was customary for young boys to be exchanged between villages at the age of about ten, so that they could grow up bilingual and mediate in disputes. But the knowledge of foreign languages was individual and restricted, so that comparatively little interlinguistic borrowing seems to have taken place. The few examples of such borrowing that I did find are given in the next paragraph.

The village of Ulupu, in the Maprik subdistrict, is situated at the junction of Abelam, Boikin and Arapesh communities, and considerable intermarriage has taken place, with the result that lexical items from all three languages are used by all inhabitants of the village. Such cases are, however, rare. In a relatively homogeneous culture like New Guinea—and here one must interpret the word 'relatively' fairly widely—there is little incentive to borrow from another language. One can find a

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sprinkling of words dealing with cultural innovations:— the word for 'pig', which has a /b-r/ root in a surprisingly large number of New Guinea languages; words for 'coconut', traceable from a form / tɔpma / all the way up the Sepik from the coast to the headwaters; words for 'tobacco', borrowed ultimately from Portuguese and then from language to language in a chain running diagonally from Vogelkop across the island; words for 'bow' and 'arrow', borrowed in fairly recent times by some Sepik river groups; words for 'canoe', borrowed by hills natives who have moved to the river (probably in the last 150 years); words for 'house' and 'village', that were almost certainly taken over at the same time as particular house-types and village-layouts. Abelam has succeeded in imposing on the unrelated Kwoma its words for 'tree', 'grandfather', 'father', two of the personal pronouns, and in all some 20 per cent of the basic vocabulary list—a fact very damaging to theories of the stability of non-cultural vocabulary. A few words from Iatmul, especially those dealing with fish and fishing, have found their way into some of the languages to the north of the river, since Iatmul was used fairly extensively as a trade language.

But the real flood of foreign borrowings in New Guinea languages came with the spread of Pidgin. Pidgin was already established in Australian-held areas of New Guinea by 1900, and by 1910 German administrators in the northern half of the area were complaining that it was rapidly becoming the lingua franca of their region. After the first world war German influence was no longer felt, and Pidgin spread everywhere. The system of indentured labour, coupled with the pacifying of tribes and the greater freedom of movement permitted by the *pax britannica*, brought Pidgin to areas where few or even no Europeans had ever been. Today, especially, most natives learn Pidgin from other natives, not from Europeans.

Pidgin, as the new lingua franca, served as the vehicle for the importation of new words connected with European culture, from bible stories to bully beef; and in many areas it acquired a prestige value it has not yet lost. Elementary schooling is mostly given in Pidgin, in spite of United Nations opposition, and most men in all but the remotest areas are bilingual in Pidgin. Young men often use Pidgin to show off in front of the women. Women, on the other hand, if they live in villages at any distance from a Government station, may acquire no more than a smattering of Pidgin, and listening to them speaking their own languages affords a useful yardstick for measuring which Pidgin words have been definitely assimilated.

Pidgin is fairly easily acquired by speakers of both Melanesian and Papuan languages. There are few features of the simplified structure of Pidgin that are not found in most of the native languages, and with the exception of a few consonant clusters and frequent one-for-one consonant substitution there is little problem in phonology. But this ease of learning can blind one to the underlying dissimilarities of structure.

The data for this paper consists of five brief texts (pp.49-51) in the Wosera dialect of Abelam,<sup>1</sup> one of the main languages of the Sepik District. These texts were recorded during fieldwork in 1959-60. Each contains one or more significant borrowings from Pidgin. All are followed by translations into English, and all except the last are accompanied by interlinear translation.

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1. For a full treatment of Abelam phonology and a sketch of the grammar see Laycock 1965.

These texts show first of all the types of words borrowed. In *text 1* they are for the most part isolated lexical items for which there are no native equivalents. One of these /bikples-bΔ/, is assimilated to the extent of taking a native locational affix. *Text 2* shows examples of Pidgin verb borrowings with Abelam past-tense markers. In this case there are also satisfactory Abelam equivalents for the borrowed words. *Text 3* reveals cultural interaction between myself and the informant. I had asked, in Pidgin, for a /stori/, and the word appears in the first sentence of the text, in spite of the fact that there is a good Abelam equivalent.

In *text 4* the borrowings have penetrated deeper levels of the grammar. The Pidgin construction /save/ + Verb for habitual action replaces the Abelam construction Verb Base + /rə/ ('stay') + Tense/Person Suffixes. This "analytic" replacement of native "synthetic" constructions is also found in conditional clauses, where Pidgin /sapos/ 'if' is used with a native indicative form; the Abelam construction uses a conditional verb form without a conjunction. Finally, *text 5* shows the large number of borrowings that can occur in particular contexts. Here the informant is speaking of church matters, and the influence of Sunday-school Pidgin is very strong.

It is however at the phonemic level that Pidgin borrowings are most interesting. Pronunciation of Pidgin words presents no difficulties to the Abelam speaker, since *phonetically* the languages are similar; but the *phonemic* interpretations of the spoken forms in the two languages are quite different. In other words, there is what may be termed *allophonic overlap* between the two languages. *Table 1* (p. 47) shows the phonemic systems of Pidgin and Abelam, in abbreviated form. Abelam is unusual in its lack, at the phonemic level, of vowels with high tongue position; their place is taken by vocoid allophones of semivowels, or vowel-semivowel sequences. This means that Pidgin words in Abelam are reinterpreted in terms of Abelam phonemics, to the extent of considerably modifying their phonemic shape.<sup>2</sup> *Table 2* (p. 48) lists the borrowed Pidgin words in the Abelam texts, with their Abelam phonemic shapes.

A number of practical and theoretical problems arise from this matter of allophonic overlap. In the first place, in a practical Abelam orthography, should the borrowed words be spelt according to Abelam phonemics, or should they appear in their often misleading Pidgin guise? The question is complicated by factors such as the possibility of future literacy of Abelam speakers in Pidgin or English.

Secondly, at what stage can a borrowed word be regarded as fully assimilated into the borrowing language? Many Pidgin words betray their origin by unassimilable consonant clusters, but others are indistinguishable phonetically from Abelam words. If Abelam were freed at this stage from Pidgin influence, the Pidgin stratum could be discovered only by the nature of the borrowed vocabulary.

Thirdly, there is the possibility of changes being brought about in the Abelam phonemic system by Pidgin influence. Though the phonemic distribution of Abelam vowels postulated by this author may seem unusual, it is amply justified, at the present stage of Abelam, by structural considerations; but whether it can hold out against the pressure of the commoner 5-vowel system of Pidgin is another matter. The Abelam vowel-system is stable, in that it shows no internal tensions, but its very unusualness may force it to give way, by a process of analogic levelling. This however will remain

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2. Pidgin orthography, as used in this paper, is approximately phonemic.

to be seen; in this paper I have been more concerned to point up problems than to answer them.

## REFERENCE

LAYCOCK, D.C., 1965. *The Ndu Language Family (Sepik District, New Guinea)*. Linguistic Circle of Canberra Publications, Series C, No. 1, Canberra.

TABLE 1

## Phonemic Systems of Pidgin and Abelam

(Significant allophones are shown in parentheses)

PIDGIN						ABELAM				
<b>Consonants:</b>						<b>Consonants:</b>				
p	t	-	k			p	t	c [ts,s]	k	
b	d	-	g			b [mb]	d [nd]	j [ɲj]	g [ɾg]	
m	n	-	ŋ			m	n	ɸ	ŋ	
-	r	-	-			v [b]	r	l [l <sup>y</sup> ]	-	
-	l	-	-			-	-	-	-	
w [w,b]	s	y	h			w [w,u,u]	-	y [y,i,t]	-	
<b>Vowels:</b>						<b>Vowels:</b>				
i	e	a	o	u	(ə)	ə	ʌ	a	(y)	(w)
<b>Vowel Sequences:</b>						<b>Vowel and Semivowel Sequences:</b>				
i <sub>ɳ</sub>	i <sub>ɳ</sub>	i <sub>ɳ</sub> o	i <sub>ɳ</sub> u			əy [i:]	ʌy [ei]	ay [ai]		
a <sub>ɳ</sub>	a <sub>ɳ</sub>					əw [u:]	ʌw [ou]	aw [au]		
o <sub>ɳ</sub>						yə [y]	yʌ [yɛ]	ya [ya]		
						wə [w]	wʌ [wɔ]	wa [wa]		
<b>Consonant Sequences:</b>						<b>Consonant Sequences:</b>				
ŋg	(pr)	(tr)	(kr)			None except across syllable boundaries and in sequences of C+y or C+w				
(otherwise none except across syllable boundaries)										

TABLE 2: Pidgin Words in Abelam Phonemic Interpretation

Pidgin	Abelam	English
don	dawn	(proper name), 'Don'
pren	pəraɪn	'friend'
bikples	bykpeɪləɪc	'village'
liklik	lyklyk	'small'
hanwara	anwara	'stream'
orait	waraɪt	'well'
poto	bwaɪaɪw	'photo'
stesen	daɪcən	'station'
sambai	caɪwaɪ	'wait'
nambawan	nabaɪwan	'chief'
dokta	daɪkta	'doctor'
misis	mycəc	'white woman'
makim	maɪkɪm	'mark'
kamap	kaɪmaɪp	'come up'
stori	cəɪɪaɪwɪ	'story'
save	caɪvaɪ	'know, be accustomed'
hapmun	apɪmɪn	'fortnight'
pater	paɪaɪt	'priest'
sikul	cəɪkwɪ	'school'
haus lotu	awc laɪɪtw	'church'
pinis	pyɪnəc	'finish'
wonem taim	wanəm taɪm	'when'
marit	maɪrət	'marry'
brukim	bəɪrɪkɪm	'break'
stretim	cəɪtraɪtɪm	'straighten'
yu tu	yɪw tɪw	'you two'
i stap	yəɪstap	'continues'
kalap nabaut	kaɪlap nabaɪwt	'play around'
tambu	taɪbɪw	'type of shell'
pulim nating	pwɪɪm naɪtɪŋ	'exert pressure on'
hadwok	atɪwək	'work'
tumas	tɪwmaɪc	'too much'
god	gɪwəd	'God'
behain	byaɪn	'after'
yes	yəɪc	'yes'
mekim gut	maɪkɪm gɪwt	'rectify'
bikhet	bykaɪt	'stubborn'
kros	kwaraɪc	'angry'

## TEXTS

Pidgin or non-Abelam words are underlined; — — — indicates that a portion has been omitted; three levels of pause are indicated by . . . , // , # .

1. don wə pren yadəkə ɔrəkəm wavy vay kətydəkə ənə yk # yəy  
*Don my friend coming Seragum yams seeing they-dancing we-2 went going*
- bikplesbə vətəkŋəy ənə dəwly liklik hanwara nəkŋ pwtəkŋəy ənə wərək #  
*village-in seeing we-2 descending small stream one crossing we-2 ascended*
- wəry ənə wavy vətəy . . . orait poto keratakŋədəkə ənə gwəmələy yək #  
*ascending we-2 yams seeing well photo he-taking we-2 back came*
- yəy ənə stesin sambai gərəbɔw yadəkə ənə təpə gwəmələy wəyk — — —  
*coming we-2 station wait evening it-coming we-2 again back ascended*
- kətytəy yadəkə dəy nəbawan dokta dəkw misis wələ bət wəyəy tətəy  
*dancing they-making they head doctor his wife with they-2 ascending standing*
- wəyət poto yək # takwə kətydəkə bət poto yək # em tasol #  
*yam photo made women they-dancing they-2 photo made that is-all*

Translation: *My friend Don came and we went to see the yams and the people dancing. We went up and looked at the main village, came down, crossed a creek and went up again. There we saw the yams . . . Don took a photo and we came back. We waited at the station till evening, then went back up again — — — the people were dancing; the head doctor came up with his wife, and they stood around taking photos. They took photos of the women dancing. That is all.*

2. tay də dw makimwk takwə makimwk # yadəkə dəy dwtəkəwə wəbə  
*cutting he man marked woman marked having-done they people thus*
- kəməpmwk # em tasol #  
*arose that is-all*

Translation: *Having cut the tree he shaped a man and shaped a woman; human beings arose in this fashion. That is all.*

3. orait nanə gayna stori kəgə də raw #  
 well our village-of story thus it sits

Translation: This is a story of our village.

4. day save nak bapmw kətyw // nak gay save day hapmun kətykwa  
 they know one moon dance one village know they half-moon dance

day kapwk yawa # orait em tasol #  
 they not make well that is-all

Translation: Some villages are accustomed to dance a whole month, others (who do not do it right), usually dance a fortnight.

5. pater wgayba wadəkwa ywa gaba kwamwk # pater də wadəkwa baka ya  
sikulba tə # sikulba tay nəmwan yay yay wnat kamapbənw wakawtəkwa #  
 wne wakə yakwa ... haus-lotuba ... bənə ywawt ... dwtakwa wala yay  
orait wawtə yk pinis yadw wonem taim maritbənw ... wne wawtəkwa  
pater ... magway ... wawtəkway brukim marit yabənw # brukim marit  
 yay cəpəlak apəlak dw kwby fiən # wne lga wawtəkwa # yay wne wa  
stretimke haus-lotuba # haus-lotuba stretim yu tu maritbənw # marit  
kay i stap wkacalə rabənw # kalap nabaut yay nak dwby marit ...  
tambu kwaywtəkwa # tambu kwaywtəkwa bənət orait marit wga gayba #  
 gayba rapkabənw # kay fiənə kalap nabaut yay marit nak dw kykə  
marit wgeray fiənə kyafienw ... fiənə kyafienw # orait wne yaba  
 wawtəkway fiənə ramw yay gaba kwafiəga # ramw yay gaba kwafiəga #  
 wne lga wawtəkwa ramw yay gaba kwa baka tay // ramw yay gaba kwa  
 baka tay // baka may waty sikulba # sikulba mayatə ... ramw yay  
 gaba kwa baka tə # wgay yafiega nanə apa acat hadwok yakwa # baka  
 yay apa aca pulim nating yay ywa tabərəka nanə hadwok tumas yakwa //  
 nanə hadwok tumas yakwa # yay tay tay jəba yanagwa god papwynağwa #  
god papwynağwa nanat # --- də ban yanaga yay pater stretimke yaden  
 nanat # behain nanə gayba kwadəkwa # nanə gayba kwatay orait nanə  
 gay stretimke yay orait nanə makal fiən fiən fiəbalə sikulba takədəka //  
 takənaga təkwa # yes pater mekim gut yadəkwa nanat // nanə fiəbalat #  
 yadəkwa nanə bikhet yakwa ... paterət # paterət bikhetnagwa #  
 yanadawa pater nanat kros yadəkwa # ating em i inap liklik #

Sense translation: *The menstruating women used to stay in the women's house, but the priest objected: they should go to school. When two are to be married correctly in the church, their name is called out in the church, and I speak to the priest; if adultery is committed I speak to the priest, and he rectifies it in the church. Two married people should not play around; if you do this you will lose eternal life. I help in the gift exchange of shell-rings. Parents can no longer coerce their children; our parents made life too hard. We deceived God --- now the priest has come to straighten things out in our village and send our children to school. But some people are stubborn and make the priest angry with us. I think that is enough for now.*