

Review

Dutton, Tom. *Police Motu: iena sivarai (its story)*.

Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea Press. 1985.

xvi + 297 pp. Kina 13.95

Reviewed by Chris Come, University of Auckland.

Officially published in 1985, the 1987 appearance of this book marks a major step forward in the sociolinguistic history of the Pacific region. Along with Jeff Siegel's contemporaneous publication on the contact languages of Fiji (Siegel 1987), it is an important contribution to the study of pidgin and creole languages generally, not least because it deals with the emergence and stabilization of a pidginized form of a non-European language. It is not that such languages are rare, but rather that very few of them have been the subject of scholarly attention (cf. Mühlhäusler 1986a, b).

In his Preface, Dutton states that his intention was to make his history 'as intelligible as possible to the non-specialist' while preserving its academic credentials (xi). He can claim success with respect to the latter, and a very good measure of success in the matter of intelligibility for the non-specialist; but I suspect that Chapter One 'The language today' (1-19) and Chapter Two 'In the beginning: the pre-European setting' (20-40), in spite of valiant efforts to keep the presentation simple, are going to baffle many readers who are not linguists, and annoy linguists by the very extent of the simplification.

Police Motu is one of the most important languages in Papua New Guinea's modern history. D's aim is to recount how and why this language came into being, why it got the name it did (and, incidentally, why its modern name since 1971 of Hiri ['trading voyage'] Motu is historically misleading), and why its use spread so that it is today, along with Tok Pisin, the unofficial national language of Papua New Guinea.

Briefly, the story is this. Police Motu is the continuation, not of a *hiri* trading language, but of a 'foreigner talk' version of the Austronesian language of the Motu people of the Port Moresby region. This 'foreigner talk' or Simplified Motu, was used as a contact language with linguistically related and

unrelated peoples in their immediate area. The *hiri* trading languages were, on the contrary, jargonized forms of the languages of their trading partners in the Gulf of Papua. These *hiri* languages may have had some influence on Simplified Motu. This latter was used with visitors: it was what the Motu taught to the first missionary (1874). Its use was extended by the arrival in the area of other foreigners: the usual collection of missionaries, adventurers, pearl-ers, traders, planters, and beachcombers from Australia, Europe, Polynesia, Melanesia, and elsewhere (all those known are listed in Appendix C [149-191] for the period 1870-1890, and in Appendix D [192-194] for the period ca. 1890). With the progressive establishment of a stronger government presence, some of these people were employed by the government in various capacities, notably as interpreters, guides and unofficial policemen. When an official police force was set up in 1890, employing men recruited from all districts of the colony of Papua as well as from (in particular) Fiji and the Solomons (Appendix E, 195-6), a form of Simplified Motu was used, whence the name Police Motu (PM). The language came to be associated with government and law and order, and it spread along with increasing governmental control. Until World War II, there was competition from assorted pidginized forms of English, introduced by people with work experience in the Torres Straits and Queensland, and contact with different languages in different parts of the country gave rise to different varieties of PM. With the advent of World War II, PM was recorded and described for the first time, it was regularized, and increasingly used for mass communication. After the war, PM gained greater prestige, standard English was officially promoted, and Papuan Pidgin English lost prestige as a result. As Hiri Motu today, its vocabulary is being expanded by increased contact with English and Tok Pisin in an ever more complex society. Its status as an 'unofficial national language', on a par with Tok Pisin, dates from 1975.

This reconstruction of the external history of PM, with its emphasis on the social conditions obtaining at crucial times, is extremely well done, in view of the generally poor quality of the currently available documentation for the period prior to World War II. D perhaps makes a little too much of this paucity in his Preface (ix) – compare Baker's reconstruction of the external history of Mauritian Creole in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Baker 1982a & b, 1984) – but it does highlight his extensive use of oral evidence. It would be surprising if any historical information were to surface in future which would substantially alter D's depiction of the sequence of events.

For the internal history of PM prior to the war, D is forced to rely on inferential arguments, based on a comparison of Motu and present-day PM (78-81), as there are no surviving records of the language at any stage of its development up to that time. What evidence there is consists of isolated words and phrases and assorted comments about the language in the journals of early missionaries, and similar sources.

What emerges from D's account is that the processes, social and linguistic, which went into the emergence of PM and its subsequent stabilization are not in essence different from those involved in other cases: Foreigner Talk (L1 as used with outsiders) and Broken Language (imperfectly acquired L2); the use of the contact language in a multilingual contact situation; the interplay of specific social forces at crucial points in the language's development. PM may even be 'acquiring native speakers' (mixed marriages: more social forces!)

The main periods of social and economic change in Papua from the arrival of the first European settlers to the present are crucial episodes in PM's history. The book's organization reflects this. The first two chapters are followed by: Chapter Three 'Invasion and the new frontier: Simplified Motu to Police Motu' (41-58); Four 'Law and order: the spread of Police Motu' (59-81), covering the Armed Native Constabulary, the village constable system, and the linguistically important prison system; Five 'Economic and other developments: consolidation and complication' (82-107), including the patterns of labour movement in the period 1870 to the 1920s and language and educational policy; Six 'The War and after: recognition, name change, national identity, and the future' (108-130).

Chapter Seven 'Some concluding remarks' (131-135) is followed by the well conceived Figure 7-1 (136), a diagrammatic representation of PM's history, and no fewer than 13 appendices spread over 99 pages (137-236). Most of these give the detailed results of years of painstaking work on D's part, and provide the basis for a lot of his historical reconstruction. They are therefore crucial to an evaluation of that reconstruction's persuasiveness. Most readers, however, will take them on trust, and they could all well have been printed in the much smaller typeface used for Appendix B. The same is true of the 32 pages of Notes to chapters 1-7 (237-268). These two items together make up roughly half of the volume's bulk: since one of D's hopes is that his work will stimulate Papua New Guineans to take a greater interest in PM,

his publisher should perhaps have been prevailed upon to keep costs down. The substantial Bibliography (269-284) is followed by a reasonably complete Index (285-297). Apart from a few glitches in the printing, especially the two misplaced notes in the middle of p.150, the book is well presented and lavishly illustrated with 24 black and white photographs. There are appropriate tables, charts, figures, and maps.

Well conceived and well executed, this interdisciplinary approach constitutes a major extension of our knowledge of Police Motu. It is an interesting history, and one which will repay study by those who wish to theorize on the origins of pidgin and creole languages.

References

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