THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE CHANGE IN A SMALL, ISOLATED COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF PALMERSTON ISLAND

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Abstract

Palmerston Island is a tiny isolated community in the Pacific. Over the past 140 years it has developed a unique linguistic and cultural identity, influenced by England, the Cook Islands, and more recently New Zealand. The islanders strongly identify with England and consider themselves very different from the rest of the Cook Islands, to which Palmerston Island officially belongs. This paper explores the relationship between Palmerston Islanders' conceptions of themselves and their linguistic ideologies. It is shown that the construction of linguistic and social norms is not entirely subconscious: the community is aware of the different origins of lexical items, and the cultural and social affiliations signalled by different linguistic choices. Subconscious co-evolution of culture and language also takes place and appears likely to be responsible for the substrate influences of Cook Island Māori in both realms.

1. Introduction

Linguistic ideologies, defined by Rumsey (1990: 346) as 'shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world', are a key

element in a community's and individuals' self-identity. Speakers' beliefs about language contribute to their linguistic choices and over time, the cumulation of these choices shapes the language itself. This is likely to be particularly true in a linguistic environment that is shaped by language contact, with a large amount of linguistic variation. As noted by Woolard (1998: 9), 'Ideology is variously discovered in linguistic practice itself; in explicit talk about language, that is, metalinguistic or metapragmatic discourse, and in the regimentation of language use through more implicit metapragmatics.' In this paper I will mainly focus on the 'explicit talk about language' I observed in a case-study of a small isolated community with mixed origins: Palmerston Island. There will also be some discussion of the 'implicit metapragmatics' of language use in the community. Most importantly, I will situate this description of Palmerston Island linguistic ideology in the wider context of the islanders' cultural and linguistic identities and affiliations in order to gain a new perspective on development of this unique English variety.

After 140 years of near-total isolation, the inhabitants of Palmerston Island, a tiny atoll in the Cook Islands group, have developed an identity that draws on both English and Polynesian linguistic and cultural traditions. They consider themselves English ethnically, culturally, and linguistically, but also have strong ties to the rest of the Cook Islands, and to New Zealand. As a close-knit community that has historically had between 50 and 100 inhabitants, Palmerston Island has also developed and perpetuated its own unique traditions, linguistic features, and ways of thinking about the world.

The small size and isolation of Palmerston Island makes it an ideal location for examining linguistic ideology and identity, because one is able to explore this at the level of individual community members. A language ideology is not a monolithic view held by speakers of the language. Blommaert (2005: 173–174) points out a 'layered simultaneity' that comes from ideologies operating differently at different levels, for example intrapersonally, in the workplace, in society at large, and over different time periods. I think it is worth pointing out, however, that as well as this polycentricity and stratification in the *system(s)*, there is also a multiplicity of ideologies among speakers. Each individual in a speech community holds his or her own views on language, culture, identity and social organisation (and may, of course, hold different views with regard to the different 'layers' referred to by Blommaert). The diversity of these views, the ways they relate to the ideas and beliefs of others in the community, and the ways in which they are transmitted to children through their families and teachers, are all factors that contribute to the community's construction

of their language and identity (cf. Cameron 1990: 88 for the importance of examining linguistic norms and identity at the level of the individual actor).

The dialect of English spoken on the island is described in detail from a formal linguistic perspective in Ehrhart-Kneher (1996), and Hendery and Ehrhart (2011, in press). The remarkable degree of inter- and intra-speaker linguistic variation on the island is discussed in the latter paper. The link between Palmerston Island's cultural and linguistic traditions provides the key to the existence of such variation, which is found in the islanders' own sense of linguistic identity, as expressed in their views on their speech variety, their history, linguistic norms, prescriptivism, education, and the island's historical and current ties to the region and beyond. In this paper I will describe these views, as expressed by Palmerston Islanders in interviews I conducted in 2009. I will show how these views relate to the island's current linguistic and cultural context, and how they hold clues to the island's history. It will be seen that close attention to community knowledge of and opinions on language, especially at the level of the individual, can result in a more thorough, nuanced understanding of the linguistic and cultural situation than would a heavily abstracted description.

The cultural and social elements that combined in the original settlement of Palmerston Island are not identical to those that are valued and discussed by Palmerston Islanders today. In this paper I will examine how the current linguistic features of the dialect reflect the choices Palmerston Islanders have made historically with regard to the narratives they privilege, the cultures with which they identify, and the ancestors they remember. I will show that these effects are indirect, mediated by the linguistic ideologies that members of the community hold. By examining the roles of linguistic and cultural identity, and language ideology, we can gain a clearer idea of how a newly-formed community develops a shared language, and we can begin to explain the functions of on-going variation in that language.

2. Background

Palmerston Island is approximately 600m across, with a population in August 2009 of 54. It belongs to the Cook Island group and lies about halfway between Rarotonga and Niue, but slightly north of both. It was settled in the mid-1800s by William Marsters, probably originally from Leicestershire or Birmingham, his two (later three) Cook Island wives and a small group of others, including

several more Cook Islanders, a Portuguese man, his wife and child. The inhabitants today are the descendants of this small group and speak a dialect of English; those who grew up on the island are monolingual. In July—August 2009 there were 13 adult women, 13 adult men, and 28 children. Five of the people currently on the island are not originally from Palmerston: these include the teacher (from New Zealand, now married to a local man), two Rarotongan women married to local men, and the two missionaries (from another island in the Cook Islands group). According to Crocombe and Marsters (1987: 222), outside marriage has been rare historically.

The island has been very isolated—there is no regular transport to or from it, and it is 400 km away from the closest other inhabited islands. There is no television signal. In 2009 there was one telephone and one computer with a very slow satellite internet connection. Up until around eight years ago, there were no moorings, so the visitors were few, as it was dangerous to try to anchor if the wind was not exactly right. During the 20th century, there were sometimes many years without any contact with the outside world. Nowadays around 30 yachts visit each year during the August–September 'cruising' season, staying for a few days each. Detailed records of these visitors are kept. Various volunteers and teachers have helped with the school, and records of these are kept at the school. While the church is currently staffed by Cook Island missionaries, previous pastors have all been local Palmerston Islanders.

Older historical influences on the island are also relatively easy to track. Although older records that had been kept in the church were lost in a fire some years ago, the oldest inhabitants were able to recall the few visitors to the island in their youth. These were mainly occasional school board superintendents from England and sometimes Rarotonga, who came once every few years to examine the children on their lessons. Several outsiders spent long periods on the island: Victor Clark was an Englishman shipwrecked on Palmerston Island for a year in the 1950s (Clark 1960); Arthur Helm stayed there for a year in the 1960s (Helm & Percival 1973), and more recently Daniel Curran, a sociology PhD student from the University of Kent, visited for nine months during 2010.

The isolation and small size of the island are advantages for a linguist as they make it possible to (a) interview all Palmerston Islanders, and (b) track all external influences on the language, making Palmerston Island a wonderful laboratory for studying the development of linguistic and cultural identities in small mixed-origin communities.

During four weeks of fieldwork in 2009, I spoke with all of the then-

inhabitants of the island except for one elderly man, who is blind and deaf. While there are certainly common themes in the local views on the island's history, identity and language, there is also much diversity. Each family on the island has its own traditions and stories. The quotations and views recorded in this paper should therefore not be taken to be general consensus, or even representative of more than one family's perspective, unless otherwise stated. As views are so diverse, those reported here are ascribed to individuals, but for privacy reasons, these individuals are not referred to by name, but only with two-letter codes which are not their actual initials.

Palmerston Islanders divide themselves into three groups, named after the three wives of Marsters: *Akakaingara*, *Matavia*, *and Tepou*. The island itself is also divided in three, as are the other islets around the lagoon, each third belonging to one of the families.[1] Membership in one of the three families determines land inheritance, council representation, hunting and gathering rights, marriage possibilities, and to some extent, day-to-day socialisation patterns.

Cutting across the distinction between the three families is another distinction, between the *beachfellas* and the *bush people*, as they are called by Palmerston Islanders. The former live in the cleared sandy main settlement area at the north end of the island. The latter have built houses further south, among the palm trees that cover the rest of the island. In practical terms, the distance between the most distant houses is only a couple of hundred metres – a few minutes' walk. In social terms, however, distinctions are made between the two groups, and each believes the other to have different cultural and linguistic practices.

A further distinction is made between locals and outsiders. The most transient of the outsiders are the 'yachties', but even the women who have married into the community are still seen as *comers* [kʊməs]. The islanders use short wave radios to communicate with each other (much as other communities use mobile telephones), and call signs are assigned only to those who were born on the island. The 'outsider' women, who are married to locals and have been living in the community for 10 or more years, do not have their own call signs but go by their husbands'.

Palmerston Islanders view themselves as distinct from the rest of the Cook Islands, and are proud of their association with England. 'Duke's Day', a public holiday commemorating the day the Duke of Edinburgh visited the island in 1972, is celebrated annually. Local lore has it that he praised the Palmerston Island dialect and said it was excellent English. Moreover,

Palmerston Islanders claim that those who spoke with him understood his English and were themselves more easily understood than English-speaking tourists who were also present. During national celebrations in Rarotonga in 2008, when the representatives from each island wore clothing representative of their heritage, the Palmerston Island contingent dressed as Buckingham Palace guards.

The islands belonging to the Cook Islands are divided into the Northern Group and the Southern Group. While Palmerston officially belongs to the Southern Group, it is the most northern of these, and has more in common geographically with the northern islands, as these, like Palmerston, are true atolls, while all the other southern islands are raised volcanic atolls. It also has the sweeter variety of coconuts that are otherwise found only in the Northern Group. Palmerston Islanders generally feel that Palmerston should either be included in the Northern Group, or not be considered part of the Cook Islands at all. The island is governed by a council, made up of the eldest member of each of the three families and a second member from each, appointed by the eldest.

3. Language ideologies and linguistic history

There are at least two different types of relationship between language ideology and linguistic history. The first is reconciling traditional ideas about language change, the origin of the local language/dialect and its links to other varieties in the region with what linguists can find out about these questions through other means, for example documented history, linguistic reconstruction, comparison or similar objective tools. The other relationship between language ideology and linguistic history is that a community's self-identification and choice of affiliation with other communities can affect its speakers' linguistic choices, and consequently can play a role in determining the evolution of the language. This can occur explicitly, for example through the socialization of children, but it can also be mediated by the effects of identity and affiliation on social networks. If speakers who identify more with the Cook Islands spend more time with visitors or immigrants from the Cook Islands, while speakers who identify more with England spend less time with these, but more time with English visitors, then each group will have more opportunity to draw on the linguistic resources of the variety they have more exposure to, such as borrowing new terminology from it, or accommodating

phonetically to it. This also means that the two groups socialise less with *each other*. Innovations in one group are therefore more likely to be transmitted within the group than across the boundary to the other group.

Moreover, a community's linguistic and cultural identity is likely to inform the stories it tells itself and outsiders about the history of its language. For that reason, even if local lore about the language's history and its relationship to other varieties is different from what conventional linguistic research would tell us, it is still valuable, perhaps essential, if the linguist wants to explore the question of *why* the language has developed as it has.

In this section I will discuss three relationships between Palmerston Island language ideologies/cultural identity and certain characteristics of the linguistic variety. The first is the island's tendency to emphasise its English roots over its Polynesian background, and the remarkably low incidence of Māori substrate features in the dialect. The second is the complete absence of the island's Portuguese influences, both when explicitly talking about the island's linguistic and cultural history, and in the linguistic characteristics of Palmerston Island English. The third is the correspondence of extreme variation in linguistic features with variation in the historical narratives told about the island.

Polynesian substrate

The first relationship between Palmerston Island language ideologies and linguistic features I will discuss is the emphasis on English over Polynesian[2] heritage, both culturally and linguistically. As mentioned in the introduction, many Palmerston Islanders are very proud of their English heritage. They emphasise Marsters as their ancestor, and their stories and songs about the island's history are about him, rarely mentioning his wives by name. My hosts frequently pointed out to me those physical features that they consider English and that they assume they have inherited from Marsters. Public holidays are Duke's Day, Queen Victoria's Birthday, Easter, and Christmas Day, all of which are associated with the English side of the island's history. Some traditions enforced by Marsters during his lifetime—daily evening prayer, morning rows across the lagoon, sweeping the beach and the paths, early rising (2 am)—continued until recently, well beyond Marsters' death; and because they were instigated by Marsters, they are also considered to be English in nature.

There is little explicit mention of the island's Polynesian heritage in my transcripts of conversations about the island's history, culture or language.

In some conversations, a Polynesian connection seemed almost to have been forgotten until I reminded the speaker about Marsters' wives:

RH I also heard that people used to use a lot more Māori words here: they used to mix the languages a bit. Use some words. Is that true, do you think?

OB What? How do you mean?

RH That people used to use more Māori words on Palmerston Island for things, sometimes. And mix the languages a little bit. Use some words from Māori; some words from English.

OB I don't know.

RH You don't know, yeah okay.

OB So far we all English speakers.

RH But originally, William Marsters' wives... They spoke Māori, didn't they?

OB Oh yeah.

Underlyingly, however, there are many threads of Cook Island Māori culture that run through everyday Palmerston life. Houses are thatched with woven palm branches, which are also used for making straw hats. The diet is primarily fish, coconut, taro and rice, with staple recipes that are found elsewhere in the Cook Islands and Polynesia (e.g. raw fish, *poke*) As is usual across Polynesia, white clothing is worn to church when communion is celebrated. Women always wear hats to church, and men and women sit on separate sides of the aisle. Two different types of hymns are sung: *Sunday school hymns*, including some that are widely known across the English-speaking world, which are sung in English with a single melodic line, and *traditional hymns*, which are known elsewhere in the Cook Islands as *'imene tuki*, which are always sung in Māori in a chanting style and have complex multiple parts with different words and melodies. Palmerston Islanders memorise the Māori words to these without usually knowing their meanings. The *traditional hymns* are taught and practised in weekly prayer and song meetings known as *'uapo*, which is also a tradition across the Cook Islands.

Until recently, when they were replaced with modern boats fitted with

outboard motors, canoes were made by hollowing out *tamanu* trees. These are outrigger canoes similar in style to the traditional canoes of other islands in the region.

Land division, hunting and gathering rights, and use of land for building on are all governed by similar principles to those found in other Cook Island communities, as can be seen in Crocombe and Marsters (1987), a thorough description of the rules of land use on Palmerston Island. Although the focal point *from* which descent in the three families is reckoned is the three original women, one's ancestry is calculated *through* the patriline. In other words, all Palmerston Islanders define themselves as belonging to the 'family' of either Akakaingaro, Tepou, or Matavia (the three wives of Marsters), but they trace this ancestry through their male ancesters. Patrilineal descent is a common feature of Polynesian societies, as is the co-existence of this with important female ancestors from which one's lineage might be calculated (cf. Gunson 1987).

Roles of men, women and children on Palmerston Island are also reminiscent of other Polynesian societies. Children are expected to do a large amount of the daily work: sweeping, feeding the animals, cutting up coconuts, making drinks for their parents and for guests, fetching and carrying water, taking messages, and cleaning. Women bake bread most days, prepare the rest of the food except on rare occasions, sweep, wash clothes and dishes – both of which are labour-intensive tasks without running water. Men do most of the fishing and hunting of birds. Children are expected to obey parents and other older family members immediately and without question.

Some of these Polynesian cultural practices (for example the diet, the use of palm leaves) could be argued to be practical necessities due to what is available on the island. Others (division of labour, religious practices, music, particular preparations of food) are not born of necessity and instead might well be retentions from the practices of Marsters' own wives.

Similarly there appears to be a Cook Island Māori substrate in the language, but this sits below the level of consciousness. The lexical borrowings from Cook Island Māori are relatively few and mainly limited to the semantic domains of flora and fauna and religion, but there is also some influence in the phonetic, phonological, morphological and syntactic domains of the language. For example, Palmerston Island English has variation between [v] and [w], for example 'vase' [waz~vaz], 'over' [ɔwə~ɔvə]; and Palmerston [t] or [d] (word-initially) and [s] (word-finally) correspond to standard English interdental fricatives (e.g. Palmerston [tem] or [dem] 'them', [tis] 'teeth').

This is all likely to be due to influence from Cook Island Māori, most dialects of which have few or no fricatives. Simplification of consonant clusters to a single consonant is probably a result of Cook Island Māori's CV syllable structure (e.g. *roun* 'round', *ol* 'old' *mos* 'most', *is* or *it* 'it's/its').

A distinction between singular, dual and plural pronouns is almost always made. Forms for expressing the dual category, as well as the singular/plural distinction where standard English does not express this, are created using the resources of standard English, for example *dem two* 'third person dual' or *dem lot* 'third person plural'. In addition, the inclusive/exclusive distinction may be marked in conjunction with dual number in the pronoun *yami*, 'first person dual inclusive', although it is not used as frequently as in the past. The pronouns of Palmerston Island English therefore mirror the system of Cook Island Māori almost exactly (see Hendery & Ehrhart In Press for a side-by-side comparison of the two paradigms).

Cases in which Palmerston Island word order differs from that of standard English (but aligns in some constructions with that of Cook Island Māori) include fronting and topicalisation constructions, some compounds and some possession constructions. Some of these are illustrated in (1).

1. a. two barrel diesel Korinako's
   'two of Korinako's barrels of diesel'

   b. Too small the table
   'The table is too small'
   c. blood pig
   'pig's blood'

A lack of copula, lack of plural marking on nouns, and optionality of explicit subject (pro-drop, e.g. *It's really fun when hear them speaking* 'It's really fun when you hear them speaking') are features of both Palmerston Island English and Cook Island Māori.

The only one of these linguistic features that was volunteered to me as an example of Palmerston Island English is the use of the pronoun *yami* for the first person dual inclusive. Otherwise they either pass under the conscious radar of the speakers, or are not considered noteworthy. As a comparison, the use of particular tense and aspect forms (double-marking of past tense verbs, for example *passeded*, *blesseded*, formation of present participles with *-en*, for example *fishening*, *singening*), were all pointed out to me numerous times as examples of Palmerston Island English. While Māori-origin lexical

items were sometimes explained to me (*motu* 'island', *'uapo* 'singalong', *tamanu* 'mahogany', *para* 'wahoo', etc), they were never given when I asked explicitly for words that Palmerston Islanders use that are 'different from the way other English speakers talk'. In answer to this question instead I was given terms like *fowl* 'chicken', *bong* 'lid', *basin* 'bowl', *for'ard* 'in front', *yonder* 'over there'—words that the islanders explicitly associated with Marsters and with his (Northern) English dialect.

Similarly, English-focussed cultural practices were often explained to me unelicited—Duke's Day, Christmas celebrations, early rising, the English-only policy—while the Polynesian practices were not discussed. Some of this may be because the islanders are aware of the uniqueness of their heritage through Marsters, but believe some of the Polynesian practices to be ubiquitous (this is certainly the case for wearing white to church—Palmerston Islanders were surprised when I told them this is not a practice everywhere in the world.) It may, however, also be the case that their pride in their English heritage and Marsters' centrality to the story of their origins overshadow other contributions to the language and culture and are therefore foremost in the islanders' minds when linguistic and cultural matters are discussed.

The Portuguese question

According to Helm and Percival (1973: 105–108), the island was originally settled not only by William Marsters with his wives, but also by a Portuguese friend of Marsters, Jean Baptiste Fernandez (or Fernandos) and his wife and child. After Fernandez's death Marsters took Fernandez's wife as his third wife, and adopted Fernandez's children. Helm and Percival report that Fernandez was 'variously described as a "Hindu-Portuguese" from Goa, a "Portuguese sea-cook" and a "native of the Fernando Noronha Islands off the east coast of Brazil"' (106–108). While these descriptions are in quotation marks, Helm and Percival do not give sources for them. Whether Fernandez's native language was Portuguese or an indigenous language of Goa or Brazil, it is likely that his L2 English would have been quite different from the English of the Cook Islanders, and also different from Marsters' L1 English, containing features that could have been transmitted and retained in Palmerston English, just as was the case for Marsters' Northern English dialect or the others' Cook Island L2 English. Fernandez remained for several decades of the early period after settlement, and as his family made up a large percentage of the original population, one might expect that it would have left some traces, possibly in the language and culture, and certainly in the oral histories. The

histories of the island told to me did not, however, mention him at all. Nor does he appear in the traditional song about the island's settlement that the older islanders remember their grandparents (second-generation Palmerston Islanders) singing:

> Oh William Marsters was a brave hero.
> He farewelled to happy Londontown.
> He has been to Birmingham
> where he was,
> in the beautiful country of him.
> He took a joyous voyage,
> and saw pretty countries.
> While on a ship he has passed Tongareva,
> and so called in.
> And when leaving with his [family?][3]
> he came to Palmerston,
> living as the married king for the rest of his day.

There are several other similar songs, all of which focus on William Marsters as the founder of the island, and none of which mention Fernandez at all. It should be noted that all the islanders have the surname Marsters and trace their ancestry to Marsters and one of his wives; none have retained any connection to Fernandez.

The only traces of Fernandez in the materials available to me are in references in the early court records to a woman *Tati Fernandos*, and in John Burland's interview with Ned Marsters in 1959. Ned Marsters tells John Burland the following, but only when directly asked about Fernandez:

> NM He [William Marsters] was a whaler – stayed in America for the gold digging. From the gold digging he came over to Penrhyn and stayed in Penrhyn and get the girl there – his wife – and so they came on shifting down to Samoa – this time he went to Samoa.
>
> JB I see. And then when he went to Palmerston Island he had not only his wife but the second girl as well?
>
> NM Yes.
>
> JB They both went together?

NM Yes. Both went together. The cousin – his wife and the cousin of his wife. And Fernandez and his wife.

JB Oh, they all went together?

NM They all went together.

JB This is John Fernandez?

NM John Fernandez and his wife.

JB And John Fernandez was a Portuguese, was he not?

NM Yes. A Portuguese half-caste – half white.

This interview is the only reference to Fernandez I have come across directly from Palmerston Islanders.

Similarly absent are linguistic features that are unambiguously attributable to Portuguese influence or the influence of any other language that Fernandez might have spoken. All of the characteristics of Palmerston English can be explained as retentions from William Marsters' Northern English dialect, influences from his wives' Māori varieties, innovations introduced by the wives' L2 English, or recent influences from Cook Island English. There are a few features that exist in both Cook Island Māori and Portuguese, so could have been brought into Palmerston Island English from either (or, perhaps more likely, from both). One of these is pro-drop, the possibility of eliding the subject (or less frequently the object) of a clause. This sort of pro-drop is allowed in both Cook Island Māori and Portuguese, so it is impossible to know for sure which one was the source of the feature in Palmerston Island English. If it were found in the L2 English of all the early Palmerston Island settlers, both Portuguese and Polynesian, it could even be said to derive from both.

Apart from features like this that could just as easily have arisen without the contribution of Portuguese learner English, there are no traces of any linguistic influences in the language today that might be due to Fernandez. The coincidence of this with the absence of Fernandez from the local historical record is striking. An explanation could be that the islanders have identified with Marsters and with English, and actively disassociated themselves from any Portuguese linguistic and cultural history. Because of this the earlier generations may have selected variants that they recalled Marsters himself using, preferring these over alternative 'non-English' variants. Even today there is a certain amount of awareness of which features of the dialect are

especially 'English': for example the pronunciation of the some words that belong to the STRUT lexical set in many English varieties as [ʊ] (the same as FOOT). We can only speculate about the reasons behind this *erasure*, but the results are a common ideological phenomenon: 'in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, [it] renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. Facts inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or are explained away' (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38).

In this and the previous section we have seen that the relative influences of English, Cook Island Māori and Portuguese on Palmerston Island English seem to correlate with the islanders' orientation to each of these sources culturally and historically. William Marsters is the major founder figure in their narratives, the main person to whom they trace their ancestry, and because of this they consider themselves English. English is unquestionably the major source of the modern dialect. Their Cook Island Māori heritage, on the other hand, is less foregrounded in their historical narratives and in their deliberate representation of themselves and their language to outsiders. While it has a clear influence on some features of the language, this is not sufficiently pervasive to justify characterising Palmerston Island English as a mixed language. The increase in interaction with New Zealand over the past few decades (through travel, aid, and visitors) is mirrored in some elements of the language that have probably come in from New Zealand English: the use of the tag *eh?*, an extension of *like* to a focussing function, and the formation of future tense with *go* are all features that have appeared in Palmerston Island English in the past twenty years (i.e. are not found in recordings made by Sabine Ehrhart in 1991), and can plausibly be explained as influences from New Zealand English. The Portuguese element in the island's history is almost completely ignored, and similarly has had little or no influence on the language. In this, Palmerston Island demonstrates in microcosm the relationship between language and ethnicity that is also found in larger, longer-established states (cf. Blommaert 2005: 214–217). This too is a kind of ideology: 'we are English and therefore we speak English'/ 'we speak English and therefore we are English'.

Variation

One of the most striking features of Palmerston Island English is the amount of variation that is found, from speaker to speaker, and also in the speech of a single speaker. Variation is found at all linguistic levels: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon. It is not only a matter of choosing

local variants or standard English variants, but also sometimes of choosing between multiple local variants, for example the use of the terms *moa*, *fowl*, or *chicken*. It appears that some variation is governed by gender (e.g. pro-drop is much more heavily used by men than by women), and some by age (use of singular forms of the verb *be* with plural subjects, e.g. *they is*, *we is*, *you is* is more frequent with younger speakers than with older people). At least some of the variation found in the speech of a single speaker is conditioned by context (i.e. register) and by identity of interlocutor (accommodation). The average use of certain typical Palmerston Island features when aggregated[4] does in fact turn out to be different between the aforementioned *bush people* and the *beachfellas*. However, a large amount of the inter-speaker variation is unaccounted for, and may be the same sort of phenomenon identified in small communities of Gaelic speakers by Dorian (1994), and termed *personal-pattern variation.*

Besides this linguistic variation, variation is also found in the linguistic ideologies, cultural identities, and histories of the island. Some speakers consider themselves, or are considered by others, to be 'more English', as the following quote suggests.

> They don't say it [*shubble* for *shovel*], cos they're Engli- kind of closer to English, like MM and, uh, PT and them there.

Some people seemed to be especially proud of their English heritage, pointing out physical features such as heavy body hair, skin colour, and stature that they associate with the English body type. This also comes up in the earliest interview we have: Burland's interview with Ned Marsters, William Marsters' grandson, in 1959:

> NM My grandfather, he has the same look as my father, the same build as my father, and hairy the same as my father. […] Full beard, and this part – well the body is all black hair. Oh, yes. Well, the boys, they got all full hair in front.

Other speakers never mentioned England or the English in my hearing at all. For some Palmerston Islanders, their association with New Zealand seems to be more salient than their English connections, as they spontaneously discussed recent New Zealand politics, visits to New Zealand, and New Zealanders they had met, rather than talking about England. These topics may

have been emphasised because of my presence, as a New Zealander myself, but the level of knowledge of those who brought up New Zealand news and politics was far beyond that of most non-New Zealanders. The information seems to be gained from visitors, letters and (rare) phone conversations with family members living in Rarotonga, New Zealand or Australia, and news brought back by Palmerston Islanders who have been off island for medical reasons or to visit family.

Each family has its own version of Palmerston Island's history, and those speakers who shared theirs with me were very careful to avoid claiming that their version was the only correct one, peppering them with hedges like the following:

'To be honest, I don't really know that.'

'What I heard that he... All right. What I heard is...'

'So I don't know how true it is. Really don't know.'

Some of them are certain that the history outlined in Hilyard's biography of the Marsters family (Hilyard 2008) is incorrect ('all lies'), while others accept this version.

As well as these variations in the accounts of the island's history, there is variation in the feelings towards Palmerston Island English. There is widespread understanding that outsiders see it as a substandard dialect:

CC yeah I've noticed that when I live one and a half year in NZ **they used to complain how I talk**. See, I used to work as a receptionist in the school an' I u- I always used to say 'you welcome' never 'you're welcome', and they used to tell me off not to say that.

CC I try a speak **proper English** cos it's goin' be hard in school cos our teacher tell us off when we're speaking not proper English

MM But I try to remember them [*standard grammar rules*] and try to do it the way she's [*the head teacher*] saying it, cos then it's so when I speak to the children it be the way that she's wanting.

Some Palmerston Islanders themselves seem to agree with this negative assessment of their dialect:

AP Palmerston slang, and New Zealand slang and, uh, the other two are **slack slang**.

CC I don't talk **proper English** to my parents.

JM They [*the children*] try to say the words correctly. […] Well to me the teachers is more like trying to get them to say **the right words**.

VN But I think we been morely taught how to speak a bit more **proper** than how we usually talk.

Others are proud of their variety of English and actively encourage it in their children, as is shown in the following exchanges:

OB Have you hear of a word 'bugger'? You heard the word 'bugger'? Some of us use it in the island. [...] Oh just like when the childrens make something, make the mistake at home or do something wrong, our father use say it, 'You bugger you!' Something like that. I'm not sure how it come, but my grandfather and grandmother speaks it and that's how I pick it up, and is still in me and **I'm proud to speak it**.

LM To me there's really no proper way o' speaking, it's just the way you speak. If you been understood, then **that's the proper way**.

LM And a lot of Palmerston people gets that feeling when they go to Rarotonga: The way we speak, they probably think that we are not educated enough how to speak English properly. I guess that is probably **them the one is not educated**. I think for them to be thinking that: about judging other people how they speak.

OB I speak my language **the old way**. And my children's learning it and we understand ourselves when we speak.

One resident even reported that he discouraged his children from using at least one of the features of Standard English: he tells the children to say [d] instead of the [ð] that the teachers tell them to use, because otherwise 'it make them sound like faggots'.

Many of these assessments of Palmerston Island English take place in a context of comparison to other varieties of English and references to spaces in which Palmerston Islanders come into contact with these varieties: Rarotonga, New Zealand, and even the Palmerston School (where the head teacher is a New Zealander, and the educational materials include books in New Zealand English, American English and British English). In their discussion of multilingualism, space, and globalization, Blommaert et al. (2005: 198) note that 'the particular environment organizes a particular regime of language, a regime which incapacitates individuals.' While Blommaert et al. are referring to multilingual incapacitation, the same can apply at the level of dialects. Some Palmerston Islanders respond to this sense of incapacitation by concluding that they don't have 'proper' language or the 'right' language, but others push back and define their variety as something to take pride in, and/or deny the existence of a single right way to speak at all.

It is not surprising if an ideology of a single standard English that everyone should aspire to is not universally held on Palmerston Island, because of the timing of original settlement of the island. The belief in the importance of a standard language was an ideology that arose in Victorian England as an offshoot of nationalism and belief in the 'purity' of England's Germanic origins (cf. Milroy 2006). Marsters left England long before this movement was at its peak, and certainly well before the concept of an ideal standard language would have spread into the consciousness of the general public. This may well be part of the reason why we find Palmerston Islanders who are proud of their dialect and adamant that 'there's really no proper way o'speaking'. From the attitudes of a few, however, it is clear that the idea of a prestigious Standard English has taken some hold in the community: most likely via those islanders who have spent time abroad, and through the influence of the school (cf. Collins 1996: 204–206 for a discussion of the way in which such ideologies underpin the typical Western educational experience.)

We see that there is variation in local histories, cultural identity, and language ideology. It would be surprising if there were no relationship between these three types of variation. For one thing, a person's cultural identity informs his or her selection among variants of traditional histories: if a person identifies strongly with the English, it makes sense that he or she emphasises those stories about his or her family's history that involve the English and de-emphasise others. Cultural identity in turn influences language ideology: most people would prefer to believe that their language use reflects the culture they identify with. People who are proud of their cultural identity

are also proud of linguistic features that they believe are uniquely associated with that culture. Furthermore, if one's family has always emphasised historical traditions in which the role of certain cultures is highlighted and that of others is downplayed, it is only natural that one will believe that 'traditional' ways of speaking are also associated with those cultures, and will be proud of these.

All of these connections between history, identity and language would apply whether the community in question is homogeneous or as full of variation as Palmerston Island is. Because there are such strong relationships between history, identity, culture and language, however, variation in the community in any one of these aspects naturally goes hand-in-hand with variation in the other aspects. If one family identifies more with the English, while another sees Palmerston Island as unique and independent, the first is likely to emphasise stories about the community's history in which the English play a role, while the second is likely to downplay these. It would then be quite natural for the first family to prefer and be proud of linguistic features that have clearly English origins, while the second uses more of the innovative lexicon or structural features of the dialect. The first family might be proud of the English features of the dialect, but embarrassed by the 'non-standardness' of Polynesian-inspired substrate features. In this way, diversity of cultural identity can lead to variation in linguistic features and language ideology.

Several studies of other communities have shown links between language attitudes or ideologies and actual use of specific variants. For example Sharma (2003) finds quantitative evidence for a relationship between L2 Indian English speakers' linguistic ideologies and their use of American or Indian phonological variants. Wassink and Dyer (2004) demonstrate that change in phonological variants in two communities has gone hand-in-hand with changing attitudes to these variants and to the people who use them. Milroy (2004) discusses a number of other studies that have shown a relationship between attitudes to language and linguistic change.

This all assumes a great deal of linguistic awareness on behalf of the community members, but I do not think this assumption is necessarily unrealistic in the case of Palmerston Island, given the amount of thought most islanders seem to have given to linguistic matters, and their interest in their cultural and linguistic history. Many community members, for example, showed a keen interest and engagement in my fieldwork methodology. The following examples, from separate conversations, all show an awareness of the problem of accommodation.

TP Some of them, they know the recorder's there and they might never use the word, you know? They might just talk normal only.

MM If you saw two Palmerston people speaking it would be slightly different the way they would speak to you in a way.

CC They would say 'shubble' sometimes, only when people like you are not around their house.

In the following examples, we can see how Palmerston Islanders are aware of the origins of some words, distinguishing loan words from Māori, older English dialect terms, and items unique to Palmerston Island.

AP Wahoo. *Para*, we call it. *Wahoo* I think is a English name.

AK A couple of trees out the islets, as we say, *islets*, but we call it *motu* in the Māori, but *islets* in English

OB *Deye*: I don't know how you pronounce it. But our fathers use it. It's not a Māori word. It's just the word being used on the island.

FN My cock and pullet.[5]
SM That's a old English.

AK The big trees, the *tamanu* – they say the *mahogany* in English. Well, I'm not sure if that's the same tree, but some of them say the *mahogany*.

There is also widespread awareness of linguistic change. The following extracts are all from a conversation with one woman, SD, who is describing the differences between how her grandparents spoke, how she speaks, and how the children speak today. The number of details given show that she has very clear ideas about which elements of the dialect are older, which are newer, and whether they are associated with England, Rarotonga or New Zealand.

> But when we got to school, going to school, then there was a different of how we're pronunciation is going to be. I know when we will use the word *p-u-t*. And *b-u-t*. Knowing the phonics, you had two: [ʊ] And a [ʌ]. And I can remember –

> I know my mother, my grandmother used to say no, don't say [bʌt], it's [bʊt]. It's [bʊt]. Like 'put', because you say [ʊ]. You say not [bʌt], it is [bʊt] And 'put' is [pʊt]. See these are the difference of their pronunciation.
> [...]
> I can remember the words that they use. Like when they say, we say, 'You go over there and get something'. They say, 'You go yonder'. And that's how they use, 'You go yonder'. And then sometimes when you s- 'Oh, look yonder. How's the – where's the sun?' Y'said, 'Oh, there's the sun up there.' 'So, well do your work before the sun dips beyond the horizon.' So this is how they say there was, uh, the sun sets. But my grandmother would say, 'Before the sun dip beyond the horizon.' This is how the language my grandmother use. And I think it's a real perfect English.
> [...]
> So I learn[ed] two different languages, from the school, and from my grandmother.
> [...]
> So there's two different pronounciation: [hu] and [u] Because our grandparents don't say [hu]. It's [u]. That 'wh', they don't pronounce it. That's right. That's the school uses. So that's how the different languages been change. And so the children nowadays they using what our [u] just like that, that's how they believe 'h' into it.
> [...]
> Well that's so because people go to New Zealand and stay for a while. Then they come back home. Yeah, well they use the words from New Zealand, they come back home. It goes!

As the community is interested in language, aware of the various sources of influence on their dialect, and, at least lexically and phonetically, is aware of which linguistic choices signal which cultural affiliations, it therefore seems reasonable to associate the diversity of historical perspectives and cultural identities on the island with the diversity in language ideologies and linguistic variation.

Conclusions

Not only does Palmerston Island provide an interesting case study of the close relationship between linguistic and cultural identity, it also shows how various cultural influences can be teased apart when they are compared with similarly intertwined linguistic influences and language ideologies. Palmerston Island is also a reminder that there can be an enormous diversity of language ideologies, cultural identifications and historical understandings even in the smallest communities. This diversity may reflect linguistic diversity, and a causal relationship between these two types of variation cannot be ruled out.

In Palmerston Island, a mixed-origin group of settlers has had to co-construct a new society, with all that entails linguistically, culturally, and socially. If the social and linguistic organisation of Palmerston Island reflect each other, it is because they have evolved together. The cultural and linguistic elements that combined in the original settlement are not, however, the same as those that are most apparent in the community today. There is almost no trace of the Portuguese settler who played an important role in the founding of the community. Why the islanders have made cultural and linguistic choices to pattern themselves after the 'English' model instead of the Portuguese one is not a question that can be answered with 100% certainty. Narratives about William Marsters present him as extremely charismatic and authoritative. The only story passed down about Fernandez presents him in a rather weak light. Perhaps Marsters was a more obvious model for the men to emulate. Moreover, Marsters had three wives, while Fernandez had only one. This suggests that the majority of the children in the first generation would have been Marsters' offspring, not Fernandez's. Even Fernandez's children may have had more experience of Marsters than of their own father, since Fernandez seems to have been away travelling for several years at a time, and Marsters eventually took Fernandez's wife and children as his own. All of these factors mean that Marsters was probably the strongest and the most present father-figure the boys of the first island-born generation had available.

In terms of sheer numbers, the Polynesian influence on the island should be far greater than the English influence (see e.g. Parkvall 2012 for a model in which the settlement demographics of Palmerston Island would predict a Cook Island Māori-based creole). This is where we can clearly see the effect of power. Marsters was the head of the island ('the married king', as the song puts it). It is said that he instructed his wives and children to speak

only English, but the historical record shows this may be an exaggeration, as letters and records from the early 1900s sometimes contain Cook Island Māori and references to Cook Island Māori use, and an English missionary who visited Palmerston Island in 1877 reported that he preached in Rarotongan in Marsters' presence (Gill 1877). The influence of Cook Island Māori on the dialect is relatively minimal, however, with some phonetic influence, some morphological, and a few word order patterns. At least as many of the differences from Standard English can be explained as innovations or retentions from Marsters' own English dialect.

As is seen in the quotations from Palmerston Island residents above, construction of linguistic and social norms is not entirely subconscious: the community is aware of the different origins of lexical items, and the cultural and social affiliations signalled by different linguistic choices. Both school and parents deliberately attempt to regulate the language use of the younger generation – sometimes in conflicting directions.

The complexity of the linguistic landscape, the multiplicity of language ideologies, and the rich network of social and cultural affiliations that persist on the island are only visible because it is possible to study Palmerston Island language and culture at the level of the individual actor. Abstractions away from the individual are necessary when one is writing 'the' grammar of 'a language', or when one compares one community to another, but as this paper has demonstrated, such abstractions are by no means the end of the story.

Notes

1 The term *family* on Palmerston Island usually refers to this wider grouping: that is all descendants of the one female line. For a nuclear family group, the term *household* is more often used.

2 My reference to 'Polynesian' or 'Cook Island Māori' heritage in this section is intended to include Penrhynese heritage. While Penrhynese and other Cook Island Māori varieties are generally considered to be separate languages, Penrhynese is neither different enough, nor well enough described for us to be able to say whether apparent substrate influence in Palmerston English is from Penrhynese specifically or from other varieties of Cook Island Māori.

3 There is some debate about the word *family* in the final verse. Some other suggestions by the locals include *spirit* and *ferret*.

4 To test this I took 50 sentences from each speaker, and counted the frequency of subject pro-drop, bare nouns used for semantically plural referents, verb forms with *-s* used with non-3s subjects, and bare present tense verb forms used with 3s

subjects. For each speaker a percentage use of these features was then calculated by dividing the number of times these features appeared in the speech sample by the number of times it would have been possible to use it in that sample and multiplying by 100. The difference between these percentages for the *bush people* and the *beachfellas* was small but statistically significant ($p<0.05$).

5 This is the punchline to a dirty joke, but it only works because the words *cock* and *pullet* are still in regular use on the island in the sense of 'chicken'.

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