

**On the issues of language contact and language shift
in Tok Pisin
- Focusing on two “non-standard” varieties:
Highlands Pidgin and Anglicised Pidgin**

Submitted by

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Abstract

Tok Pisin is the most prevailing common language in Papua New Guinea. It was originally an English lexifier pidgin language and has developed as the virtual universal lingua franca in this multilingual country where over 850 indigenous languages are spoken today (Nekitel 1998).

The term Tok Pisin covers a large number of varieties due to the various social and linguistic backgrounds of its speakers. Traditionally, the rural varieties which are spoken in Coastal and Island areas are regarded as mainstream Tok Pisin and previous studies have mainly focused on these varieties. However, since the social and linguistic situation in the country has continuously changed and the language contact between Tok Pisin and both substratum languages and the superstratum language, English, continues, the varieties which were regarded as “non-standard” seem to play an important role, especially in the context of language contact and language shift today. Therefore, with respect to the roles that “non-standard” varieties play and their features, many gaps still remain. Most studies have focused on standard varieties.

In order to fill in the gaps, this study will address the issues of language contact and language shift in Tok Pisin, mainly focusing on two “non-standard” varieties. One is Highlands Pidgin which is spoken mainly in the Highlands area of the country. Because of the increase of emigrant population from Highlands to other regions, it seems that Highlands Pidgin impacts on other regional varieties of Tok Pisin. First, the characteristics which have been considered to be Highlands features are reconsidered by reanalysing previous studies and examining the author’s primary data. Then the role that Highlands Pidgin plays in the current language situation in Papua New Guinea is discussed. The other “non-standard” variety considered here is the anglicised variety. It has been pointed out that Tok Pisin is currently undergoing “decreolisation”, that is, it is gradually losing its own features and assimilating to English. However, the degree of the anglicisation can vary with situations, speakers and topics and, although earlier studies provide many important findings, few recent studies have been undertaken. Thus, the degree of anglicisation is examined according to each linguistic component including phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax based on primary data. As one of the parameters of anglicisation, code switching between Tok Pisin and English is also examined using the Matrix Language-Frame model proposed by Myers-Scotton (1993). Following the analysis of the two varieties, some sociolinguistic considerations are provided in order to capture the situation in which language contact and language shift take place.

In conclusion, based on the author’s observations and analysis, this study proposes the argument that there is little reason to rule out the “non-standard” varieties and that Tok Pisin has been a language completely distinct from English, which supports Smith’s (2002) viewpoint. Also, it illustrates a description of current Tok Pisin which coexists with English. Whether the situation continues or not in the future is open to question; however, the structural features of Tok Pisin and its remarkable vitality which are revealed here can inform the study of language contact, language shift and language maintenance.

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Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written or digitally recorded by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Explanatory notes

Abbreviation used in this thesis

PL = plural

NP = noun phrase

VP = verb phrase

SVO= subject-verb-object

SOV= subject-object-verb

PNG = Papua New Guinea

NCD = National Capital District