

### 7.4.1.3. ON REGIONAL DIALECTS IN NEW GUINEA PIDGIN

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#### 7.4.1.3.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Dialects of a language can be defined as codes of one and the same language which show a certain number of differences when compared with each other. These differences are not so great as to prevent oral communication between speakers from different dialect areas. Dialects are geographically restricted to a part of the area occupied by the language of which they are dialects. This contrasts with the notion of sociolect, a variety of a language whose difference from other varieties is determined by social factors.

Dialects often form a chain or L-complex in which each pair of adjacent dialects is mutually intelligible although the dialects at the opposite ends of the chain may not be mutually intelligible. Such dialect chains may range across language boundaries.

#### 7.4.1.3.2. THE QUESTION OF PIDGIN REGIONAL DIALECTS

The question as to whether there are dialects of New Guinea Pidgin in the sense just given has not been systematically studied and is therefore difficult to answer. Obviously one of the main factors accounting for dialects of languages such as English or German, namely linguistic isolation, is virtually absent in Pidgin. Although Wurm and Laycock are clearly justified in writing grammars of Highlands and Lowlands Pidgin respectively, the nature of the variations found in these two 'dialects' is different from the dialectal variations found in most European languages.

A very important factor to bear in mind is that Pidgin is not the first language for most of its users. This means on the one hand that

one is likely to find a number of substratum influences in any idiolect of Pidgin which reflect the grammatical patterns of the user's first language. However, the degree to which such substratum influences appear in any individual speaker are determined by social rather than geographical factors: his education, membership of a church, profession, sex, age, and many more, which have been discussed in my contribution on sociolects in this volume (chapter 7.4.1.4.3.). This means that one is likely to find many varieties even within a relatively small geographical area such as a village.

On the other hand, the amount of substratum influence is limited by practical considerations since satisfactory communication with speakers from different language backgrounds is possible only as long as one's Pidgin is not too heavily coloured by one's own speech habits. In fact, the high regional mobility of many Pidgin speakers has led to the development of a fairly uniform Pidgin which is spoken everywhere in the country. Substratum influences in this variety are minimal.

It is often very difficult to detect a fluent speaker's regional origin. With poorer speakers of Pidgin this is sometimes possible, especially since certain regionally limited phonetic habits, such as prenasalisation of stops, are carried over into their pronunciation.

In spite of such difficulties, a number of my Pidgin-speaking informants claimed to be able to distinguish between at least three regional dialects of Pidgin: Highlands, Lowlands, and Islands Pidgin. I have not tested these claims but I suspect that even this rough classification would be difficult to make in many cases. There are very few diagnostic words and constructions which point to a certain region, and these are on the way out.

Variations, mainly due to substratum influence, can be found in many parts of grammar. Variation will be most pronounced in phonetics. Syntactic variation is also widespread and at least some syntactic properties may be associated with regional varieties: Highlands Pidgin is characterised by the large number of verbal aspect markers. In contrast to other varieties of Pidgin these aspect markers are virtually obligatory in Highlands Pidgin. The distribution of direct and indirect objects accompanying certain verbs distinguishes Islands Pidgin from the other varieties. However, this variation and, to a greater extent, the choice of lexical items may also be related to other non-geographic factors.

Some decades ago regional differences seem to have been more pronounced. In this connection one can mention the old Pidgin spoken in Papua before it was replaced by Hiri Motu as a result of government

policy. A detailed description showing its close resemblance to Bichelamar, can be found in Landtman 1927:453ff. This Pidgin, spoken on Kiwai Island, is markedly different from Pidgin spoken in the previously German-controlled areas, most notably in that it lacks all influence from Tolai and German which is so characteristic of New Guinea Pidgin.

In the Trust Territory of New Guinea some regional varieties are reported. For instance, Townsend (1968:54) found that the vocabulary spoken in the Aitape area in the West Sepik Province contained a number of Malay words which were not in use elsewhere in the country. However, these words have now disappeared from the Pidgin spoken around Aitape and are only remembered by a few old Pidgin-speakers.

A look at some of the older wordlists of Pidgin such as Brenninkmeyer 1925, Borchardt 1930, and Kutscher 1940 shows that many local words were used in the Pidgin spoken on Manus, New Ireland, and especially Rabaul. Again, most of these words are either obsolete or have become accepted in the 'standard' vocabulary of Pidgin used in all parts of Papua New Guinea.

To base a word geography on these scattered examples seems impossible. Unfortunately no reliable data are available on regional variation on the discourse level, although this may be a promising field; Highlanders, for instance, appear to betray their origin by the way in which their discourse is structured more than by anything else.

#### 7.4.1.3.3. CONCLUSION

Unless a more detailed analysis of the facts reveals some outstanding features of regional dialects we are forced to give a negative answer to the question as to the presence of such dialects in Pidgin.

One of the main reasons for the absence of pronounced regional dialects lies in the nature of Pidgin itself. Thus, it is a means of communication beyond geographic and linguistic boundaries and is used mainly for contacts outside a speaker's first language community. Therefore Pidgin spoken among speakers from different language backgrounds is the result of a compromise. Highly marked grammatical categories have no place in good Pidgin. The high amount of regional mobility which necessitates the use of Pidgin by a large number of speakers from different language backgrounds together with the continuous pressure for intelligibility accounts for the large amount of dialect levelling that has taken place and is still taking place. Pidgin is a social rather than individual solution to the problem of communication and any innovations have to be accepted by a large number of

speakers from various areas before they have a chance of becoming an integral part of Pidgin. In addition to these factors one may adduce the temporal factor, since the time it takes for pronounced dialects to develop is greater than the age of Pidgin.

The time at which Pidgin came into being coincides with the emergence of modern mass media. The printed word spread by the missions and government and the spoken word transmitted over a number of radio stations helped to eliminate deviant forms and had a further levelling effect on Pidgin.

Provided there are no drastic changes in the social and political patterns of Papua New Guinea it is unlikely that new dialects will develop.

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