

7.4.2.10. 'PIDGIN FOR PAPUANS': MATTER OF EXPEDIENCY

Lois Carrington

7.4.2.10.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The general training centre for public servants in Papua New Guinea (excepting, of course, those specially provided for in such institutions as the Forestry College and the Posts and Telegraphs College) is the Administrative College at Waigani. Over a period of years from 1969 I was among those teaching English as a foreign language at the College; I quite deliberately use 'foreign language' rather than 'second language' not only because English to the majority of the students was certainly not a L_2 , but rather a L_3 , L_4 or even L_5 , but also because those few to whom English was indeed a 'second language' were among the students for whom 'Pidgin for Papuans' was a matter of expediency.

7.4.2.10.2. LANGUAGE USE AT THE ADMINISTRATIVE COLLEGE

There is little point in outlining here the scope and purpose of training at the Administrative College;¹ it is sufficient here to say that the majority of the more than 800 students whom I taught were newly recruited in to the public service from Year 10 (Form IV) of secondary school, that they came from every District of the country, and that they were destined to become, the following year or the year after that, Trainee Patrol Officers (the greatest number), Local Government Officers, Local Court Magistrates, Community Development Officers, Police Prosecutors, Administrative Clerks, Library Officers or, in the earlier days, steno-secretaries.

In those earlier days, in 1969 and 1970, reflecting to a large degree the state of development of secondary education in the Districts, there were few Papuan students from the Western District, only one or two from the Southern Highlands, some from the Northern District, more from

the Gulf and Milne Bay Districts and, repeating the pattern of public service enlistment in Port Moresby at the time, a preponderance from the Central District. Most of these were unable, or claimed to be unable, to speak Pidgin. Konedobu was still 'Murray country';² 1969 was still a year when ambitious young Papuans, along with Dr Gunther, felt it prudent to be 'cats among the Pidgins'.³ Even girl counter clerks, in the Konedobu offices, showed all too clearly that it was beneath their dignity to speak any better Pidgin than a kind of 'tok misis'.⁴

Among the New Guinean students, such things did not occur, except, for example, that there were young Tolais from girls' secondary schools who had had little opportunity or need to acquire any Pidgin, but who learnt readily from the peer group within the College, that is, from Manus, New Ireland, Sepik girls within their dormitories, sporting teams, etc.

There was in those years a reluctance on the part of almost all students to use Pidgin within the classroom precincts or within the hearing of staff; this was largely a carryover from the secondary education process (see chapter 7.4.4. in this volume). It appears, from what secondary teachers told me in later years, that Pidgin did not begin to assert itself in the school context as early as it did in ours - again, this is quite understandable in terms of the acceleration, both political and in the training situation, which began to happen in the very early 1970s.

In 1971, the 'climate' among the students changed; perhaps it was easier to have your ear to the ground, in Port Moresby, even though you could rarely, on a Trainee Patrol Officer's pay, afford to admire the lights of Town. Annually, of course, especially with the Trainee Patrol Officers, we witnessed the arrival in February of little groups of shy, suspicious, regionally-minded lads. As predictably as the advent of complaints about the food on board ship, came the settling-down together, and then the nickname stage - Pomio!, Kero(wagi)!, Sunam! - and finally, six months on, the knitting together into as close a band of blood-brothers by occupation as one could ever hope to find in Papua New Guinea. But in that year, 1971, we perceived that the disinclination to own yourself as a Pidgin-speaker largely disappeared as the months went by. The reasons have been analysed elsewhere; those of us most concerned with oral English, such as myself and Dick Jeffreys, who was in charge of language laboratory programmes,⁵ found Pidgin creeping more and more into the practical work, in the stress of the moment. 'Real situations' were indeed occurring - the schoolboy (see Keith

Johnson's explanation of the connotations in chapter 7.4.4. in this volume) was giving way to the fieldworker. And the non-Pidgin-speakers wanted to join in!

7.4.2.10.3. NEED FOR FORMAL PIDGIN TRAINING

7.4.2.10.3.1. GENERAL REMARKS

By Easter 1972 it was clear that there were about 30 among the 180 students on the course who spoke no Pidgin, but who wanted to learn. Their 'mates' from the New Guinea side were only too willing to help them, but it was obvious to everybody that a brief, fairly formal introductory course, to start the Papuans off with some knowledge of good usage, was urgently required.

What was available? Nothing, as far as we could ascertain, that was not designed for Europeans, or for those who already spoke Pidgin. Papuans, and New Guineans, for that matter, were attending Pidgin courses at which various of the available textbooks and/or tape courses were used (see Dutton, chapter 7.4.2.9. in this volume); however, it seemed that to use extracts from one or more of these courses, and to put them together to form a 'short course' suitable to our needs would require more time and effort than was available, and, in any case, this would not have amounted to a course that was actually designed for Papuans. We did not care to use primers - the students were, after all, educated to post-secondary level - and the various (although, sadly, not numerous) newspapers, readers, tracts, etc. that were available in Pidgin, while they would be useful a little later as extension material, were not suitable as course material and in any case many suffered from what the 'New Guinea side' students felt was a weakness or a lack of quality - their orthography varied considerably.

7.4.2.10.3.2. THE PRODUCTION OF A COURSE

So we decided to write our own course. Everybody took part in this, New Guinea side and Papua side alike; anybody could contribute his opinions on what was required. The matter had to be settled quickly: we had begun to know that feeling, which grew stronger and stronger as Independence approached, that 'time was running out'. In the end, the following was decided on: manifestly, it seemed unnecessary to teach the Papuans the elements of Pidgin grammar, or structure, as it would have been with Europeans; all suggestions were debated, briefly in class when the scheme was first mentioned, and then by a broad 'committee' of the more interested Papuans and New Guineans. I examined these

suggestions in terms of the design (not, however, the content) of short courses for particular needs, with which I had had a deal to do in the heyday of Australia's immigration programme in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The students contributed from their own varied experience of learning Pidgin, using Pidgin in the work situation (not all were school-leavers: some, such as trainee Local Court Magistrates and Police Prosecutors, had had quite wide job experience before coming to the Administrative College) and helping others to learn it. Acquiring new languages was something of a pastime with some students: it was not unusual to find two lads, one, say, from the Sepik and the other from West New Britain, sitting under a shady tree in the lunch-break, swapping languages.

In effect, the Pidgin-speakers took that eminently practical 'Concise Grammar of Neo-Melanesian' which forms the first four pages of F. Mihalic's *Introduction to New Guinea Pidgin* (Mihalic 1969:3-6) and said 'that must be in', 'leave this out', 'they don't need this'. They indicated the kind of vocabulary that was required (elements of structure might be dispensed with, but the students had been educated in English, and words that were pitfalls for Australians might well equally be so for Papuans). The 'correct spelling' must be used - they all felt this was essential. They suggested that vocabulary extension might profitably be done in our customary classroom way, by making wall charts: a photograph of a chair, labelled *sia*, is a worthy counter to other, perhaps confusing, variants.⁶

The group was firm in its emphases; it was felt that as actually we had only two monolingual speakers (Trobriand Islanders), not counting a Hohola⁷ girl who, perforce, spoke some Motu even though her native language was English, the Papuans would need no more than, say, ten half-hour lessons 'to start them going'. To aid the refining process, I produced for their perusal lessons from my immigrant-camp and ship-board teaching days of some years before; we had copies of the *Jacaranda Dictionary* (Mihalic 1971), of the *Authorised Pidgin Spelling List* (Mihalic and Sievert 1970), of Murphy, of S.I.L. triglot readers, of Healey (Healey 1969) and *Litteral* (Litteral 1969), and of the two *Pacific Linguistics Materials* books (Wurm 1971, Laycock 1970). We browsed through them all. We wallboarded census posters in Pidgin, record covers in Pidgin, comics⁸ in Pidgin, advertisements for */mitpais/*.⁹ Then we designed the course. The Papuans probably, in the first stages, had just as much to say as those from the New Guinea side. Paul Bloomfield, a research officer with D.D.A. (the Division of District Administration, to which the Trainee Patrol Officers belonged)

contributed some 'situational conversations'; Jack Baker, the Trainee Patrol Officers' training officer, and David Chenoweth, the Principal of the College, gave the project their blessing. Ronald Ribao, the president of the Students' Representative Council, with whom I shared an office, became our sternest and most valued critic, bringing his Wapenamanda viewpoint and a wealth of experience in the field to our aid.

Six lessons were written, a student's workbook designed, and tape-scripts prepared - these were designed to be recorded with a native English-speaker (myself) reading the introduction and any instructions in English, and three 'native' (a nice point, but one that I trust is readily taken) Pidgin-speakers, a North Coast man, a Highlander and a man from the Islands, either taking turns as Reader, or each repeating the one phrase, to illustrate the variety of regional Pidgin. Trainee Patrol Officers, Community Development Officers, etc. were generally, then, given their first permanent posting in an area far from home, and could count upon moving about the country, particularly during their junior years in the service. Because of this very fact, indeed, it was felt that 'Pidgin for Papuans' (the course title just arose, and was acceptable to all) was expedient in that it gave the necessary start at a time and in a place where there was plenty of help and opportunity to learn Pidgin, not merely because the 'learning climate' was optimum, but because among the peer group, especially around the dormitories and communal areas, learning a few phrases of Pidgin was well-nigh unavoidable.

By July, motivation was high, and the various vocational training officers had had time to explain how knowledge of Pidgin could be vital, on the job. Patrol Officers on more senior level courses estimated for us that perhaps 60-80% of a Trainee Patrol Officer's or Patrol Officer's work might be done in Pidgin, if he spoke none of the local languages of his Patrol Post Area or Sub-District. The last shreds of reluctance went.

7.4.2.10.4. CONCLUSION

This, then, is the short tale of a co-operative effort to meet a pressing need when there was not, as far as we could ascertain, anything else that would serve. Perhaps the need is diminishing now, as Pidgin is becoming more universally known in the independent Papua New Guinea. Conversely, it may well be that in the future a greatly expanded version of such a course will become of the greatest usefulness possible. To me, the small miracle was the way in which it all came to be done.

N O T E S

1. See papers by College staff in Brammall and May, eds 1975, between pages 468 and 511.

2. And an Australian Department of Territories recruiting brochure (1968:4) could declare:

In the meantime Melanesian 'pidgin' became a widely understood language in New Guinea and 'motu' in Papua. However this is a temporary phase. English is the official language of the Territory - all school children are taught in English - and it will ultimately be used by everyone.

3. See *New Guinea* 4/2, June-July 1969, which announces on its cover: Cats Among the Pidgins? Papers (by John Gunther, Geoffrey Smith, Stephen Wurm and Don Laycock) of the Council on New Guinea Affairs Pidgin Seminar March 7-9, 1969.

4. Example 122 in 'Eyewitness Reporting' (Carrington 1978) provides an illuminating example of this.

5. Richard Jeffreys was later in charge of the English Department at Goroka Teachers' College, and later still Curriculum Advisor to the Department of Education.

6. This, too, is evident in the 160 examples in Carrington 1978, where although /sia/ occurs most frequently, /chair/, /chia/, /cher/, /sea/, /siar/, /char/, /cheya/ and /seya/ are also found.

7. Hohola is a suburb of Port Moresby, largely peopled by indigenous occupiers of low-covenant housing. The girl's parents, one a Papuan, the other a New Guinean, had only English as their common tongue; theirs,

in local terminology, was a 'mixed-race' marriage. Such examples of creolisation are of course becoming less and less a matter for incredulity among such students as I describe in this paper.

8. Of which the favourite was Gwyther-Jones 1971!

9. We even listened to Superintendent 'Mike' Thomas's *Tripela Liklik Pik* and - more useful to us - Radio Telephone schedules in Pidgin. Needless to say, practical work during the year's Oral/Aural English course was designed to be applicable in any language: the medium of instruction was English, but more and more over the years Pidgin and vernaculars were used, e.g. in Radio Telephone practice, telephone training, the conduct of meetings, etc. Of the 'extension material' in written form, we found the Reverend John Sievert's excellent little books (Sievert 1970a-d) most useful, mainly by virtue of the familiarity of the stories to everyone.

L. CARRINGTON

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