

# LANGUAGE PLANNING AND NEW GUINEA PIDGIN<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

New Guinea Pidgin, the major lingua franca of Papua New Guinea, is believed to have at present close to a million and a half speakers which is one half of the total population of the country. During its colourful history a number of attempts at language planning have been made. However, whilst the subject of "Language Planning and Pidgin" is much talked and thought about in post-independence Papua New Guinea, there is very little systematic and planned action taking place in connection with it. At the same time, it appears that without vigorous implementation of concrete language planning actions in the near future, the continued existence of the language or at least its role as a general lingua franca in a country with approximately seven hundred languages may be in serious jeopardy.

To explain the situation, it will first be necessary to give some background information on the history of New Guinea Pidgin and its changing roles and social functions over the years to the present (see also Wurm 1977).

## 2. HISTORY AND ROLE OF PIDGIN

Recent research by Mühlhäusler (1975a, 1976b) has shown that the earliest stabilised form of New Guinea Pidgin was spoken in about 1882, on the Duke of York Islands, north of New Britain. He attributes the emergence of this earliest form of New Guinea Pidgin to the establishment of a stabilised plantation pidgin in Samoa where labourers recruited from the Duke of York area were working after 1879, with the first of them returning to their home area in 1882. With the spread

of administrative control through parts of German New Guinea, a version of this early New Guinea Pidgin, with its lexicon enriched with words from Tolai and German, spread far and wide and played an increasingly important role as a means of intercommunication across language boundaries. In this process, it became nativised and developed into an expanded pidgin, i.e. a language approximating, in its structural complexity and functional status, a natively spoken language.

The geographic and functional expansion of Pidgin continued and accelerated under Australian administration after 1914, and regional and social dialects began to appear. In the social setup of Papua New Guinea, however, Pidgin remained very much a low-caste language.

World War II saw a great expansion of the social functions of Pidgin which resulted from the emergence of new social patterns (Mühlhäusler 1979) and the breakdown of social barriers between indigenes and Europeans.

After the war, the spread of Pidgin into the realm of Police Motu (the other main Papua New Guinea lingua franca spoken in the former Territory of Papua) which had begun during the war years, gained momentum. At the same time, on the social level, Pidgin gradually changed its role from that of a caste language to a language with new roles and functions in the changing society.

In the early fifties, the status of English was enhanced dramatically for the indigenous population with primary schools generally switching to it as the medium of instruction as a result of a rigid governmental policy. However, the spread of Pidgin continued unabated, and the unrealistic 1953 call to Australia by the United Nations urging it to discontinue the use of Pidgin in the then Trust Territory of New Guinea (Hall 1955) had no effect on this: the administration had no control over the use of a nativised lingua franca as it was used mainly as an intertribal means of intercommunication by the indigenous population.

In the early sixties, regional diversification reached a comparatively high level, but after that the dialects became gradually neutralised as a result of the increasing mobility of the population, and the widening impact of mass media also played a part in this. At the same time, sociolectal diversification increased and an Urban Pidgin sociolect became well established. Creolised Pidgin made its first significant appearance during the sixties.

The coming of the seventies was, in Papua New Guinea, characterised by fundamental political and social changes, with the social position of members of the indigenous population undergoing a radical re-orientation as a result. This had the consequence that Pidgin was

suddenly assigned to much higher functional and social levels than before. It assumed the role of the first and main debate language in the Papua New Guinea House of Assembly (Hull 1968), and later the Parliament, its use by the mass media was greatly stepped up, and it again gained a role in primary education which it had before the switch to English in the fifties. At the same time, it became the inherent means of expression of a new subculture lying between the traditional and the Western, and in this capacity, it is now replacing local vernaculars and entering into a diglossic relation with English in urban areas. Socially determined differences became more prominent, and Rural Pidgin and Urban Pidgin became established as the two main sociolects (Mühlhäusler 1975c, 1979). Thus Pidgin became increasingly fluid and variable, and the stabilisation and remarkable uniformity, both regional and within sociolects, which had been characterising it, began to break down.

These phenomena were the direct consequence of the sudden elevation of Pidgin into a range of new and elaborate functions and social roles. In its forms as extant at the beginning of this development, it was clearly inadequate for fulfilling these roles satisfactorily - especially in terms of its vocabulary. It was therefore subjected to great pressures aiming to make its power of expression commensurate with its functional extensions. Pidgin contains, in its internal structure, powerful means of word formation and creation (Mühlhäusler 1973, 1975b, Wurm, Laycock and Mühlhäusler 1977) and the necessary enlargement of its vocabulary could, to a great extent, have taken place through internal creation if systematic and adequate language planning had been resorted to. Unfortunately, however, unco-ordinated ad hoc approaches reigned supreme, and wholesale borrowing from English became the prime process for the enrichment of the lexicon of Pidgin. The loans often violate the rules underlying the lexicon of New Guinea Pidgin (Mühlhäusler 1976a) and jeopardise the continued existence of Pidgin as an independent language. In addition, this unsystematic interference with the internal structure of Pidgin has brought about the abovementioned increasing instability of the language and thereby has begun to threaten the continuing value of the language as the main lingua franca of Papua New Guinea. Already, there is an incipient communication breakdown between speakers of different sociolects (Wurm 1976a), and intercommunication between speakers of them continues to be possible only because the older speakers of the heavily anglicised Urban sociolects are bi-sociolectal. With the growing up of a new generation of speakers of the Urban sociolect, the intercommunication situation can be expected to become critical.

### 3. LANGUAGE PLANNING

It has been pointed out above that very little systematic language planning has been applied to Pidgin in its present precarious situation, though the need for it can only be described as desperate. Interestingly enough, however, Pidgin had been the target of language planning actions of various kinds in the past.

Before reviewing these instances of language planning, some definitions of "language planning" may be called for. Activities concerned with planning related to a language or languages can be broadly classified into two categories, one concerned with the social and functional role, use and standing of a particular language or languages, and the other with the form, i.e. features of the structure, of the language itself. The author has proposed the use of the term, "external language planning" for the former, and "internal language planning" for the latter (Wurm 1977). As an alternative, the term "language planning" has been mentioned with reference to Pidgin in the discussion of the directed role and functions of a language or languages in defined situations and in terms of a conceived language policy. "Language engineering" was used for activities concerned with the form of the language or languages involved (Wurm, Laycock and Mühlhäusler 1977). At the same time, it has been suggested that "language planning" may be the appropriate term to describe the deliberations preceding actions which constitute a direct interference with a language or languages, and that "language engineering" may be reserved for the actions of direct interference. A precise line separating the two concepts may be somewhat difficult to draw, and actions coming under one or the other of the opposing headings are often closely interconnected in actual situations of trial and feedback. In this paper, the terms "external language planning" and "internal language planning" will be used as defined above.

### 4. PIDGIN AND EXTERNAL LANGUAGE PLANNING

Three significant acts of external language planning directly or indirectly involving Pidgin stand out in the past.

One of these is the successful elimination of Pidgin from the former Territory of Papua in the period between the two world wars as the direct consequence of the encouragement of Police Motu by Sir Hubert Murray, the Lieutenant-Governor of Papua, who had a great dislike of Pidgin. It seems likely that Papua New Guinea may pay dearly for this success (Johnson 1977, Wurm, Laycock and Mühlhäusler 1977) in terms of political difficulties in view of the existence of the Papua

Independence Movement which has adopted Police Motu (now re-named Hiri Motu) as its rallying point and also in terms of problems surrounding the adoption of a single major local lingua franca. Pidgin seems the obvious choice for that: its speakers number close to a million and a half, and it is spoken and understood by some people in most parts of the country, including the areas which were traditionally the realms of Hiri Motu. Nevertheless, the politically highly sensitive issue of the value attached to Hiri Motu by the Papua Independence Movement, and the increasing significance of the language for many of the inhabitants of the former Territory of Papua as a means of self-identification, has made it necessary for the government to assign equal status, as major *lingue franche*, to Hiri Motu and Pidgin, though the former has only about 200,000 speakers, and is a strictly regional lingua franca.

Another act of external language planning involving Pidgin has been the imposition of English as the sole medium of instruction in the education system of Papua New Guinea over the past twenty years. Here again, it seems likely that the success of this action has done a great disservice to the country (Johnson 1977). Knowledge of English is of no relevance to a very large portion of the population of Papua New Guinea which is very predominantly rural.

The great hoped-for results of universal education in English have not materialised, and the resulting decline and, in many instances, elimination of the previous elementary education in vernaculars and *lingue franche* since the mid-fifties (Neuendorf 1977, Mihalic 1977, Renck 1977) has undoubtedly had an adverse influence on the educational level of the masses in the country. Had the same amount of effort and money which has been invested into education through English been spent on elementary and basic education, and vocational training through *lingue franche*, especially Pidgin and to some extent Hiri Motu, and through vernaculars, the country would have a much better supply of people with the type of education it needs than it has at present. The English-speaking elite would still be there, because education would have switched to English as a medium of instruction for those who proceeded beyond basic education, but the overall price of such a process, in terms of monetary and social cost, would have been much lower.

A third, and utterly unsuccessful, act of external language planning in the past was constituted by the attempts directed at the elimination of Pidgin in the former Trust Territory of New Guinea, including the abovementioned call by the United Nations in 1953 to the Australian Administration to discontinue its use immediately (Hall 1955).

The present, or recent, fundamental changes in the social functions

and role of Pidgin and its elevation to higher-level roles (see above) also constitute significant acts of external language planning. However, they have put the language into a precarious situation threatening its basic role and continued survival, as has been pointed out above.

A strong plea for new approaches to the role of Pidgin in national development, education and as a National Language of Papua New Guinea was made by T. Dutton, the foundation professor in the Department of Language in the University of Papua New Guinea, in his inaugural lecture (Dutton 1976). His strong criticism of the existing approach which favours English stresses

- a) that it perpetuates old assumptions and old fallacies subsumed under them, and
- b) that it is too expensive from both social and monetary points of view.

He then proceeds to investigate the suitability of Pidgin as a general national language and proposes its adoption as such, and also advocates its use, in an "improved", i.e. enriched, form as the medium of instruction on all levels of education, including the secondary and tertiary. Its use in this function in education would constitute a novel step in external language planning involving Pidgin. Dutton demonstrates that the adoption of Pidgin in the functions proposed by him would entail very substantial monetary savings over the cost of the present use of English. He also argues that it would produce great benefits on the social side such as universal literacy within a very short time, more jobs for people for less money and at the right levels, education in a language which children can understand, an education for the mass of the people which is relevant to their needs, and the development of an important national symbol. He is, at the same time, aware of possible social costs, especially the fear of "intellectual deprivation" suffered by children educated in a still-developing language which does not have the same range in the subtlety of expression which English possesses. He feels, however, that these fears are largely unjustified and that by the time the children would be receiving schooling full-time in Pidgin the language would have been enriched sufficiently to make such fears groundless. Dutton is also aware of the possibility of both teacher and community resistance against a change of the kind proposed by him, but feels that this resistance would only arise out of the present situation. In other words, if the decision were taken to change the system, then this situation would also change, and the motivation for such resistance would disappear. Dutton continues by suggesting practical steps for the implementation of a non-English, i.e. Pidgin-oriented policy which constitutes a blueprint for external

language planning procedures aimed at achieving this goal. The main points which he makes are the following:

- 1) The Government should establish a national language committee whose task it would be to research further into the present state of the language and make decisions about what should be in the language.
- 2) There should be a "soft" advertising campaign to "sell" the new idea.
- 3) All public servants should be able to speak the national language and be encouraged to use it whenever convenient.
- 4) The national language should be taught in all primary schools not as an alternative to vernacular education but where necessary, together with it.
- 5) The national language should be taught to all adults interested in learning to read in it.
- 6) The national language should be the principal language used on all district and national radio stations for national information. Local vernaculars could be used for local information very much as at present.
- 7) The Government should publish local newspapers with reporting in the national language - not translating from English - and encourage people to publish their own papers and keep their own records.
- 8) Teachers' colleges should be turned over to teaching Tok Pisin and should concentrate on the production of reading materials and community aid programmes.
- 9) Teaching in English at the University should be gradually scaled down and the University should utilise resources for the production of materials in the national language. This could be done as follows:
  - (i) all graduates spend another year at university producing textbooks and writing in the language leading to an increase in the national literature;
  - (ii) the national language to be a compulsory part of all courses;
  - (iii) "diplomates" (if they restructure the university courses as presently being considered) could do useful things in the village helping out teachers with literacy materials in their own field;
  - (iv) the material written by graduate students to be used in first-year courses the next year;
  - (v) English to be offered as part of the course structure for certain professions, e.g. foreign affairs, business executives, university staff.
- 10) Selected Government officers to be sent to Tanzania and Indonesia to study their programmes.

## 5. PIDGIN AND INTERNAL LANGUAGE PLANNING

The above discussion by Dutton of detailed external language planning proposals concerning the use and role of Pidgin raises the question of internal language planning involving Pidgin.

### 5.1. PIDGIN AND INTERNAL LANGUAGE PLANNING IN THE PAST AND RECENTLY

Pidgin had been subjected to few acts of internal language planning in the past. One notable instance in pre-World War II times was the attempt by the Catholic Mission at the standardisation of Pidgin orthography, lexicon and grammar (Höltker 1945) which led to the emergence of two distinct (mainland Pidgin versus Island Pidgin) dialects as a result of the differing views held by the Missions in Alexishafen near Madang and in New Britain. However, these standardisation efforts lagged behind the developments in spoken Pidgin and brought about the development of an archaic Church Pidgin.

Another important act of internal language planning was the establishment of a standard Pidgin orthography in the mid-fifties by official administrative action through the efforts of the Department of Education (Wurm 1976b). Unfortunately, the newly devised orthography was not in fact adopted by Administration agencies because of the lack of implementation action. However, it was adopted, and later modified, by the Lutheran Mission and used in its numerous publications, including the Translation of the New Testament which appeared in 1969.

In 1969, a large group of interested persons from missions, government, the press, the House of Assembly, and institutions engaged in the professional and scientific study of language again attempted to fully standardise the orthography of Pidgin following the New Testament spelling. The deliberations and recommendations of this group constituted a good example of careful internal language planning, but again, there was no official action enforcing the proposals, and they were largely not followed by government departments and other agencies. However, the orthography was used in dictionaries (e.g. Mihalic 1971) and Pidgin textbooks (i.e. Dutton 1973) which were published since, then led to its increasing acceptance, especially amongst expatriates.

Apart from this concern with the spelling and orthography of Pidgin, the only significant acts of deliberate internal language planning involving Pidgin was the adoption of a standardised form of the language reflecting the northern coastal usage, by the Lutheran and Catholic Presses in their numerous publications. This also entailed the coining of a number of vocabulary items, predominantly through loans from English and other European sources, but also through the

utilisation of word-building rules inherent in Pidgin.

These controlled and careful attempts at enriching the vocabulary of Pidgin constituted acts which would legitimately come under the heading of internal language planning. On the other hand, the flooding of Pidgin with a mass of unmodified loans from English in ad hoc attempts by speakers using Pidgin in new social functions and roles for which it lacked readily available lexical means of expression, hardly deserves this name. It has, on the contrary, put the language into a situation in which language planning aiming at repairing the damage done is badly needed to ensure its continued existence as a language separate from English, and to enable it to continue its function as the main lingua franca of Papua New Guinea.

## 5.2. INTERNAL LANGUAGE PLANNING NEEDED FOR PIDGIN

Such internal language actions urgently called for Pidgin would, in this situation, have to be

- a) remedial, and
- b) constructive.

Pidgin has quite elaborate rules of word formation (Mühlhäusler 1976d, Wurm, Laycock, Mühlhäusler 1977) which are radically different from those of English. The wholesale introduction of English loanwords often violates these rules and not only leads to a breakdown of the rules underlying the structure of the Pidgin lexicon, but also decreases the mutual intelligibility of Urban and Rural Pidgin. Unfortunately, anglicised Urban Pidgin remains the variety used in many Government pronouncements and public statements intended for the nation as a whole: this means that much of the contents of such statements remains incomprehensible to the majority of the population and that the basic function of Pidgin as a general means of inter-communication is getting defeated.

Obviously, remedial action aiming at the solution of the two problems mentioned is needed. At the same time, the basic cause responsible for the emergence of these problems must be eliminated. The reason for the overloading of Pidgin with English loanwords is obviously the inadequacy of its lexical range which cannot meet the demands of the new roles and functions into which the language has suddenly been elevated as a result of social and political developments in very recent times. If therefore, carefully considered and vigorous constructive action can be taken to remedy this shortcoming through adequate enrichment of the Pidgin lexicon with vocabulary items which follow the internal rules of the language, two aims would be achieved: Pidgin would remain a language in its own right, and the enriched language would be readily

understood by all speakers of Pidgin. English loans would of course be required in considerable numbers, but if care is taken that the words adapted do not violate the basic rules of Pidgin structure, their presence would not be harmful to the nature of the language, and the mass media could be instrumental in explaining the meaning of new terms to the public. This would be quite feasible if the number of such words is not very large, and they fit into Pidgin structure - but it is fruitless if there is a flood of them, and they have shapes quite alien and structurally strange to the average Pidgin speaker.

#### 5.2.1. Orthography

From what has been said so far it appears that the two areas in which there is the greatest need for language planning for Pidgin are those of orthography and lexicon. With the former, a workable orthography is available - some internal planning improving its shape may perhaps be called for, but in general, it is adequate. What is needed, is concerted external language planning action to ensure its general acceptance and use.

#### 5.2.2. Lexicon

The situation surrounding the lexicon of Pidgin is different, and a large amount of internal language planning is required to enrich the Pidgin vocabulary with items of Pidgin creation. In fact, many such items are already in use by Pidgin-speakers, but they are over-shadowed by the English loans used by others in their place. The collection and sifting of genuine Pidgin creations for new concepts is an important task for internal language planning. External language planning action is needed to enrich the acceptance and use of such genuine Pidgin lexical items, and the discontinuation of the many straight English loans at present employed by speakers of the heavily anglicised Urban Pidgin sociolect.

Plans are under consideration in Papua New Guinea at present on an official level in connection with the establishment of an organisation co-operating with the University of Papua New Guinea, which would have as its task the study of the problems of the lexicon of Pidgin, with a view to its enrichment and elaboration so that the language can more adequately fulfil its present and future roles.

#### 5.2.3. Pronunciation and Spelling of English Loan Words

A problem directly associated with the recent English loans in Pidgin is that of the pronunciation (and in written Pidgin, the spelling)

of such words. The sound system of Pidgin is quite different from that of English, and the tendency of educated Pidgin-speakers to pronounce (and spell) such loan words in accordance with English usage further violates the structure of Pidgin and has an additional adverse effect on its comprehensibility to non-sophisticated Pidgin-speakers who do not know English.

The interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon can be observed that educationally sophisticated speakers of Pidgin tend to adopt an English accent in Pidgin for reasons of prestige, while at the same time they readily admit that such anglicised Pidgin is "bad Pidgin", and non-anglicised Rural Pidgin "good Pidgin" endowed with prestige. It appears that anglicised Pidgin is frequently used merely to enhance personal prestige, identifying the speaker as an educated person who knows English (Wurm 1977).

#### 5.2.4. Grammatical Structure

Another facet of Pidgin which calls for internal language planning is its grammatical structure. Until recently, differences in the grammatical structure of different forms of Pidgin were relatively minor (Laycock 1970, Wurm 1971), and its core grammar comparatively stable. As a result of the abovementioned social changes, however, Pidgin grammar, especially in the Urban sociolect, has become increasingly unstable and fluid in recent times. Remedial standardisation procedures concerning grammar are called for in the framework of internal language planning. In general, Pidgin is losing some grammatical features (such as aspect marking) which were common in some of its varieties until not long ago and which added to its expressive power. It appears that a task of internal language planning concerning Pidgin grammar would be to ascertain the nature and range of functions of such more elaborate forms in past and present forms of Pidgin and to prescriptively include them in the grammar of an enriched standardised form of Pidgin (Wurm 1975).

### 6. IMPLEMENTATION OF LANGUAGE PLANNING DECISIONS

With acts of language planning, external and internal, the question of the implementation of decisions taken is one of paramount importance. As has already been mentioned, general acceptance of the standardised Pidgin orthography twice foundered on this problem in the past.

While authoritative decrees sanctioning, and prescribing the acceptance of, the decisions of external language planning and the adoption of the language features proposed by internal language planning are

essential for success, they alone are not sufficient. The most important factor in the implementation of the decisions of language planners, once they have been officially accepted and sanctioned by those in authority, is the endowment of the proposed language roles and the use of the suggested language forms with some prestige and economic or other benefits. For instance, appointment to coveted governmental and other positions offering rich rewards in terms of prestige and material advantages could be made conditional on the acceptance and mastery of the planned, standardised form of the language by the appointee. Also of very great importance is the strict adherence to what has been proposed by language planners, on the part of the authorities who have accepted and sanctioned the proposals and decreed their implementation. This would constitute the setting of an example by a body commanding prestige, and this example would stand a good chance of being followed by others.

#### 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It seems that in the case of Pidgin, the need for careful attention to the question of the implementation of language planning decisions has been overlooked in the past. Beyond doubt, the success of urgently needed internal language planning actions involving Pidgin would, if taken, depend entirely on the amount and nature of attention given to the all-important question of the implementation of such actions and on the way in which this implementation is carried out. It seems also beyond doubt that, without adequate internal language planning and suitable implementation of its decisions, Pidgin will not fulfil the roles which it is destined to play in the opinion and views of many in Papua New Guinea.

#### N O T E

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