

7.4.2.4. NEW GUINEA PIDGIN TEACHING: POLICY OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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7.4.2.4.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

New Guinea Pidgin, though it had been in general use for a long time before, did not attain any official status in the Lutheran mission and church work until after World War II, and even then it received that status very slowly. For many years expatriate as well as indigenous church workers were very reluctant to even consider Pidgin as a true language, let alone accept it as a means of communication, for preaching and teaching. The preference was clearly for 'true' New Guinea languages, be they local vernaculars or *lingue franche*. That attitude was certainly something very positive as far as the intensity of the mission work was concerned, and the first generations of missionaries and indigenous Christians still have to be highly commended for all their efforts to implant the Christian message into truly Papua New Guinean thought patterns through the languages they used. But when Pidgin developed and spread and actually became the *lingua franca* of an area in which the Lutheran Church had until then tried to work with several *lingue franche*, it proved not so advantageous for the work to retain the old rigid standards of linguistic purism.

It was to a large extent these circumstances, and some pressures from outside the church, which eventually persuaded the Lutheran Church to change its policy with regard to Pidgin, and to accept Pidgin as the *lingua franca* of the church, as well as that of the country.

7.4.2.4.2. CHURCH LINGUE FRANCHE AND PIDGIN

When Lutheran mission work got under way in New Guinea in the '80s of the last century, it was started almost simultaneously in the

Finschhafen and Madang areas. In Finschhafen, the use of Pidgin was completely out of the question for a long time, since it was hardly known there, especially after the German administration moved away in 1892 to the Madang District. Also, it did not take the Lutheran missionaries and the emerging congregations too long to decide on their language policy, and to introduce two local vernaculars, Yabêm and Kâte, as church *lingue franche*.¹ That in particular barred the use of Pidgin in the Lutheran Church in that area for a long time to come, and there were always enough bilingual people through whom contact between speakers of these two languages could be maintained.

In the Madang area the situation was different. Especially the coastal region there shows a much greater linguistic complexity than the Finschhafen area. The missionaries, however, engaged in the study of quite a number of local vernaculars, since few, if any of them, regarded Pidgin as a true language which could be utilised for mission work. The general opinion of the missionaries of that time about Pidgin is expressed by one of them who later wrote in his autobiography:

Es konnten einem die Haare zu Berge stehen, wenn man dies Kauderwelsch anhörte und selber unter Umständen mitmachen musste. ('One's hair would stand on end when one listened to that gibberish, and perhaps even had to participate.') (Hoffmann 1948:126)

However, already before World War I, Pidgin and its use outside the church developed faster in the Madang area than anywhere else on the New Guinea mainland. Madang was an administrative and business centre where Pidgin was used extensively. Young men who worked on the coconut plantations around Madang, where mainly Pidgin was spoken, returned to their home areas, and soon Pidgin-speakers could be found in many villages, and they came in handy as interpreters, sometimes even for visiting missionaries.

In the years between the two World Wars, Pidgin therefore happened to become more and more used also for mission and church work, even more so because the final decision on a church *lingua franca* had to be put off several times, and when it was finally made, it was actually too late.² Because of that delay, several languages were used consecutively as *lingue franche* in some areas, with the result that none of them became well established. Therefore, for church conferences and elders' meetings, where people of different language groups were involved, Pidgin was the only possible means of communication, and inevitably had to be used. Also missionaries transferring from one language area to another found Pidgin very handy. Even then it was never officially acknowledged as a language, but was used rather as a kind of necessary

evil. The only Pidgin 'literature' produced by Lutheran Mission before World War II was a small leaflet containing some hymns and the Lord's Prayer.

The situation changed quite rapidly when in the years after World War II the towns started to grow fast in New Guinea, and Lutheran Mission found it necessary to begin 'compound' work which subsequently led to the formation of town congregations. That was a novelty in comparison to the situation which had prevailed prior to that time, where the congregations had been located in purely rural environments, and thereby always stayed within the limits of languages or language groups. This new situation necessitated the use of Pidgin, which was the daily language of the people at their respective jobs anyway. Special meetings and services were, however, always arranged for people of the different language groups in the towns. It was in Madang that the town work was started first, and there the first 'Lotu Buk', containing Pidgin hymns and Bible Stories, was compiled and printed.

It was soon realised that town work had to be extended to all major centres in the country, including towns which were outside of the actual Lutheran area, like Port Moresby, Rabaul, and others in Papua and on the islands, to which great numbers of Lutherans had moved and had to be served by the church. Except where a town congregation happened to be made up entirely of people from the same church lingua franca area, the language for all town congregations was Pidgin from the beginning.

In 1956, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea (ELCONG) (now renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELCPNG)) was founded as an organisation indigenous to New Guinea. At once Pidgin became the most important language for inter-district communication in the church, and though on the district level, meetings and conferences continued at least partly to be conducted in church lingue franche, on the church-wide level they were held in Pidgin from then on.

At that time, the production of Pidgin literature for use in the Lutheran Church was taken up on a modest scale. It was decided, and also agreed upon with other churches, that the version of Pidgin spoken in the Madang area should be the standard norm, and should be used for all literature produced. The first publications were mainly of the type to be used immediately in the new all-Pidgin congregations. Over the years, however, the production of Pidgin literature increased to such an extent that the Church found it necessary to appoint a full-time literature director who devoted most of his time to the development and promotion of Pidgin literature. A climax of Pidgin literature development was the publication of the Pidgin New Testament by the British

and Foreign Bible Society in 1969. Much of the translation work had been done by Lutheran church workers, and the book was printed by Luther Press in Madang. But this publication served a great need of all Christian churches in the country. It boosted especially also the promotion of Pidgin as a language, in the Lutheran Church as well as in other churches.

But in the meantime things had happened in the field of education which had gradually led to a change in the language policy of the Lutheran Church, and to the replacement of the church *lingue franche* by Pidgin in many areas.

7.4.2.4.3. PIDGIN IN EDUCATION IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Until the end of the '50s, almost all educational work within the Lutheran Church had been carried out in church *lingue franche*. An exception was the Pidgin school at Banz in the Western Highlands which was started as early as 1950, according to the Banz missionary at that time, as 'the result of need, not a product of policy or preference'.³ Such need was to influence the policy of the Church greatly in years to come.

Towards the end of the '50s, the Australian Administration was getting ready for the introduction of 'universal primary education in English'. At the annual Lutheran mission conference in 1959, the Director of Education informed the Lutheran Mission and ELCONG that in 1960, the Administration would close all schools at which the language of instruction was a New Guinea language other than the local vernacular. That was a severe blow for the school system of the Church, because that definition applied to about 90% of its schools.

One immediate reaction of the conference was to delegate one missionary to produce reading and writing programmes in Pidgin for the first two school years. However, a majority of missionaries and quite a number of indigenous Christians still viewed Pidgin with suspicion with regard to its suitability for education. The preference was still for 'true' New Guinea languages. So in 1960 the conference decided that Pidgin schools should be established only where there was no possibility of conducting a school in a church *lingua franca*, and that those Pidgin schools should continue only until necessary school materials in local languages and teachers acquainted with such languages were available. It was, of course, an over-optimistic attitude to assume that a church-wide school programme with all its facets, such as training of teachers and developing of teaching programmes, could be carried out in so many different languages simultaneously. In consequence, the second half of the resolution never materialised.

Besides efforts to keep the vernacular schools going, the attempt was made to convert as many schools as possible into English schools in order to comply with the policy of the Administration. Teachers who had never learned English properly themselves tried now to teach it as a language and to communicate knowledge in it. Within a couple of years it became all too obvious that this move had been wrong, since an almost completely illiterate generation was growing up. Therefore in 1962 the Church, in order to comply with Administration policy, but also to fulfil its obligations towards its baptised children for Christian education, decided on a dual system: some English schools were established as far as qualified teachers were available, and a second school programme was conducted in New Guinea vernaculars and/or Pidgin. In that way, all the good teachers whose only shortcoming was that they did not know English, could be utilised for school work.

This was in fact a resurrection of the former vernacular school programme of the Lutheran Church, and in order to distinguish it from the Administration's 'official' education programme, it was then termed 'Bible School' programme, and was more recently renamed 'Vernacular School' programme.

In 1963, the writing of Pidgin teaching programmes and textbooks for the vernacular village schools commenced, and in 1964, the first training course with the programmes for the first school year was conducted at Rintebe in the Eastern Highlands. As in subsequent years programmes and books for further school years were produced, the training courses (first mostly concerned with the retraining of older teachers, and later largely with the training of new ones) were extended first to one year, then to two. Thus Rintebe developed into a permanent training school for Lutheran vernacular teachers, with Pidgin as the language of instruction. Programmes were developed for four years of the lowest (village) level, and for two additional years on a medium level. The declared aim of these schools was and is to make children literate in a Papua New Guinea language, which in fact is Pidgin almost everywhere, and to provide Christian education for them.

While the new school programme was developed at Rintebe and teachers were trained for it and vernacular schools established or re-established throughout the church, various other training programmes were begun in Pidgin, or existing programmes were switched partly or completely over to Pidgin. This included the Higher or District Bible Schools which train congregational workers, two Theological Seminaries, two Domestic Training Schools, and a Technical School.

7.4.2.4.4. USE OF PIDGIN IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN RECENT YEARS

At the present time, Pidgin is used extensively over most of the area of the ELCPNG, perhaps with the exception of the Finschhafen area where in recent years the Kâte language has staged a surprising come-back in all spheres of church life.

In the towns, as it has always been, Pidgin is used for all major facets of congregational work, though for the benefit of those who know English, services in that language are regularly conducted, and the individual language groups still have services and other activities in their respective languages.

But even in 'rural' environments the use of Pidgin is spreading at an increasing rate, especially in areas in which linguistic diversity prohibits the use of local vernaculars on a wider than village or congregational scale. Most conferences and meetings are conducted entirely or to a large extent in Pidgin also in rural areas, if people of different language areas are present. And even if the discussion or part of it is carried out in another language, the records are usually kept in Pidgin.

The statistics for 1973 show the following figures for schools and training institutions of the Church in which Pidgin is the sole, or the main medium of instruction:

Vernacular Schools on the lower and medium levels:	340 teachers, 9,500 students
District Bible Schools:	36 teachers, 670 students
Theological Seminaries:	14 teachers, 131 students
Teacher Training Rintebe:	8 teachers, 107 students
Girls' Schools (Domestic Training):	4 teachers, 60 students
Technical School:	3 teachers, 20 students
Medical Training:	2 teachers, 30 students

The promotion of Pidgin literature is one of the aims of Kristen Pres Incorporated (KPI) which was founded in 1969, succeeding the original Lutheran Mission Press, and later Luther Press, which had been operating under the direction of the Board of Publication of the Church. The list of titles available from KPI in 1974 shows 60 Pidgin titles, 29 of them of a religious nature. Every year, KPI also publishes a Pidgin Church Calendar which is very popular and is widely used also by literate people outside the Church.

The monthly Church newspaper 'New Guinea Lutheran' was for a number of years published trilingually: in Pidgin, English, and Kâte. As from

1974 on, the publication has been switched over to a Pidgin edition exclusively. This again is significant for the importance of Pidgin in the Lutheran Church of today in Papua New Guinea.

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N O T E S

1. Cf. chapters 7.4.5.2. and 7.4.5.3. in this volume.
2. Cf. P. Freyberg's chapter on Bel (Gedaged), 7.4.5.4. in this volume.
3. H. Mansur, personal communication.

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