

10 ‘Don’t take my word for it’: two case studies of unexpected non-borrowing

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1 Introduction

Prolonged or intensive contact between people of different cultures very often leads to lexical (and other) borrowing, at least in one direction. Within the Pacific, sandalwood stations and plantations provide one kind of context in which multilingual contact took place—and which indeed helped give rise to a stable creole which is still spoken in much of Melanesia—while colonisation was another situation in which borrowing was highly likely (though here the contact was often, or predominantly, bilingual rather than multilingual).

In this paper, however, I want to investigate two situations in which, although one would expect a certain degree of borrowing to have taken place, virtually no words moved from one language to another. These are the negligible influence of the languages of the Loyalty Islands and southern Vanuatu on Bislama, and of German on Samoan. I will show that social attitudes and competitive sources of vocabulary were the major factors in the lack of borrowing.¹

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2 Bislama and the Tafea/Loyalties languages

Some of the earliest prolonged and intensive contacts with outsiders in Melanesia took place in the Loyalty Islands (as well as the Isle of Pines) in New Caledonia and in the southern islands of Vanuatu (now known as the Tafea Province), and a significant proportion of plantation and sandalwood labourers and ships' crew were recruited from these areas. Despite their numbers, the languages of Tafea and the Loyalties have made a negligible contribution to the Bislama lexicon.²

2.1 History of labour recruitment and other contacts

Sandalwood expeditions began in the 1820s, and sandalwood stations opened in the area under discussion in the middle of the nineteenth century. These stations operated from 1844–72 in Aneityum, 1847–63 in Tanna, 1854–64 in Erromango (all in Tafea) and 1856–61 in Ouvéa in the Loyalties, and all employed labour from a number of different islands:

Sandalwooders had, from the beginnings of the trade, freely employed Melanesians away from their homes for extensive periods. Tan[n]ja seems to have gained its reputation as an excellent source of 'labour' very early in the trade. [...] Paddon always had a number of workers from other islands on his station at Aneityum. (Shineberg 1967:190).

Labour recruitment, which was to have a marked effect on the development of Melanesian Pidgin, began in the early 1860s. Basically, the recruiters began in the south of Melanesia, recruiting initially from the Loyalty Islands and from Efate and the islands of the Tafea Province in Vanuatu, before moving increasingly northwards into northern Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The major destinations were the plantations of Fiji, Samoa and Queensland and the nickel mines of New Caledonia, though some labourers also went to Hawai'i and French Polynesia—and, of course, in later years to plantations within Melanesia itself.

For the period 1864–75, for example, 7352 ni-Vanuatu were recruited to work on plantations in Fiji. Of these, we know the island of origin of 2125: 1118 from Tafea (mainly Tanna), 1007 from elsewhere in Vanuatu (Siegel 1987:55). If we assume that those of unknown origin were in roughly the same proportion, this would mean that probably 3500–4000 of the 7352 ni-Vanuatu labourers in Fiji were from Tafea. Similarly, we know that by the 1880s there were about 2500 ni-Vanuatu in New Caledonia, and these were mainly from Tanna, although there was a considerable number from Efate. Although the recruiters moved northward, they returned to Tanna from about 1890–1912, recruiting both men and women (Dorothy Shineberg, pers. comm.).

So Tannese particularly were prominent among the labourers recruited in Bislama's formative years, and Loyalty Islanders were prominent as ships' crew. Their sheer weight of

² I will not be concerned here with the two Polynesian Outlier languages Futuna-Aniwa in Tafea and Fagaueva on Ouvéa, but rather with the non-Polynesian languages of the islands of Erromango, Tanna and Aneityum in Vanuatu and with the Iaai, Drehu and Nengone languages in the Loyalties.

numbers would suggest that their languages would have had some influence on the emerging creole. But, as will be seen below, that influence has been negligible.

2.2 Tafea/Loyalties lexical items in Bislama

Crowley (1990:145–178) lists over 160 words in Bislama which have a Vanuatu origin—i.e. which derive from one or more indigenous Vanuatu languages. The only Bislama words which have a Tafea origin are the following, which represent less than 3% of the Melanesian content of Bislama.

Table 1: Tafea words in Bislama

Form	Meaning	Source
<i>kasi</i>	(term of address) to a Tannese person	Lenakel <i>kasi</i> ‘term of address between equals’
<i>lavlaven</i>	greeting to a Tannese person	Whitesands <i>laplapən</i> ‘morning’ (cf. <i>lapən</i> ‘night’)
<i>names</i>	expression of surprise	Lenakel <i>n-am-es</i> ‘you-CONTINUOUS-copulate’
<i>nandae</i>	k.o. tree, <i>Myristica fatua</i>	Sye <i>nande</i> (= /nanre/)
<i>piak</i>	1. term of address to a Tannese person 2. exclamation for immunity in <i>lelu</i> (chasing game)	Lenakel, Whitesands <i>p^wiak</i> ‘my older same-sex sibling’
<i>yanganen</i>	expression of surprise, delight or pleasure [only commonly used by people from Tanna]	Whitesands <i>iaŋanən</i> ‘his penis’

Crowley (1990:167) further states that ‘there are no words of Melanesian origin from Loyalties languages in Bislama’. However, there does appear to be one: *yosi* ‘expression of admiration or surprise’, which is also found with the same meaning in New Caledonian French, and which derives ultimately from Drehu (Lifou) *iosi* ‘vagina’. Crowley (1990:73–85) discusses the considerable influence that early Melanesian Pidgin had on the languages of the Loyalty Islands. That speakers of Iaaï, Drehu and Nengone also spoke Bislama is incontestable.

2.3 Some explanations

Why then are there so few Tafea and Loyalties words in Bislama, given the large numbers of Tannese and Loyalty Islanders involved in the sandalwood industry and the labour trade?

2.3.1 Phonological 'difficulty'

The explanation may lie in the nature of the phonologies of these languages. Below, for example, are phonemes of Iaai (Ozanne-Rivierre 1984:12–13):

	<i>p</i>			<i>t</i>	<i>t̥</i>	<i>tʃ</i>	<i>k</i>		<i>i</i>	<i>ü</i>		<i>u</i>
<i>b^w</i>	<i>b</i>			<i>d</i>	<i>d̥</i>	<i>dʒ</i>	<i>g</i>		<i>e</i>	<i>ø</i>	<i>ə</i>	<i>o</i>
<i>w</i>	<i>ɸ</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>θ</i>	<i>s</i>		<i>ʃ</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>æ</i>		<i>a</i>	<i>ɔ</i>
<i>w̥</i>	<i>β</i>		<i>ð</i>						+ length			
<i>m^w</i>	<i>m</i>			<i>n</i>	<i>ɳ</i>	<i>ɲ</i>	<i>ŋ</i>					
<i>m̥^w</i>	<i>m̥</i>			<i>n̥</i>	<i>ɳ̥</i>	<i>ɲ̥</i>	<i>ŋ̥</i>					
				<i>l</i>								
				<i>l̥</i>								

Phonotactically, Iaai is not much more 'difficult' than Vanuatu languages which have contributed vocabulary to Bislama: a word may end in a consonant, but basically the only permitted word-medial clusters are those in which the first member is a nasal. Phonologically, however, non-Polynesian Loyalties languages would sound 'strange' indeed to most Melanesian and Polynesian ears.

Tafea languages too are viewed by speakers of other Vanuatu languages as 'hard to pronounce'. Although the phoneme inventories are not nearly as complex as that of Iaai (for example), and not particularly unusual in comparison with other Vanuatu languages (apart perhaps from phonemic /ə/ in Tanna and /θ/ in Anejoñ), the phonotactics are quite different from many of these northern and central languages. As a result of various historical vowel-deletion rules, initial and final consonants and consonant clusters occur frequently. Ni-Vanuatu who come from languages with predominantly open syllables would thus find such words difficult to pronounce.

Table 2 shows a number of vernacular words in Bislama which derive from one or more central or northern Vanuatu languages, together with their cognates in one or more Tafea and Loyalties languages. (Square brackets enclose forms which are probably not cognate.)

One possible explanation, then, is that where there were competing alternatives the phonologically 'simplest' was the one chosen; and the languages which have contributed most to Bislama (Nakanamanga and those of Ambae-Maewo-Pentecost) fit this description (Crowley 1990:168). Phonotactically, open syllables were preferred over closed syllables and single consonants over clusters. Phonologically, words with 'unusual' phonemes (like the Iaai retroflex and voiceless sonorant consonants and the front rounded vowels) were also avoided. This is not unexpected: it is part of the pidginisation process—finding the 'lowest common

denominator'. Crowley (1990:170) seems to concur with this view, at least as far as the Tanna languages are concerned:

Vocabulary from Tannese languages could also have entered Beach-la-Mar under these circumstances, but it did not. [...] the absence of vocabulary from Tannese languages could be due to the widespread perception among ni-Vanuatu even today that the languages of Tanna are 'hard'.

Table 2: Tafea/Loyalties cognates of Melanesian vocabulary in Bislama

Bislama	Tafea cognate	Iaai cognate	Meaning
<i>dalingan</i>	Lenakel <i>nəp^wəŋ-telŋən</i> , Anejoŋ <i>intijŋan</i> (with 3SG suffix)	<i>kəŋen</i>	ear
<i>nabakura</i>	Sye <i>poŋur</i> , Anejoŋ <i>inpeye</i>		k.o. tree, <i>Calophyllum</i> sp.
<i>nabangga</i>	Sye <i>npaŋ</i> , Lenakel <i>nepək</i>	<i>bæk</i>	banyan
<i>nakavika</i>	Lenakel <i>nəkəvək</i>	<i>əxəiə</i>	Malay-apple, <i>Eugenia malaccensis</i>
<i>nambuton</i>	Lenakel <i>nəprəŋən</i> (with 3SG suffix)	<i>bibiken</i>	navel
<i>namele</i>	Anejoŋ <i>nam^woj</i>	[<i>ivekə</i>]	cycad, <i>Cycas circinnalis</i>
<i>nasiko</i>	Anejoŋ <i>neθey</i>	<i>dʒidʒi</i>	kingfisher, <i>Halcyon</i> sp.
<i>natalie</i>	Lenakel <i>telh</i> [<i>teʃ</i>], Anejoŋ <i>intejeθ</i>	[<i>waemahar</i>]	k.o. tree, <i>Terminalia catappa</i>

2.3.2 Social attitudes

Crowley (1990:170) also raises another possible obstacle to borrowing, to do with social attitudes towards the speakers of these languages rather than with articulatory difficulties:

Another explanation perhaps relates to prestige. I have not found any references in contemporary sources to the attitudes of the Tannese and the Efatese labourers towards each other, but today the Tannese in Vanuatu are often looked down on by people from the islands to the north. [...] Thus, perhaps Tannese words could simply have been considered 'unworthy'.

An examination of the meanings of the Bislama words which derive from these languages might support this thesis. Of the Tafea words listed in Table 1, all except *nandae* 'k.o. tree,

Myristica fatua could be classified as marginal vocabulary: they consist of exclamations and interjections, some of them restricted in use to or by Tannese. The fact that three of the seven loans from Tafea/Loyalties languages—*names*, *yanganen* and *yosi*—are in fact obscene or tabu words in the source languages might reinforce this view. Dorothy Shineberg (pers. comm.), however, is of the view that, at least in the nineteenth century, Tannese were feared for their superior sorcery rather than looked down upon.

Speakers of early Bislama from islands outside Tafea seem to have been very reluctant to take on vocabulary from the Tafea languages. This seems to have been due to attitudes to the languages themselves (too 'hard'), or to the speakers of those languages (too 'primitive' or too 'dangerous').

3 Samoan and German

Milner's (1993) *Samoan dictionary* (xlv–xlvi) lists various abbreviations used in entries, among them etymological abbreviations like E = English, G = Greek and H = Hebrew. Nowhere is there mention of German as a source of borrowed words, and Samoan academics and other educated Samoans routinely maintain that there are *no* words of German origin in Samoan, despite long contact between Samoans and Germans and despite the fact that German has contributed vocabulary to other Pacific languages.

3.1 German influence on other Pacific languages

At one time or another in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Germany had commercial, missionary and/or colonial interests in New Guinea, Samoa, Nauru, parts of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Belau, and the Marshall Islands. This involvement ceased after World War I, when other colonial powers took over Germany's former colonies.

German vocabulary was borrowed into most of the languages whose speakers were in contact with Germans, although 85 years after the withdrawal of the German colonisers some of the earlier German loans have been replaced with words from English or other sources. Tok Pisin is perhaps the best known case. Mühlhäusler (1979:202ff.) presents 'almost 150 items of German origin ... listed in various dictionaries and vocabularies compiled after the termination of German control [which] indicates a fair degree of institutionalisation of these loans'. Many of these are no longer in current use, or even recognisable to modern-day Tok Pisin speakers. But the fact remains that German had considerable influence on the vocabulary of early Tok Pisin; and there still are a number of words of German origin in very common use in modern Tok Pisin, like *gumi* 'rubber, something made of rubber', *beten* 'pray' and *rausim* 'get rid of'.

Marshallese is another Pacific language which has borrowed quite a number of words from German, like the following which are still in current use and which refer to everyday concepts (Abo et al. 1976):

Table 3: Some German loans in Marshallese

Marshallese	Meaning	From German
<i>jeep</i>	shake hands to make a promise	<i>geben</i> 'give' (as in <i>sich die Hände geben</i>)
<i>kapel</i>	fork	<i>Gabel</i>
<i>komja</i>	senior government official	<i>Kommissar</i>
<i>kumi</i>	small rubber tube	<i>Gummi</i> 'rubber'
<i>maak</i>	money	<i>Mark</i> unit of currency
<i>malen</i>	write, draw	<i>malen</i> 'paint, portray'
<i>tōbak</i>	tobacco	<i>Tabak</i>

3.2 German loans in Samoan³

Samoa experienced the common Pacific phenomenon of visiting trading ships, and indeed the beachcombers seem to have been the first to introduce a kind of Christianity (Meleisea 1987:12). John Williams, of the London Missionary Society, established more formal Christianity in 1830, and the French Marists arrived in 1845. Foreign settlement increased in the 1840s and 1850s, and both the British and Americans set up consulates at this time. The German commercial presence dates from the mid-1850s with the establishment in Samoa of the firm of Godeffroy und Sohn.

'Internal instability and external involvement in island affairs continued as Britain, Germany, and the United States established treaties with the islands' Samoan government to protect trade and military rights in 1878–79' (Bunge & Cooke 1984:445). The conflict between the metropolitan powers continued despite the Treaty of Berlin and the Tripartite Convention of 1889, until in 1899 Britain renounced its interests and, in the following year, the islands were partitioned between the United States and Germany. While the United States has maintained its control over eastern Samoa, German rule over the western islands lasted only until 1914, when New Zealand took over the administration until what was then called Western Samoa achieved independence in 1962.

Cain (1986) lists over 2500 loan words in Samoan. Many of these are Samoanisations of biblical personal and place names, names of towns in Europe, etc. The bulk of the remainder come from English. Indeed, he lists only fifteen from German (though there are two more which are probably mis-identified as coming from English), and more than half of these are obsolete. Here is the list, in three categories; in category 1, in addition to the German source I have shown the modern equivalent (in all cases from English).

³ Much of the information in this section derives from Bunge and Cooke (1984) and Meleisea (1987). I use the term Samoa to refer to what today is the independent state of Samoa (until recently Western Samoa) and the US territory of American Samoa.

Table 4: German loans in Samoan

Samoan	Meaning	From German
1. Obsolete (according to Cain 1986)		
'amepose ~ 'amepusa	anvil	Amboss (> anivalo)
'ametimani	bailiff, official	Amtmann (> peilifi)
kakao	cocoa	Kakao (> koko)
'ofisia	officer	Offizier (> 'ofisa)
'Oreta	Easter	Ostern (> 'Êseta)
poseta	post (noun)	Post (> meli)
salā	salad	Salat (> sālali)
2. In current use (according to Cain 1986)		
fēnika	pfennig	Pfennig
fumfa	be of no account, worthless, unprofitable	Fünfer '5 pfennig coin'
hela	trivial matter	Heller 'farthing'
kaisa	emperor	Kaiser
kaisalika	imperial	kaiserlich
kaisarina	empress	Kaiserin
3. Misidentified by Cain (1986)		
maiesitete	majesty	Mäjestät
maka	Mark (unit of currency)	Mark

Let me comment first on category 3. The form *maka* meaning 'Mark (unit of currency)' almost certainly comes from German, although *maka* with the meaning '(to) mark' is of English origin. Both Cain and Milner identify *maiesitete* as coming from English 'majesty', but German *Mäjestät* seems a much more likely source, explaining both the first *i* (< German *j*) and the second *t* in the Samoan form.⁴

Of the obsolete forms, Ioane Lafaai (pers. comm.) recalls seeing the term 'ametimani' being used in reference to an early New Zealand official, but the others seem to be well and truly obsolete, and indeed have been replaced by forms of English origin. The same, however, could also be said for most of the terms in category 2, with the following exceptions:

⁴ The form *salā* 'salad' in category 1 in Table 4 may not derive from German *Salat* but from French *salade*, with stress (reinterpreted as vowel length) on the second syllable. There has been a small amount of French influence in Samoan as well.

- (i) *fumfa* which, despite its unusual phonotactics, is still in current colloquial use;
- (ii) the term *kaisa* which refers to the leader of a village group which comes to another village to perform a play or concert (Tasi Malifa, pers. comm.); and
- (iii) those that are homophonous with personal names (Fenika, Sala, Kaisa).

We are left then with a very few words of German origin which are current in Samoan (*fumfa*, *kaisa* and *maiesitete* being the only serious cases), and all of these could be considered as marginal vocabulary in one way or another—unlike the examples in Table 3 of German loans in Marshallese or the list of German loans in Tok Pisin.

3.3 German versus English in Samoa

Although German commercial interests remained strong for a period of sixty years up to World War I, and although Samoa was a German colony for the later part of that period, English-speaking missionaries dominated the religious and educational affairs of the islands. It was these missionaries who were involved in the translation of the Bible and the introduction of literacy, as well as in grass-roots education. This necessitated the introduction of modern vocabulary, and it was to their English missionaries rather than their German colonial 'masters' that Samoans looked for these new words.

On the other hand, the attitude of Solf, the first German governor, was rather different. The relationship between coloniser and colonised was a paternalistic one. Solf did indeed aim at promoting Samoan language and customs; but he also believed that the German language and culture would be too difficult and too 'advanced' for the Samoans, and was irrelevant in that environment. Thus the German administration carried on in Apia, issuing ordinances in Samoan, while the English-speaking missionaries carried on their work in the villages, using a level of linguistic intercourse that facilitated the transfer of English words into Samoan (Ioane Lafoai, pers. comm.). It would appear that this difference in colonial philosophy and practice is the major explanation for the paucity of German loans in modern Samoan.

4 Conclusions

The two cases which I have documented here are cases where borrowing might have been expected to take place, but did not—at least not on the scale which one might have expected. In the case of Bislama and the Tanna languages, it appears as if linguistic factors—phonological difficulty—were at least partly responsible, though social attitudes may also have been a factor. In the case of German and Samoan, it seems that social factors were of prime importance. In both cases, of course, there was an alternative source or sources for the introduction of necessary vocabulary.

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