

MALAITAN INFLUENCE ON TWO GRAMMATICAL PARTICLES IN SOLOMON ISLANDS PIJIN

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

Solomon Islands Pijin is the variety of Melanesian Pidgin English spoken in the Solomon Islands. It is called 'Pijin' by Solomon Islanders, and I will refer to it by the same or with the abbreviation SIP. It is spoken by over half the Solomon Islanders as a second language of wider communication (total population of the Solomons is currently estimated to be 230,000 and by a few thousand² as a first language (primarily children in towns and plantation areas).

The influence of English on Pijin is immediately obvious. A scan through the Pijin dictionary (Simons and Young 1978) shows that 95 per cent of the words defined there have borrowed their form from English. However, the influence of local Melanesian languages is evident as well, equally as pervasive but generally more subtle. As a general rule the contribution of English has been more at the level of form and primary meaning, while the contribution of the local languages has been more at the level of grammar and extended meanings.

I believe the Malaitan languages have an especially close relationship with SIP because of the role the Malaitans played in the labour trade. A glance at the history of the 19th century labour trade to Queensland shows that there was a higher proportion of Malaitans working overseas than people from any other single island. Edward Docker in his book *The Blackbirders* states (1970:233):

From about 1885 onwards that island [Malaita] had come to supply overwhelmingly the largest number of recruits to Queensland out of all Melanesia.

Another source, Peter Corris in *Passage, port, and plantation: a history of Solomon Islands labor migration 1870-1914* states (1973:89, 104) that Malaitans were regarded as the best workers by plantation owners and labour recruiters. As for their actual numbers, Corris (1973:129-130) provides the following statistics about the number of people to be repatriated when the labour trade was abolished:

At the time of the 1906 inquiry there were 6389 Melanesians in Queensland liable to deportation; it was estimated that about 4000 were Solomon Islanders, of whom about 2500 were Malaitans.

He also reports (p.104) that Malaitans were to be found living in many other parts of the Solomons as workers on trading ships, plantations, and at trading

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centres. Accounts of early visitors to Malaita show that pidgin English was already well established in some parts of the island by the turn of the century. A visitor to South Malaita in 1894 'found there very young children who could speak Pidgin English which they had learned from Queensland returns' (Corris p.123). A visitor to Fiu (northwest Malaita) in 1902 reported that:

'most if not all' of the people there had been to
Queensland of Fiji and spoke 'pidgeon English'
(Corris p.123).

All of this indicates that both by their numbers and their personality, the Malaitans were the dominant group of Solomon Islanders in the setting in which Solomon Islands Pijin was growing. It is reasonable to assume that because of this, they had a great influence on Solomons Pijin in its formative stages, and in its spread throughout the Solomons group. Today one can see the influence of Malaitan languages on SIP in both its vocabulary and its grammar, and this paper seeks to examine the influence Malaitan grammar has had on two specific grammatical particles in SIP.

This paper examines two Pijin words which are particularly elusive: *nao* and *ia*. It is generally assumed that both have inherited their lexical forms from English (from 'now' and 'here' respectively), but an attempt to understand their meaning and grammatical uses from the perspective of the English source words will prove far inadequate. The key to understanding their meanings lies in a comparison to the forms in the Malaitan languages for which *nao* and *ia* correspond in function.

For the native English speaker who learns SIP, it is very difficult, even after years of experience, to use these particles correctly because of interference from English. However, for the Malaitan, the use of these particles parallels the use of similar particles in his or her mother tongue, so it is largely a case of lexical transfer. The function and meaning of these two particles does overlap with the function and meaning of English 'now' and 'here' in a small way, and this is probably how the phonological forms got a toe-hold in the language. But the true source of their present day function and meaning is from the vernaculars.

My examples showing a comparison between SIP and a Malaitan vernacular use the To'abaita (TOB) language specifically. To'abaita is spoken by about 6000 people at the northwest end of Malaita and is one of 12 closely related languages and dialects spoken on the island. I do not mean to imply that To'abaita is any more closely related to SIP than any other of the Malaitan dialects. Indeed, this is not so. But I do assume that To'abaita is representative of all the Malaitan languages and therefore it is appropriate to use it specifically in making a comparison to SIP. Roger Keesing in his *Kwaio grammar* (1984) and his earlier manuscript of *Kwaio: a grammatical introduction* (n.d.) makes many grammatical comparisons between Kwaio and SIP, nearly all of which have correspondences in TOB as well. In reference to the SIP items I discuss in this paper, Keesing gives a detailed explanation (1984) of the correspondence between Kwaio *no'o* and SIP *nao* (see Section 2.1 below).³

This paper will not only show the meanings of *nao* and *ia*, but will also show how these two grammatical particles exhibit the generic nature of pidgin languages in general. We will see how one word in SIP is equivalent to a number of different words in the Malaitan language.

2. PIJIN nao

In studying Pijin texts, I have found at least three different uses of the word *nao*. These three uses are: (1) to show completed action or state, (2) to mark or emphasise a topic, and (3) to connect sentences in a narrative. In Table 1 notice that the Malaitan morphemes that correspond to Pijin *nao* nearly all begin with the syllable 'na'. This suggests that the phonological similarity between these Malaitan words and the SIP word is not necessarily a coincidence. That is, the reason that SIP adopted the form *nao* for these functions, is possibly due more to the similarity in form between the Malaitan morphemes and English 'now' rather than to the similarity of their meanings. Table 1 shows the Malaitan cognate sets of the three uses of *nao*, each of which is examined below.

Table 1: Malaitan cognate sets corresponding to SIP <i>nao</i> ⁴			
	completed action	marking a topic	sentence connector
To'abaita	na'a	na	ma
Lau	naa	na	ma
Kwara'ae	na'a	ne'e	ma
Kwaio	no'o	ne'e	na
'Are'are	no'o	ne	na
Sa'a	na		na

2.1 SIP *nao* showing completed action

The most common use of *nao* in Pijin is equivalent to TOB *na'a*. *Na'a* can be loosely defined as 'completed action or changed state'. It follows an active verb phrase to mean the action of the verb is completed (or will be completed) rather than ongoing. It follows a descriptive phrase to mean a new state exists which did not before. It is not translated explicitly into English, but rather its meaning is part of the tense and mode of the English verb. It does not mean 'past' action for it can also be used with TOB future tense. When used with future tense it indicates an action or a new state will be accomplished in the future but it is not yet so.

SIP *nao* and TOB *na'a* both are frequently used to end descriptive clauses and active clauses. In the following examples, the Pijin clause is given first, and then the corresponding To'abaita example, the literal English gloss, and a free English translation. Both the SIP and TOB examples are well formed and natural clauses — the TOB examples are not a word-by-word gloss of the SIP (as is the English), but the examples from the two languages happen to be, in most cases, formally equivalent. Many of the SIP examples come from stories published in *Buk fo ridim and raetem Pijin*, *Buk 1* edited by Ernest Lee (1981). Other examples are from my own collection of SIP and TOB texts. Abbreviations used in the English glosses are: NOM = nominaliser, PL = plural marker, and SP = species.

- (1) SIP ... hemi had tumas nao.
 TOB ... 'e 'efetei 'asia na'a.
 it difficult very
 ... it is very difficult.
- (2) SIP ... hemi bring-im faea nao.⁵
 TOB ... ka ngali-a na'a nga dunga.
 he bring-it the fire
 ... he brought the fire.
- (3) SIP ... evriwan resis kam nao.
 TOB ... kera fita mai na'a.
 they run hither
 ... they came running.
- (4) SIP Hemi dae nai.
 TOB 'E mae na'a.
 he die
 He died.

2.2 SIP nao marking a topic

A second use of Pijin nao is to mark the first element in a clause as the topic. In TOB na is used to do this. There are three different manifestations of this use of SIP nao and TOB na. The first is with the subject of the clause. Example 5 shows a simple declarative sentence.

- (5) SIP Rongoomea hemi raet -em.
 TOB Tha Rongoomea 'e keda -a.
 Mr Rongoomea he write-it
 Rongoomea wrote it.

The subject of this sentence can be topicalised by adding SIP nao (or TOB na), making what is equivalent to an English cleft sentence. (Note that the TOB particle na often contracts with the immediately following subject marker: no = na + 'o and ne = na + 'e.)

- (6) SIP Rongoomea nao hemi raet -em.
 TOB Tha Rongoomea ne keda -a. (ne = na 'e)
 Mr Rongoomea he wrote-it
 It was Rongoomea who wrote it.

Another example,

- (7) SIP Mifala tenfala man nao mifala go.
 TOB Kamili'a te'e akwala na mili lae.
 we one ten men we go
 It was ten of us men who went.

If the SIP nao and the TOB na had been omitted in example 7 the English gloss would be: *ten of us went*.

The second manifestation of using nao to mark a topic is when a clause constituent other than subject is put to the front. When it is fronted in this way, it is usually followed by nao in SIP and na in TOB. In examples 8 and 9 the direct object is fronted from its usual position directly following the verb to become the first element of the sentence. In example 10, the possessor is fronted.

- (8) SIP Desfala tobako nao hem no bring-im.
 TOB Firi ~~eri~~ ne a'i si ngali-a.
tobacco this he not bring-it
[But] this tobacco he did not bring.
- (9) SIP Deswan nao mi no save.
 TOB Si doo ne'e na kusi thaito'omana.
some thing this I not know
[But] this I don't know.
- (10) SIP Olketa man nao waka blong olketa
 TOB Wane ~~ki~~ na raoa kera
man PL work their
 SIP fo klae an brekem nat.
 TOB 'ana ra'a la ma 'ui la.
to climb and break nuts
[As for] the men, their work is to climb the trees and crack the nuts.

The third manifestation of nao marking a topic is in questions. There are two ways to form questions in Pijin. The 'unmarked' way is to substitute the question word in the same place as the element being asked about. For instance, in the example,

- (11) SIP Iu luk-im wanem?
you see-it what?
What do you see?

wanem is in the normal place for the direct object. The other, and perhaps more common, way to form questions in Pijin is to front the question word and follow it by nao. For instance,

- (12) SIP Wanem nao iu luk-im?
what you see-it?
What is it you see?

Both of these ways to form questions are also used in To'abaita.

- (13) non-fronted
 SIP Iu luk -im wanem?
 TOB 'O riki-a taa?
you see -it what?
What are you looking at?
- (14) fronted
 SIP Wanem nao iu luk -im?
 TOB Taa no riki-a? (no = na 'o)
what you look-it?
What is it you are looking at?

Not only the direct object in a question can be fronted. In example 15, the locational phrase moves from its usual place at the end of the clause to the front. When this happens, it is followed by SIP nao or TOB na and a trace or 'place holder' phrase is put in the 'empty' place in both Pijin and To'abaita. (In the examples with direct object above, the traces are the suffixes SIP -im and TOB -a which signal an object.)

(15) non-fronted

SIP Iufala go [long] wea?
 TOB Mulu lae 'i fei?
you PL go to where?
Where are you going?

(16) fronted

SIP Wea nao iufala go long hem?
 TOB 'I fei na mulu lae 'uri-a?
where you PL go to it?
Where is it you are going?

This pattern of using *nao* to topicalise the thing in the beginning of the sentence can be generalised as:

SIP topic *nao* comment
 TOB topic *na* comment

The topic is the thing being talked about whether it is subject, object, possessor, location, or question word. The comment is what is being said about the topic.

2.3 SIP *nao* connecting sentences

A third use of *nao* is when it occurs at the beginning of the sentence, usually in a narrative discourse, where it is used to connect sentences. In this use it can be glossed *and then*.⁶ This use of SIP *nao* is equivalent to TOB *ma*. Note that the 'Are'are and Sa'a equivalents (see Table 1) have *na* for this. The examples 17, 18 and 19 came from a single story.

- (17) SIP Nao mifala trifala boe mifala luk -im plande buma ...
 TOB Ma kamili'a ulu wela mili riki-a buma 'oro ...
and we three boy we saw -it fish SP many
And then we three boys saw many buma ...
- (18) SIP Nao taem hem luk -im olsem ...
 TOB Ma si manga nia 'e riki-a 'una 'eri ...
and some time he he saw -it like this
And when he saw it like this ...
- (19) SIP Nao mi talem hem ...
 TOB Ma nau ku fa'arongoa ...
and I I told him
And then I told him ...

2.4 Summary

From this discussion we can see that the uses of *nao* in Pijin directly parallel the uses of vernacular morphemes with similar phonetic shape, rather than the uses of the English word 'now'. We can also see that *nao* exhibits the generic nature of pidgin languages, in that the functions of several morphemes in the underlying Melanesian source languages have been merged into a single morpheme in SIP. This case is of particular interest in that it demonstrates the generic forming nature of a pidgin language in the realm of grammatical function morphemes. Table 2 shows that several vernacular words correspond to a single

word in Pijin, but that this is not a one-to-one reciprocal correspondence. For instance, one use of SIP nao is equivalent to TOB na, but TOB na has other grammatical uses as well (including forming relative clauses and equative sentences) which correspond to SIP words other than nao.

Table 2: TOB equivalents to SIP nao

SIP	TOB	OTHER SIP EQUIVALENTS
nao	na'a	-
	na	wea/hu (relative clause)
		hemi (equative sentence)
	ma	an (and)

3. PIJIN ia

The particle ia has three different grammatical uses in SIP: (1) to show a physical location, (2) to recall an item that has already been mentioned in a text, and (3) to affirm a sentence. We will look at each of these in turn.

3.1 ia showing a physical location

The particle ia can be used following a noun or pronoun to indicate the location of that item near the speaker.⁷ The TOB equivalent is ne'e. For example,

- (20) SIP Wanem ia?
 TOB Taa ne'e?
what this
What is this (I'm holding)?

- (21) SIP Buk ia.
 TOB Buka ne'e.
book this
This (I'm holding) is a book.

- (22) SIP ... mi folom kam leg blong iu an hemi kasem nao
 TOB ... ku susulea mai ka fula na'a
I track toward me they reached

- SIP long mamana haos ia ...
 TOB 'i maana bi'u ne'e ...
to front house this
... I tracked your footprints and they came to the front of this house ...

SIP ia can also refer to locations away from the speaker if the speaker also uses gestures of some sort to indicate the exact location. For example,

- (23) SIP Wanem ia?
what that
What is that [I'm pointing at]?

- (24) SIP Buk ia.
 book that
 That is a book [over there].

In TOB, the gestures are not so necessary because there are several words in this set indicating specific location, all of which parallel ia. Note the SIP-TOB correspondences in Table 3. ia in the sense of physical location can be equivalent to six different words in TOB. Table 3 also shows alternate SIP forms in parentheses. These forms are more specific than ia and are used if the context requires clarification. Note the different grammatical frame the alternates are used in — all follow long.

Table 3: TOB equivalents to SIP ia: physical location

SIP	TOB	ENG
ia (long hia)	ne'e	<i>here</i>
ia (long dea)	nenā	<i>there</i>
ia (long dea/wei)	lokoo	<i>over there</i>
ia (long dea/wei)	labaa	<i>way over there</i>
ia (long antap)	loo	<i>up there</i>
ia (long daon)	fuu	<i>down there</i>

3.2 ia recalling a previously mentioned item

A second, very common use of ia is to recall or refer to a person or thing that has already been mentioned.⁸ Examples 25 and 26 are consecutive sentences taken from a SIP story. The setting is given in the first sentence, then recalled in the second sentence using ia.

(25) 1st sentence

SIP Mifala tenfala boe oltaem go kasem fis long wanfala
 we ten boy always go catch fish at a

SIP ples olketa koleM Fo'odo wea hemi stap long sanbis.
 place they call Fo'odo where it is at beach
 We ten boys always went to catch fish at a place they call
 Fo'odo which is on a beach.

(26) 2nd sentence

SIP Taem mifala go long ples ia, ...
 when we go to place that
 When we went to that place, ...

In TOB, there are two common equivalents for this use of SIP ia to recall a previously mentioned item, plus others that are not so common. For recall from the immediate context, 'eri is used. For reference from a more remote context, either far back in the text, or from a common shared experience in the past, baa is used. The second sentence from the preceeding example with its TOB equivalent is given in example 27.

(27) 2nd sentence

SIP Taem mifala go long ples ia, ...
 TOB Si manga na mili lae 'ana kula 'eri, ...
 when we go to place this
 When we went to this place, ...

Another example, using the less common 'ena as an equivalent to SIP ia follows. 'ena refers to some general thing that both speaker and hearer know about.

- (28) SIP ... praes blong hem i lelebet big tumas nao
 TOB ... liu la -na 'e adange'e ba'ita 'asia na'a
 go NOM its is slightly big much
- SIP long evri trak ia.
 TOB 'ana aini tarake 'ena ki sui.
 among all truck which you know about PL finish
 ... its price was slightly more than all other trucks [which
 are on the road today].

The full list of TOB words used to recall an item is given in Table 4 with SIP equivalents. Again when TOB distinguishes six levels of reference, Pijin condenses them into one and relies more on the implicit context to prevent confusion.

Table 4: TOB equivalents to SIP ia: textual reference

SIP	TOB	ENG
ia	ne'e	this
ia	'ena	that, general information we have in common
ia	'eri	this, the, that, the one I just mentioned
ia	baa	this, the, that, the specific one we know about from before
ia	loo	that, the, the former
ia	fuu	that, the, the latter

3.3 ia affirming a sentence

A third use of Pijin ia is in the form of a sentence tag which relates to the whole sentence. This use is often perplexing to native English speakers because there is no good translation for it. It indicates an affirmation, a declaration, an accusation; it indicates the speaker's certainty about the statement's truth; or, when used with question intonation, asks the hearer for agreement. In example 29, ia simply helps make the declaration. One TOB equivalent to SIP ia as a sentence tag is shown in the example also.

- (29) SIP ... hem kolsap finis nao ia.
 TOB ... karangia kai sui na'a ne'e.
 soon it will finish completed
 ... soon it will be finished [indeed it will].

Another TOB equivalent of SIP ia affirming a sentence is nena as shown in example 30 which is a question.

- (30) SIP Kwalumae hemi sei, 'Hu ia?'
 TOB Tha Kwalumae ka ba'e, 'Ni tei nena?'
 Mr Kwalumae he said, who
 Kwalumae said, 'Who are you?'

Table 5 shows the full set of TOB words that fill the grammatical slot of sentence affirmation tag. Once again we can see how Pijin has simplified a more complex system from the vernacular. *ia* as a sentence affirmation tag is equivalent to at least four words in TOB.

Table 5: TOB equivalents to SIP <i>ia</i> : sentence affirmation		
SIP	TOB	ENG
<i>ia</i>	<i>ne'e</i>	<i>indeed; really?</i>
<i>ia</i>	<i>nenā</i>	<i>indeed; really?</i>
<i>ia</i>	<i>neri</i>	<i>indeed; really?</i>
<i>ia</i>	<i>nabaa</i>	<i>indeed; really? like before</i>

Clearly distinguishing each of the four TOB words from one another is difficult. However, as one might suspect from the similarity of the forms with the set of textual reference words, their distribution follows the same line as the textual reference words. In example 31 we see an example of a fairly common occurrence in TOB, that of a sentence affirmation tag immediately following a textual reference word with which it rhymes. This happens in Pijin too, less frequently, which produces two *ia*'s in a row.

- (31) SIP Olketa laetem tos *ia* *ia*, ...
 TOB Kera fa'atharua kwethu 'eri neri, ...
 they light torch the indeed
 They lit the [aforementioned] torch, [indeed they did], ...

3.4 Summary

Table 6 is a summary chart of the uses of *ia* we have just studied and their TOB equivalents. Note the TOB similarities across the rows. This explains why *ia* has three different grammatical uses; so does *ne'e* and the related morphemes. The Pijin set is simplified both horizontally and vertically on the chart. Across the chart we see the different grammatical patterns *ia* is used in, and down the chart we see what range of meaning it has in each of these distinct grammatical patterns.

The word *ia* is not unique to Solomons Pijin; it occurs in the other Pacific pidgins as well. In Papua New Guinea, for instance, there has been some discussion on just what the particle is, what language it derives from, how it is used, and how it should be spelled. Mihalic (1971) lists two uses, each spelled differently: *hia* as an 'adverb of place' (p.36) and *ya* as an 'exclamatory particle at the end of a sentence' (p.206). Sankoff and Brown (1976) note it is used in three ways, all of which they spell *ia*: adverb of place, deictic, and as a bracket around relative clauses, although they say their data 'show very little use of *ia* as an adverb of place' (p.639). Their idea that *ia* is used at both the beginning and end of relative clauses is questioned by Bradshaw (1982)

Table 6: TOB equivalents to SIP *ia*

PHYSICAL LOCATION		TEXTUAL REFERENCE		SENTENCE TAG	
SIP	TOB	SIP	TOB	SIP	TOB
<i>ia</i>	{ ne'e nena lokoo labaa loo fuu	<i>ia</i>	{ ne'e 'ena 'eri baa loo fuu	<i>ia</i>	{ ne'e nena neri nabaa

who doubts that the word even derives from English 'here', but rather suggests it comes from German *ja* or English 'yeah' (p.225) and is used most often in the sense of sentence affirmation.

As for Vanuatu's Bislama, Camden's dictionary includes the entries *ia*, *ya*, and *hemia*. *ia* he defines as an adverb meaning *here* (p.37). *ya* he describes as both a deictic and an 'emphasis marker on a noun to which a relative clause relates' and as an 'emphasis adverb' which occurs at the end of a sentence (p.136). He states that *hemia* is different from *hem ya* and is a pronoun meaning *this* or *that* (p.37).

It is quite obvious that there is a widespread common thread of meaning and uses of *ia* in the Pacific pidgins, but these meanings have yet to be clearly defined. It appears that its use as a locational is more common in SIP than in Tok Pisin or Bislama, especially in its meanings 'there', 'over there', 'up', and 'down'. It appears to have no relation to forming relative clauses in SIP, but may have some in Tok Pisin and Bislama.

Regardless of what one may posit as *ia*'s original source during the formation of Pacific pidgins, it is clear that the Malaitan vernaculars have had a definite influence on the meanings and uses that *ia* has come to develop in Solomon Islands Pijin. Furthermore, whether we posit the original source as English *here* 'adverb of place' or German *ja* 'affirmation', the identity of the corresponding Malaitan forms (as in TOB *ne'e*) provides a ready explanation for why *ia* has such seemingly different functions in SIP today.

NOTES

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- ²These figures are estimates. No official census of Solomon Island population has counted people who speak Pijin as a second language, although the 1976 census counts children who speak Pijin as a first language. A language survey in the western Solomons by Robert Early (1982) showed that even in an area supposedly dominated by Roviana language as a lingua franca, 70-80 per cent of the adults could speak Pijin.
- ³Other papers which compare a Pacific pidgin with a vernacular include Camden (1979), McElhanon (1975), Roosman (1975).
- ⁴The sources for the information in this chart are as follows: To'abaita and Lau from personal study; Kwara'ae from Deck (1933-34); Kwaio from Keesing (1984) and Kate Akin, personal communication; Are'are from Geerts (1970); and Sa'a from Ivens (1929).
- ⁵This example shows a dissimilarity between SIP and TOB. TOB na'a separates the transitive verb and the direct object but SIP nao follows the direct object.
- ⁶It should be noted that while a similar use of 'now' as a sentence connector in English is not standard, it is common in some dialects.
- ⁷In Solomon Islands literature, this use of ia is usually spelled hia although this may be more for orthographic distinction than to represent a phonological distinction.
- ⁸The Malaitan form baa has been borrowed with both form and meaning into Pijin. Some Pijin speakers, including non-Malaitans, use ba as well as ia to recall a previously mentioned item.

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