

# TOK PISIN SYNTAX - THE EAST AUSTRONESIAN FACTOR<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. THE DERIVATION OF TOK PISIN LEXICON AND SYNTAX

There is general agreement that the lexicon of Tok Pisin (TP) consists predominantly of English-derived forms whose phonological make-up owes much to various languages of Papua New Guinea and whose specific semantic values have been substantially shaped by the indigenous cultural context. Laycock (1970:x1) proposes the following proportions (based on a count of vocabulary in Mihalic's dictionary) for the sources of TP lexical forms:- English 77%; Tolai 11%; other New Guinean languages (mainly Austronesian languages of New Britain and New Ireland) 6%; German 4%; others 2%. Wurm (1973:111) suggests similar proportions:- English 75-80%; indigenous languages (mainly Tolai) 15-20%; other languages (mainly German) 5%.

There has been much less agreement on the derivation of TP syntax. Hooley (1963:126-7) has argued that TP shares a greater number of transformations with English than it does with 'Melanesian' languages. Hall (1975:184) has maintained that

In the case of any European-based pidgin or creole [and he regards TP as being primarily English-based], it is immediately evident that its functors, its grammatical categories, its part-of-speech-system, and a large part of its syntactic structures are shared with the European language involved.

Mihalic (1971:10) considers that

Having been derived historically from English, it [TP] naturally carries along much of the English influence in its grammatical framework. But it is not broken English. Over the course of a century it has developed its own features, as any living language does, from the speech patterns that surround it. That explains the strong Melanesian flavour of its syntax.

Wurm (1973:111) takes the view that TP's "structure [i.e. syntax, as against vocabulary] is un-English and is patterned on that of the Austronesian languages of the South-Western Pacific".

This paper suggests (with supporting evidence) that many features of TP syntax are more plausibly derivable from a subset of East Austronesian (EAN) languages than from English, and it outlines a historical rationale for the operation of this EAN factor in the origin and early development of what was to become TP.

## 1.2. THE EAST AUSTRONESIAN FACTOR

Among the various proposals that have been made as to just when and where the synthesising that was crucial for the shaping of what was to become TP syntax took place, that of Mühlhäusler (1975b) is most germane to the argument of this paper. He suggests that this synthesising occurred among the plantation labour force in German Samoa between the late 1870s and the late 1880s, a period during which the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands were major sources of imported labour.<sup>2</sup> The pidgin which took shape in this context was then spread to the new plantation developments in New Britain, New Ireland and mainland German New Guinea as skilled plantation labour was transferred to these areas from German Samoa.

If Mühlhäusler's scenario is accepted, then the fact that during the crucial decade (late 1870s to late 1880s) the plantation labour force in German Samoa included a substantial majority of people whose first language was drawn from the subset of EAN languages spoken in the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago is compatible with the functioning of an EAN factor in the shaping of the syntax of what was to become TP. The process of pidgin formation that operated among the labour force on the plantations of German Samoa could well have been broadly similar to that implied by Bickerton (1975) for the development of a pidgin in the context of the West African Slave Trade. In this process the contrived mixing of speakers (many of whom were habitually locally multilingual) drawn from a range of languages that were not necessarily all even broadly related led to the development of a pidgin with a lexicon of which the forms were derived predominantly from non-West African sources and a syntax which was substantially derived from a model common to the range of West African languages involved.

In the plantation labour force in German Samoa there was certainly a contrived mixing of speakers (at least some of whom, if the present-day situation in island Melanesia is any guide, would have been locally

multilingual) drawn from a range of relatively closely related languages (the subset of EAN languages spoken in the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago). This situation could well have produced a pidgin with a lexicon of which the forms were derived predominantly from non-EAN sources and a syntax derived substantially from the generalised model compatible with the subset of EAN languages involved.

### 1.3. THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

The evidence in this paper is drawn from the kind and range of syntactic elements and structures referred to by Hall (*supra*), which is essentially the same kind and range as that used by Bickerton (1975).

As is the case with the lexicon, the form of the TP syntactic morphemes is derived predominantly from English, with the appropriate phonological modifications. The syntactic values of these morphemes, however, are frequently more plausibly derivable from an EAN model than from English.

The main source of TP data for this paper is the 1971 edition of Mihalic's dictionary, which includes what is still the most comprehensive published description of TP syntax. The order of presentation follows Mihalic, and his terminology has been retained for convenience of reference. The EAN model is represented by data from Raga<sup>3</sup>, a language from the North-East New Hebrides, which is here regarded as typical of the relevant subset of EAN languages. It is recognised that further testing over the whole range of EAN languages represented in the plantation labour force in German Samoa during the crucial decade is desirable.

## 2. EVIDENCE

In this section the wording of most of the subheadings follows Mihalic, and, where it is appropriate, a subheading is followed by his numerical section reference. Within the text wording in double quotation marks is Mihalic's.

### 2.1. NOUN PHRASES (3.1.5.)

The TP construction manifested by *haus lotu 'church'*, *sospen ain 'iron kettle'*, *sip plang 'wooden ship'*, and *haus kuk 'kitchen/cook-house'* is more plausibly derivable from the construction represented by Raga *imwa vatu 'house stone (i.e. stone house)'*, *atat meto 'person black (i.e. black person)'*, and *tahi mate 'sea dead (i.e. calm/lifeless sea)'* than from the construction manifested by English *'wooden ship'*,

'iron kettle', and 'cook-house'.

## 2.2. THE ARTICLES 'the' AND 'a' (3.2.)

According to Mihalic

There is actually no definite article. However, ol, the plural indicator which is otherwise untranslatable, is a kind of plural article, e.g. ol man 'the men', ol pikinini 'the children'... The indefinite article is either wanpela or nothing at all.<sup>4</sup>

In fact the situation is that English has a definite article and an indefinite article, TP does not, and Raga does not. Therefore, for this feature, TP is more plausibly derivable from the model represented by Raga than from English.

The TP plural indicator ol has no structural counterpart in English, whereas Raga has the plural marker *i-ra* which can occur with nouns referring to people, e.g. *i-ra vavine*

plural woman  
'women'.

The affinity of the TP plural indicator ol with ol 'they/them' is paralleled by the affinity of Raga *i-ra* with *ra-* 'they' and *-ra* 'them'. The syntactic value of the TP form is again more plausibly derivable from the model represented by Raga than from English.

## 2.3. GENDER (3.3.)

In Melanesian Pidgin there is no gender expressed in the nouns as such. The sex of living things is sometimes indicated by the qualifying additive man 'male' or meri 'female'. These two words always follow the noun they qualify and thus form noun phrases. For example: pikinini man 'son', paul meri 'hen'.

This statement ignores the gender distinction present in TP when man and meri are used as nouns. English manifests gender either by specific terms such as 'sow' and 'boar' or by a noun preceded by 'male' or 'female'. Raga has a few pairs of terms which manifest gender, e.g. atamwani 'man' and vavine 'woman', and where the distinction is not made in this way it may be manifested for living things by a noun followed by atamwani or vavine, e.g. toa atamwani 'rooster' and toa vavine 'hen'.

The difference of pattern between English on the one hand and TP and Raga on the other in the manifestation of gender by a means other than pairs of specific terms conforms to the difference of pattern for noun phrases (ref. 2.1.).

## 2.4. NUMBER (3.4.)

There is nothing in TP or Raga which corresponds structurally to the English pattern of suffixed plural marking for nouns. TP has the

possibility of a noun preceded by *ol* or by a numeral, e.g. *ol man* 'men', *sikispela de* 'six days'. Raga has the possibility of noun followed by a modifier (which may be a numeral) with a plural value, e.g.

<i>toa ivusi</i>	<i>toa gai-vasi</i>
<i>fowl many</i>	<i>fowl four</i>
<i>'many fowls'</i>	<i>'four fowls'</i>

or of noun followed by verb phrase containing a pronoun which indicates number, e.g. *vavine ra-m hae*

*woman they action-in-progress go-up*  
*'the women go up',*

or noun referring to people preceded by *i-ra* (ref. 2.2). The evidence under this heading is considerably less decisive than that presented under most other headings, but, on balance, it gives more support to an EAN derivation than to an English one for the TP patterns.

## 2.5. THE NOUN AS SUBJECT (3.5.1.)

In general the noun as subject in Melanesian Pidgin clauses or sentences precedes the predicate. As: *Tri i pundaun* 'The tree fell down'. However, after the interrogative clause: *We stap*, the construction may be inverted, e.g. *We stap luluai?* 'Where is the village chief?' It is equally correct to ask: *Luluai i stap we?*

In stative constructions in both English and Raga the noun as subject typically precedes the predicate. In interrogative constructions English typically has a discontinuous predicate with subject noun insertion and initial interrogative, e.g. 'Where is John going?' Raga interrogative constructions typically have subject noun before predicate with final interrogative, e.g. *ratahigi mwa do behe?*

*chief he stays where*  
*'where is the chief staying',*

which is the same pattern as TP *luluai i stap we?* Again the evidence is not decisive, but it does give some support for the presence of an EAN factor in the derivation.

"Between the subject and the predicate one finds only the modifiers of the subject, e.g. *Ol man bilong ailan ol i save swim* 'Islanders know how to swim'".

The structural similarities between this example from Mihalic and Raga (*i-ra*) *atatu ata Raga ra-m ilo gagaruva* (human plural marker) *person from Raga they-tense-marker know swimming*

*'people from Raga know how to swim'*

are not matched in standard English, which does not have the pronominal subject repetition of *'all people from England they know how to swim'*.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.6. PRONOUNS (4.)

## 2.6.1. Personal Pronouns (4.1.)

The TP personal pronouns are:-

mi	'I/me'	yumitupela	'we/us dual incl.'
mitupela	'we/us dual excl.'	yumitripela	'we/us trial incl.'
mitripela	'we/us trial excl.'	yumi	'we/us plural incl.'
mipela	'we/us plural excl.'		
yu	'you singular'	em	'he/she/it, him/her/it'
yutupela	'you dual'	tupela	'they/them dual'
yutripela	'you trial'	tripela	'they/them trial'
yupela	'you plural'	ol	'they/them plural'

The forms of these pronouns are obviously derived from English, but the structuring of semantic values for this paradigmatic set is patently derivable from an EAN model, as the following table indicates:-

	English	TP	EAN
Gender Marking in 3rd person singular	+	-	-
Number Marking in terms of singular/plural only	+	-	-
Number Marking in terms of singular/dual/trial/plural	-	+	+
Marking for inclusion or exclusion of addressee	-	+	+
2nd person singular formally distinguished from any 2nd person non-singular forms	- <sup>6</sup>	+	+

## 2.6.2. 'Possessive' Pronouns (4.3.)

The TP pattern of *bilang* + personal pronoun is more plausibly derivable from the EAN pattern of possession marker (often one of a paradigmatic set) + suffixed possessive pronoun form than it is from the English set of specifically possessive pronoun forms. Compare TP *bilang mi* 'my/mine' with Raga *bila-ku* 'possession class marker + 1st person singular marker (*mine of the specified possession class*)' or *bila-k* 'possession class marker + 1st person singular marker (*my [something] of the specified possession class*)' and with English 'my/mine'.

## 2.6.3. The 'Intensive' Pronouns (4.7.)

"The intensive pronoun is expressed by *tasol* after a personal pronoun, e.g. *Mi tasol mi mekim* 'I myself did it'."

The TP pattern here of emphatic/intensive personal pronoun + personal pronoun + predicate resembles the Raga pattern of focus or emphatic

pronoun + pronoun-tense marker + verb or verb phrase, as in *inau na-n ioli-a* 'I (focus/emphatic form) I-tense marker *did it*', more than it does the English pattern of personal pronoun + intensive/emphatic personal pronoun + predicate as manifested in, e.g., 'I myself *did it*'.

## 2.7. VERBS (6.)

### 2.7.1. The Use of the Predicate Marker (6.0.3.)

It [the predicate marker] is always used between a subject and predicate when the subject is a noun or the third person singular or plural personal pronoun. [e.g.] *San i lait* 'The sun shines', *Em i lukim mi* 'He sees me', *Ol i go long ples* 'They went home'. It is usually used between subject and predicate when the subject is either the first person plural (exclusive) or the second person plural personal pronoun. e.g. *Mipela (i) kam nau* 'We are coming now', *Yupela (i) stap we?* 'Where are you people?'. It is never used if the subject is the first or second person singular of the personal pronoun. e.g. *Mi no save* 'I don't know', *Yu laikim wanem?* 'What do you want?'.

The Raga pattern has some resemblance to that of TP here in that after a singular noun subject or after the zero allomorph of the 3rd person singular tense marker linked pronoun, the long allomorph of the appropriate tense marker is used, e.g. *boe Ø-nu hae* 'pig (it) went up', and *Ø-nu hae* 'he/she/it went up'.

According to Mihalic "The constant recurrence of the form 'i' between the subject and predicate in Melanesian Pidgin is a feature unknown in European grammar. It is typically Melanesian." (1971:23). He also quotes Wurm as follows "'The predicate marker /i/ is derived from an Austronesian particle, and its usage in Pidgin corresponds largely to that of this particle in the Austronesian languages.'" (1971:24). There would seem to be no case for the derivation of this TP feature from English, but the case for an EAN derivation has not yet been adequately documented.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.7.2. The Transitive Suffix (6.1.1.1. and 6.1.1.2.)

"Any verb ending in the suffix *-im* is transitive and has a direct object, e.g. *bihainim mi* 'to follow me', *kukim kaikai* 'to cook food'."

The form of the TP transitive suffix *-im* is derived from English, but there is no model in English for the construction verb base + transitive marker + object. This construction is present in many EAN languages. Raga does not provide an example, but another New Hebridean language, Nguna<sup>8</sup>, has *munu-gi* a 'drink (transitive suffix) it' (Schütz 1969:31, 36).

"Any transitive verb not ending in the suffix *-im* requires *long* before its object, e.g. *lukluk (long)* 'to look at', *driman (long)* 'to dream about'."

Mihalic's examples here are of TP verbs which may take an indirect object. The form of the TP indirect object marker long is derived from English, but in this case there are models for the TP construction verb base + indirect object marker + object in both English, e.g. *'they look at John'*, and EAN, e.g. Raga ra-n manu-hi Pita *'they (tense marker) laugh-at Peter'*.

### 2.7.3. Time Relation (6.4.)

"Verbs have no real tense forms in Melanesian Pidgin. Time relation outside of the present is expressed with the help of adverbial modifiers." Another description of TP tense-marking is:- "Verbs in Pidgin can refer to present, past or future actions unless they occur with adverbs....or with special auxiliary verbs or particles to indicate the time (or tense) of the action and/or the nature (or aspect) of it" (Dutton 1973:9).

An integral part of tense-marking in English is modification of the base form of the verb, either by suffixation (*'-ed, -ing'*) or radical change of shape (e.g. *'see' > 'saw'*). Tense-marking in TP does not entail any modification of the verb base. Tense-marking in Raga does not entail modification of the verb base by suffixation, nor does it entail radical alteration to the shape of the base.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.8. REDUPLICATION<sup>10</sup>

The main functions of reduplication in TP are:- intensification (e.g. bruk-bruk-im *'to break into little bits'*), duration (e.g. kaunim kaunim *'to count on and on'*), and diversity (e.g. siot i gat kala kala *'the shirt has all sorts of colours'*). It can also indicate plurality (e.g. dispela tumbuna tumbuna, em tupela tumbuna *'those ancestors, those two ancestors'*) and reciprocity (e.g. ol i helpim helpim *'they help each other'*). (Mühlhäusler 1975a:203-9). Reduplication with these kinds of function is widely manifested in EAN languages, whereas it is not so manifested in English.

Mühlhäusler suggests (1975a:210)

at least three possible answers to the question of where the reduplications in Pidgin originate. Firstly, the patterns found in the native language which has influenced other parts of pidgin grammar and lexicon most, namely Kuanua, were taken over into Pidgin. This answer reflects the substratum theory. Secondly, reduplication is a universal feature of all pidgins and creoles and can be traced back to Portuguese Pidgin. This answer reflects the relexification theory. Thirdly, reduplication is a universal of languages which is bound to appear wherever a pidgin language originates. This answer reflects the universals of pidgin theory.

A fourth possibility is that the reduplication in TP derives primarily from a general EAN model rather than from Kuanua. This possibility is not incompatible with reinforcement from Kuanua after the pattern had developed during the period in which Kuanua was only one of several EAN languages (drawn from the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago) which influenced the seminal synthesising of TP syntax.

### 3. CONCLUSION

On the basis of an exploratory and by no means exhaustive consideration of TP syntax it has here been suggested that a significant proportion of the structural features of that syntax is more plausibly derivable from an EAN model rather than from English. This lends support to Mühlhäusler's suggestion (1975b) as to the time and place of occurrence of the seminal synthesising of the syntax of what was to become TP. At the same time it attributes more significance than he does to the pan-EAN model. It is recognised that testing over a wider range of TP syntax and with an adequate sample of the relevant EAN languages (including Kuanua) is necessary before a definitive (rather than an heuristic) statement can be made.

## N O T E S

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1978 conference of the Linguistic Society of Australia.

2. The following figures for the place of origin of the plantation labour force in German Samoa have been extracted from Mühlhäusler 1975b:9:-

Year of Arrival	Total	Gilbert & Kingsmill	New Hebrides	Solomon Islands	New Britain & New Ireland
1878	272	189	83	-	-
1879	718	115	570	-	33
1880	535	300	-	226	9
1881	378	-	179	199	-
1882	264	8	153	-	103
1883	355	2	29	37	287
1884	245	29	-	-	216
mid-1885	512	124	187	156	45

3. Raga is spoken today by about 2600 people, most of whom live in the northern part of Pentecost Island. The data come from my own field-notes.

4. Mihalic's equating of *wanpela* with the English indefinite article is suspect, especially when one takes into account his primary gloss of 'one' for *wanpela* (1971:201).

5. Some non-standard varieties of English do have this construction.

6. The 'thou/you' distinction had largely disappeared from English before it could have had an effect on TP.

7. Corne (1974-75:68-73) on 'the mysterious i in Seychelles and Reunion Creole' describes a situation worth comparing with that in TP.
8. Ngunu is representative of a set of dialects spoken on North Efate and some adjacent small islands in the Central New Hebrides.
9. Some Raga verb bases do have morpho-phonemic variation of initial consonant as a 'fossilised' tense-marking feature.
10. The terminology and examples in this section are from Mühlhäusler, not Mihalic.

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