

“YU MAS KAMAP WAN NESEN”

The Mainstream Churches, Tok Pisin and National Identity in Papua New Guinea *

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SUMMARY

After the Second World War missions in Papua New Guinea faced new imperatives driven by the reaction of the Australian administration to United Nations' directives. These directives related to the development of education and the use of language in schools. This effectively ended the missions' domination of the education system and the end of Tok Ples as the primary language of education for indigenous people. Most significantly, however, was the fact that Tok Pisin came into its own as a *lingua franca*. These factors combined to enhance the role of language as an identifier from a purely village or regional level (Tok Ples) to a national one (Tok Pisin). I will argue that neither the Australian administration nor the missions foresaw this role for Tok Pisin. Paradoxically, the first steps towards making Tok Pisin respectable and beginning the enhancement of the role of language as an identifier were the missions particularly the Catholic Divine Word missionaries.

EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

As the result of pressure brought about by the United Nations in the 1950s the Australian administration in the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea decided to adopt English as the sole language for education in territory schools.¹ This recommendation was intended to hurry the development of an educated native elite which would serve as the core leadership of an independent Papua New Guinea (PNG). The recommendation appears to have been based in part on the experience of the former British colonies in Africa which had begun to win independence in the 1950s usually with the former colonial administrators being replaced by a small, university-trained indigenous elite. The decision to encourage the creation of an educated elite was part of a general impetus to speed up development in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The report of the 1962 UN mission, headed by Sir High Foot, was probably the most ambitious in its outlook. The changes in education policy which were

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¹ As a mandated territory, New Guinea was the subject of several visits by United Nations dignitaries of varying competence. Dame Rachel Cleland makes some perceptive comments about the various UN visits (Cleland 1981).

adopted by the administration should, however, be seen in the context of earlier Australian decisions about its role in the territory.² The then Australian Minister for Territories, Sir Paul Hasluck, had already outlined the objectives of the Territory administration as being, among others, to

achieve mass literacy, that is to say, to attempt to teach all native children to read and write in a common language [...and...] when, in generations to come, they may be required to manage their own affairs to a greater degree, they may feel a common bond among themselves as people (Souter 1974:247).

The significance of Hasluck's statement is that the idea of national identity, of creating a national consciousness among 1000 tribes, was already linked, however unconsciously, with literacy and education by the 1950s. I would argue that until then the identity fostered by such education as there had been through the mission schools, had been with a particular mission or region. I would also argue that the administration's hope of establishing English as a *lingua franca* failed. Education in English produced the elite desired by the UN, but it has remained a language of the elite. What nobody seems to have anticipated is that it would be Tok Pisin, the much reviled language of the labour line (plantation worker) and domestic servant (*haus boi*), which would fill that role. The original missions in New Guinea – that is, the north coast and the Bismarck Archipelago – were the Methodists and Missionnaires du Sacre Cœur (MSC) on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, the Neuendettelsau Lutherans on the Rai coast and the Divine Word missionaries (SVD) in the Sepik. The missions had fought with each other and among themselves, albeit with periods of tolerance and comity. In some areas gentleman's agreements had been drawn up as to which mission would evangelise which area, while in others "sheep stealing", as the poaching of converts was called, was common. Over zealous missionaries and their supporters were not above setting fire to each other's houses and churches in the early days.

Relations with the colonial authorities varied. During the period when New Guinea was under German administration, some missions such as the Lutherans deliberately cut themselves off from government influence, building what was virtually a *Kirchenstaat*. Others, such as the MSC at Vunapope and the SVD at Alexishafen, built large administrative centres around extensive plantation and business holdings and kept the government more politely at bay. In Papua similar institutions were founded by the MSC on Yule Island and by the Methodists in Milne Bay. This policy of establishing large centres separate from the government was intended to provide a central point for mission activities and to make them less dependent on outside funding, but it also served to keep their converts away from government influence (Douglas 1969:62). Some missionaries considered it their duty to keep their adherents as far

² Not all of the effects of the educational changes that followed were good. One result was a form of 'educational apartheid' in PNG, with European, Chinese and some mixed race children being educated in Primary "A" schools while indigenous children were separated into Primary "T" schools.

from government influence as possible and some regarded the territory in which they worked as their personal chiefdoms. This attitude was to play an important role in the missions' reactions to the Australian administration's new school language policy. In many cases it appears that the missions' opposition to the new language policy was based on the knowledge that they would lose their influence over the local people. Because of Australian neglect of Papua and New Guinea before the Second World War, in most places not only education, but health services, shipping and in some cases trade for 'natives' was solely in the hands of the missions (L. Cass 1999).

However one might question the Australian administration's willingness to accept a UN recommendation based on an African experience – and imposing lessons learnt in Africa on the Pacific has usually not been a success – the decision to use English as the sole language of instruction in schools was rational. With up to 1000 local languages, there was at this stage no effective *lingua franca* that could serve in both the Australian territories. Tok Pisin prevailed in some parts of New Guinea, but was regarded with suspicion elsewhere. In Papua Motu was widespread as a trading language, but it is unlikely to have developed as a national *lingua franca*. The missions overcame this problem by using Tok Ples (lit. "talk of the place": the local vernacular) for evangelisation, making it in effect a *tok lotu* (lit. "talk of the church"). The Methodists and MSC were fortunate in being able to use a single language, Kuanua, which they then exported to New Ireland. The Lutherans used three languages, Jabem, Kate and Graged and spread them widely along the coast and the hinterland. The SVD in the Sepik could find no single language to use and eventually settled on Tok Pisin. The *tok lotu* became the language of identification for adherents of a particular mission. The Lutherans spread the three coastal languages widely in their area of influence, sometimes replacing an existing Tok Ples with an imported one. On the Gazelle the absurd situation arose whereby Methodist and Catholic Tolai used different orthographies of Kuanua. If there was to be any chance of uniting the disparate peoples under the Australian administration, it must be through language and English appeared to be the only logical choice. This meant the eventual closure of the mission Tok Ples schools through pressure on subsidies, new teaching standards and inspection regimes. There is evidence of a desire by the local people for government schools and attempts by missionaries – both Protestant and Catholic – to thwart this desire (L. Cass 1999).

There was debate then, as now, about whether the administration's policy made sense in terms of education and whether children learn best in their own language for the first few years and then switch to English or whether they should they use English all the way through. There may be sound reasons for starting primary school with Tok Ples education as now happens in some places. There has been some argument that bilingual students do better and that language skills acquired in one language are transferred to another. Litteral argues strenuously in a series of papers for the virtues of Tok Ples schools, but Turner reports that the re-introduction of Tok Ples schools in some regions has been met with suspicion by some communities which feel that they are

receiving a second rate education (Turner 1990:81; Litteral 1999a, b). Regardless of the validity of these arguments, what is certain is that for the purpose of establishing a universal language of instruction and rapidly creating the national elite demanded by the UN, the maintenance of Tok Ples literate populations had to be sacrificed.

By insisting on the use of English as the only language of instruction, the administration effectively eliminated Tok Ples as a language by which people could identify themselves through the *lotu*. Being able to speak a language other than that of the *lotu* meant being able to leave the village, to travel and generally to leave the influence of the mission. This eliminated at a stroke the role of the mission as the chief identifier outside the clan and family system. Those who became fluent in English could find work with the administration or Australian businesses, but even to travel outside the village meant coming into contact with people who spoke other languages. For the majority who did not become fluent in English, Tok Pisin provided a parallel language which allowed entry into the labour market through plantations. Because Tok Pisin was more widely spoken than English it was of more use to the majority of the population who could use it to enter the unskilled and semi-skilled market. As we shall see, migrant workers also found that their spiritual needs were met by missions which, through necessity, had to run services and preach in Tok Pisin for multi-lingual congregations. Tok Pisin therefore also became a parallel language of identity in the *lotu*. This allowed Tok Pisin to become a language with a much broader identifying role which overlay the function of Tok Ples at a village or clan level and eventually replaced Tok Ples within the *lotu* in a way that English never could. I would argue that in some cases Tok Pisin has also taken on a much broader role as an identifier, a process expressed most succinctly in the word “wanpisin” which is now used to signify membership of the same group of Tok Pisin dialect in the way that “wantok” literally signifies somebody from the same language group. If before a person identified himself through his Tok Ples or *tok lotu*, then we now find people identifying themselves through the dialect of Tok Pisin they speak. I do not suggest that the term “wanpisin” replaces “wantok” – although it may in time among people who speak nothing but creolised Tok Pisin – but it serves to add another layer of identification. Just as people may be known by different names in the village, work or school, so they may carry different linguistic identities.

MISSION REACTIONS

How did the missions react to the change in administration policy? The missions which returned to Papua New Guinea after the Second World War had to devote much of their time to rebuilding the infrastructure on which they depended. The disruption caused by the war placed them in a vulnerable position to changes in policy, but they fought the changes vigorously, not just from a pedagogical standpoint, but

because they saw the move as damaging the relationships that were framed by the school, the local church and the community (Hage 1986:417). The administration achieved its ends by refusing to subsidise mission schools which did not have properly qualified staff. Since these were, inevitably, the village schools where Tok Ples was used, it meant the end of many of these schools. It also meant the end of the missions' financial independence from the government. If they wanted or needed government money for education they had to accept funding from the administration on its terms and these were properly qualified staff and classes conducted in English. The administration also opposed the imposition of a Tok Ples from one area to another, precisely the method used by the Lutherans on the north coast and, to a lesser extent, by the Catholics and Methodists in Milne Bay (Nelson 1982:153).

The missions – with the exception of the SVD – had been using Tok Ples as *lotu* languages since the German times (1875–1914). The use of Tok Pisin by the SVD for the purpose of evangelisation was the first time the language had been given any official recognition. All the missions had to contend with the fact that population movements caused by labour recruiting meant that people had to learn Tok Pisin to be able to work and converse on plantations in other districts. When they came home they brought Tok Pisin with them, just as the Tolai returning from sandalwood ships and the Samoan plantations had done in the 1880s. Tok Pisin provided a ready made *lingua franca*, but many missions remained opposed to its use on the grounds that it was not a real language or capable of expressing complex ideas. It was also seen to threaten the introduction of a 'proper' European language. Ralph quotes an unnamed missionary blaming the failure of the German administration's language policy on "this miserable pidgin English" (Ralph 1965:77). The gradual – and often painful – acceptance of Tok Pisin by the missions did not mean the complete disappearance of Tok Ples education or literacy, but vernaculary remained intact best in places where there was one language such as on the Gazelle Peninsula, or where there was a strong *lotu* language of local origin. The move towards the acceptance of Tok Pisin as a *lotu* language took much longer. The missionaries used it in the field for day to day purposes, but then used Tok Ples for evangelisation and often a third language in church. Tok Pisin does not seem to have been regarded as being suitable for use as a *lotu* language by many missionaries because it was not a 'real' language and because it was not felt to be sufficiently sophisticated to convey complex theological points.³ The real turning point was the work on the Tok Pisin "Nupela Testamen", which expressed the acceptance of Tok Pisin in its most tangible form and which also drew rival missions together in the work of translation (Mihalic 1990:269).

The missions approached the question of Tok Pisin in different ways. Even when a mission ostensibly devoted its energies to working in Tok Ples and maintaining them

³ Tok Pisin can be a very subtle and inventive language, but it can be more descriptive than succinct. The phrase "Decade of Evangelisation" for instance, was rendered in Tok Pisin on a banner I saw at Wirui mission in April 1992 as "Tenpela yia bilong outim gutpela nius bilong Jisas Kraist".

as *lotu* languages it still used Tok Pisin for general communication. Some missions which had been instrumental in codifying local languages began preaching in Tok Pisin as a matter of necessity as early as the 1940s. The first Methodist missionaries, for instance, communicated partly in Tok Pisin and partly through interpreters, but gradually switched their emphasis towards learning the local languages, eventually settling on Kuanua as their *lotu* language on the Gazelle Peninsula. When George Brown led the first formal service on New Ireland in December 1875 he preached in Tok Pisin, which was translated into the Duke of York language and then into the local Tok Ples (Threlfall 1985:34, 38). The movement of plantation workers meant that there were Methodists and other Protestants in Rabaul who could not be ministered to in their own Tok Ples. They were catered for with Tok Pisin services and a book of Tok Pisin hymns was produced (Threlfall 1985:140). Tok Pisin services were held for Ambonese after the Second World War. Tok Pisin services were also held for indigenous workers from other districts, but until these were established workers from New Ireland and Nakanai attended Kuanua services at Malakuna village (Threlfall 1985:166). In the 1950s Tok Pisin services continued to be held for Rabaul workers. Lutheran and London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries in Rabaul held services in many languages for workers from around the country, such as Toaripi for LMS people. The Methodists held services in Dobu for workers from Milne Bay. Methodists, LMS, and Lutherans worked closely together and the Methodists often preached in LMS and Lutheran services through interpreters or in Tok Pisin (Threlfall 1985:184). Close co-operation with other Protestant missions had wider effects. By the 1960s the Methodist bookshop/printery in Rabaul (later “Tok Save Buk” and “Trinity Press”) was buying Tok Pisin material from other churches in the Territory and selling it alongside its own Kuanua literature (Threlfall 1985:192). As the Methodists moved towards the creation of the United Church in 1965–67, the mission used explanatory literature in both Kuanua and Tok Pisin (Threlfall 1985:215). By the 1970s Tok Pisin was being used as language of debate in Synod and from 1972 minutes were recorded in Tok Pisin, not English (Threlfall 1985:224).

At this stage a decision was also taken to publish the complete Bible in Kuanua in collaboration with the Catholic mission at Vunapope (Threlfall 1985:232). The significance of this decision lay in the fact that Kuanua was the only really large language group outside the Highlands and the creation of the new Bible would serve both Catholic and Methodist Tolai who had previously been separated by different mission orthographies. The adoption of a common orthography could only add to the simultaneous growth in political identity on the Gazelle Peninsula which had led to the formation of such political groups as the Mataungan Association.⁴ It can be argued that

⁴ The argument for the political power engendered by a common language and a strong sense of regional, as opposed to national, identity can be made most strongly in those areas with the largest language blocs, such as the Gazelle (63,200 Kuanua speakers), Simbu (137,654 speakers) and Enga provinces (164,750 speakers) (Rannells 1990:71).

the role of Kuanua as an identifier at church level on the Gazelle has probably declined with the need to reach out to people who do not speak the language. Tok Pisin services have been held on the Gazelle for decades, but when the church newspaper “A Nilai Ra Davot” – the second oldest in the country – was revived in 1993, the then Acting Bishop of the United Church, Esau Teko, said that it could no longer be a purely Kuanua publication because of the demand for Tok Pisin (P. Cass 1993).

The Lutheran mission in PNG placed just as much emphasis on the use of *lotu* languages as the Methodists, but also used Tok Pisin to preach when necessary. The official acceptance of the language did not occur until 1956 and even then care was taken not to endanger the existing policy of using Jabem, Kate and Graged, for purposes of evangelisation. Hage records that Tok Pisin was regarded by some as being little better than gibberish and incapable of precise expression, but when people from widely disparate language groups got together, it was the only possible means of communication. Once the Lutherans – re-organised as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea (ELCONG) in 1956 – had accepted that Tok Pisin was acceptable for official purposes, it was used for other purposes as well. The three church newspapers became bilingual and a “Lotu Book” appeared alongside Tok Ples publications (Hage 1986:413–414). The significance of this should not be underestimated. The Lutheran and Methodist missions had been the first people to produce newspapers in New Guinea, and certainly the first to produce written material for the indigenous population. By making Tok Pisin material available at a time when the number of Tok Pisin speakers was growing, the churches were, wittingly or not, tapping into a new market.

ELCONG’s response to the changes in the administration’s language policy was reluctantly pragmatic. While fighting to retain vernacular education through its village Bible schools, it established a Tok Pisin school system. The loss of the vernacular school system meant that increasing numbers of students became illiterate in their own language (or at least their *lotu* language) and so the church was forced to communicate with them in Tok Pisin. Lutheran records show the majority of Tok Pisin materials being created from the mid 1960s, such as a pastors’ refresher course in 1964. However, there are records of a few earlier documents such as a Tok Pisin/Kate pamphlet on the relationship of the church to the secular world. Other bilingual documents include a text on liturgy. Lists of Tok Pisin documents from this period include “Sampela Litugi bilong Lotu” and “Laip Bilong Jisas Kraist long Gutnius” (Hage 1969). However, the records still show most work being produced in this period as being in Jabem, Kate and Graged. The earliest school materials in Tok Pisin date from 1967, but most are from 1969 (Hage 1969). Most ELCONG publications are now printed in Tok Pisin. The publication of the “Nupela Testamen” in 1969 was what, in Hage’s words, gave Tok Pisin respectability (Hage 1986:414).

THE MISSIONS AND THE MEDIA

Having been so intimately involved with the media since their earliest days it was only natural that the mission churches should recognise their obligations to the contemporary media. In common with most other churches in PNG, ELCONG is a member of the "Church's Council for Media Co-ordination", a body which gives a common voice to Christian views on the media and helps ensure a shared and rational use of church media resources. ELCONG is also a shareholder with the Anglican, Catholic and United Churches in Word Publishing, which produces "Wantok", PNG's only Tok Pisin weekly newspaper (Schwarz 1986:346, 349). To trace the origins of "Wantok", we have to go back to the earliest days of the Catholic Divine Word mission. When the SVD established themselves in the Sepik they found that they could not find a single language which would serve for *lotu* purposes. They therefore accepted the need to learn and use a wide range of Tok Ples, taught German in their schools until the establishment of the Australian mandate and thereafter decided, with some reluctance to accept Tok Pisin as their *lotu* language (Wilgten 1969:357). Fr. Kirschbaum was put in charge of a language commission in 1930 and his final report strongly advocated the use of Tok Pisin as a *lingua franca*. Tok Pisin became the official mission language in north east New Guinea from 1931 (Steffen 1992). Before the Second World War broke out some catechital literature such as "Stori Bilong ol Santu", "Liklik Baibel" and "Liklik Katekism" had been printed. Fr. Weisenthal was closely involved with the production of these works. A Tok Pisin newspaper was also published by the mission. The date of publication is the subject of debate. Steffen says it came out from 1935 to 1941, while Tschauder remembers seeing a Tok Pisin newspaper of some kind when he went there in 1927 (P. Cass 1992a). As the SVD began to expand into the Highlands in the 1930s, it became clear that the policy of adopting Tok Pisin was beginning to pay off. Bishop Leo Arkfeld asserted that resistance in the Highlands to imported Tok Ples had been strong and he stressed the flexibility of Tok Pisin as a language that could be carried from one language group to another (P. Cass 1992b).

However, not all the SVD missionaries were entirely taken with Tok Pisin. Fr. Ernst Montag complained in his memoirs that

Pidgin was a synthetic language, one that was composed purposely to suit the primitiveness of the aborigines. The vocabulary is meagre. Many words have several meanings. Just this gives rise to the possibility of misunderstandings and inaccuracies (Montag 1989:37).

The possibility of misunderstandings and inaccuracies existed partly because there was no standard orthography. Although Frs. Kirschbaum and Meisner had produced Tok Pisin dictionaries, the fact that different pronunciations and loan words obtained in different districts, made it difficult to pin the language down precisely.⁵ The first real

⁵ Note, for instance, the spelling in the November 1967 edition of "Katolik Nius", produced by the

attempt to produce an academically acceptable dictionary was Fr. Frank Mihalic’s “Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin” in 1971. Mihalic saw Tok Pisin as a transitional stage towards the widespread use of and literacy in standard English: “I am looking forward to the day when Neo-Melanesian and this book will be buried and forgotten, when standard English and the Oxford dictionary will completely replace both” (Mihalic 1971:ix). But even before this he had admitted that „No matter how many New Guineans [...] speak standardised English, they never feel it is their language. It remains ever foreign“ (Mihalic 1969:2).

In the second edition spellings were revised to conform with usage in the “Nupela Testamen”. It was decided to standardise the Tok Pisin orthography using the north coast dialect as a ‘high Pidgin’ to be used in writing because Madang Pidgin was held to be the least affected by Anglicisation.

Apart from his dictionary, Mihalic’s greatest achievement was to bring to fruition an idea that had begun with Bishop Adolph Noser and been supported by Bishop Arkfeld, that of beginning a Tok Pisin publication for PNG. “Wantok” fulfilled a long standing commitment by the mainstream churches to the media in PNG. It was always catholic, rather than Catholic, with a strong ecumenical flavour from the beginning. It promoted Christian values and reflected the social justice philosophy developed by the Catholic church in South America and the Philippines.

The work of the SVD in nurturing, codifying and promoting Tok Pisin has precedents, probably best exemplified by the work of the Jesuits in Paraguay. Although eventually expelled from Paraguay in 1767, the Jesuits’ use of Guarani meant that the language survived and eventually became, besides Spanish, that country’s second national language, spoken by 90 percent of the people.⁶

As already noted, “Wantok” was not the order’s first Tok Pisin publication. Several decades before it had published “Frend Bilong Mi” which appeared intermittently. “Frend Bilong Mi” eventually disappeared, a fate which also befell other Tok Pisin publications produced by the administration and commercial publishers (Nelson 1967). Quite apart from Mihalic’s sheer obstinacy in the face of opposition and indifference, “Wantok”’s success was probably due as much to the fact that it emerged at a time when a critical mass of Tok Pisin had developed. Some correlation could be drawn between the growing number of students at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s and the growth of the paper. In 1970 the first students graduated from the University of Papua New Guinea and the Institute of Technology. In that year there were 17.600 students in secondary education, a tenfold increase on the figure for 1960 (McKinnon 1971:1, 16). The audience was functionally literate in Tok Pisin, for despite the policy of teaching in English, the Tok Pisin schools had survived and eventually the

MSC at Vunapope: “Vonem naem bilong yu?” – rather than the more standard “Wanem nem bilong yu?”

⁶ See Anderson (1991:197), Warren (1949:147–148), and Lustig (@ <http://eskimo.com/~krautm/>).

administration had had to allow some schools to teach in Tok Pisin or Tok Ples in the first and second grade. The failure of English to take hold as a *lingua franca* could be due to the fact that Tok Pisin proved adequate for the needs of the bulk of the population who felt no need to become fluent in English (Zinkel 1971:52). School leavers literate in Tok Pisin appear to have been regarded as a primary market for “Wantok”. In the paper’s 100th edition Mihalic wrote:

Planti student I pinisim praimer skul tasol, na bikipela lain gen I save lusim haikul long Fom 2. Tru, ol I no inap ritim gut ol buk na niuspepa long tok Inglis. Wantok I wok long helpim ol dispela lain na ol narapela bikipela manmeri tu long ritim na raitim tok pisin. Nogot edukesen bilong ol I pundaun nating. Wantok I wok long givim ol kain kain nius I laik kamap insait long PNG – bilong gavman, bisnis, na ol misin bai ol pipel I save gut long kantri bilong ol (Mihalic 1974).

Many students are finishing school, but many others leave after form two. They can’t read books or newspapers in English very well. Wantok is working to help these people and older men and women to read and write in Tok Pisin. There is no point in wasting education. Wantok’s job is to give people the kind of news they want about government, business and the missions so that everybody will know what is happening in their country (translation by P.C.).

This is not the place to give a complete history of “Wantok” – Fr. Mihalic will hopefully do that himself one day – but the Tok Pisin newspaper that began life at the Wirui mission in 1970 serves to illustrate two important points: firstly it shows the correctness of adopting Tok Pisin as a *lotu* language and it shows that Tok Pisin has developed as a *lingua franca* in a way that English never could. It also showed that the question of *lotu* languages was utterly redundant. The extent to which Tok Pisin had become a *lingua franca* and the way in which had begun to play a role as a unifying agent was exemplified when journalist Kumalau Tawali quoted Professor Lynch at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) as saying that because the government and media did not use Tok Pisin they were failing to keep people informed and only informed people truly participate in development. “The result is inevitable: we make little progress as a nation. It’s as important as that” (Tawali 1979).

Today Tok Pisin is the national *lingua franca* of Papua New Guinea. It is still changing, with once common words consigned to obscurity and new loan words and Tok Ples expressions taking their place.⁷ Whatever its regional differences, however, it would be hard to argue with the sentiment that “without it, there would be no unity in this land” (Willey 1965). This is not to say that Tok Ples are redundant, far from it. If their role in uniting a *lotu* has passed, they remain powerful signifiers of group iden-

⁷ See Mihailic (1990). I would suggest that there are at least five variants: one in the Highlands, one on the north coast, one in the Islands’ region, the creolised version heard in Port Moresby and a version I have dubbed “Waigani Pidgin” in which the Honourable Members baffle their grass roots constituents by referring to “dispela five yia development plan”.

tity, as witnessed by the survival of Kuanua on the Gazelle Peninsula and Suau and Dobu in Milne Bay. It is Tok Pisin, however, which has expanded its role to help create something quite different, a national consciousness.⁸

The development of a national consciousness is an organic process, which may be helped, wittingly or unwittingly, to fruition. Papua New Guinea, however, did not exist as such before it was created by the Australian administration; it is an artificial creation, one of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined nations”. It is therefore not surprising that it is difficult for people whose primary allegiances have always been traditionally to the clan, to imagine it as a whole. However, we can see in the spread of Tok Pisin and its increasing status through its use as a *lotu* language by the churches, a mechanism by which people might feel united through a *lingua franca* and might feel a national rather than a strictly clan or *lotu*-based consciousness. The unwitting promotion of Tok Pisin as a language of national unity has its parallels in nineteenth century Europe, where, according to Anderson, the rise of nationalism – or at least national identity – can be traced at least partly through the appearance of dictionaries, and formalised orthographies (Anderson 1991:67–93).

The SVD chose to work in Tok Pisin because it was practical to do so, not because they had a grand plan for the cultural unification of Papua New Guinea. The Protestant missions eventually accorded Tok Pisin the status of a *lotu* language because they were forced to by circumstance and the natural demand of the indigenous people for a language which allowed them to participate in the economy. Tok Pisin was simply more useful to the majority of indigenous people than English or the particular Tok Ples of the *lotu*. One could argue that this was somehow the unconscious will of the people brought to fruition by the policy of pragmatic German missionaries. Rather, one should say that the process occurred because of a mixture of economic demand, administration policies designed to foster English as a *lingua franca*, the SVD’s decision to use Tok Pisin as a *lotu* language and the eventual recognition – again led by the SVD and expressed through “Wantok” – that Tok Pisin had a vital role to play in national development. I would argue that this was made possible precisely because Tok Pisin was an artificial language developed locally, borrowing freely as geography dictated from Tok Ples, Dutch, Indonesian, German and English and growing and changing to suit new conditions. Thus it remained a language of the local people. Many years ago a Tolai man I was interviewing in Rabaul said proudly: “We invented Tok Pisin”. Tok Pisin has many antecedents, ranging from Chinese business pidgin to Samoan plantation pidgin and ship’s pidgin, but in one sense my Tolai respondent was right: Tok Pisin was invented by the people of Papua New Guinea and this more than anything else is responsible for its growth and strength. Had it been imposed on the people, as was English and the various *tok lotu* (when taken out of their own districts)

⁸ I know that this argument has its problems, not least because of the primacy of Kuanua on the Gazelle Peninsula, English in Milne Bay and Motu in southern Papua.

there would be no “Wantok”, no films like “Tinpis Run” and “EmTV” would not be able to fill several hours each week with local bands such as “Painim Wok”.

Newspapers, films and songs express a desire for a national consciousness not yet fully formed, a sentiment expressed in the Tok Pisin song “PNG yu mas kamap wan nesen”. If we accept, as history has shown us, that national consciousness and identity is fragile in the post colonial period, then surely it worth nurturing, for national unity proceeds from national consciousness. If that means the development of Tok Pisin as a *lingua franca* which replaces some Tok Ples, then that may be a price that has to be paid, at least for a time. It has been argued by Kulick (1997:*passim*) and others that Tok Pisin is beginning to influence some Tok Ples and from this it might be inferred that there is even more danger to those languages which have been ‘lost’, insofar as a generation of people literate in their own language has been lost (Kulick 1997). However, I would argue that these languages will recover and that literate populations will re-emerge with the re-introduction of Tok Ples education. I think it is also worth bearing in mind that whatever written versions of these Tok Ples exist are the mission versions. The fact that dictionaries and orthographies for these languages have had to be revised indicates that the languages changed at least as soon as contact was made with the ‘outside world’. The fact that PNG has anywhere between 700–1000 languages is the result of a long period of isolation. The influence of Tok Pisin on some Tok Ples detected by Kulick simply reflect the same processes that have influenced every other language on the planet. We cannot say that any of the multitude of PNG languages should or can remain in a pristine pre-contact state. This is to imprison the languages in a museum, rather than admitting that they must grow and change as an authentic reflection of their speakers’ world. In my view, the loss of Tok Ples as *lotu* languages should not be mourned. The real issue is whether or not the primary role of language in a developing country is to divide or unify it.

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