SOME OBSERVATIONS ON PHONETICAL HISTORY OF MELANESIAN PIDGINS

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of phonetic correspondences in two Melanesian pidgins (Tok Pisin and Bislama) against the background of English data is undertaken. The phonetic correspondences are shown to be regular for the modern state of the vocabulary, i.e. with all loans considered, and display almost no regularity for the early pidgin stage.

Linguistically Western Melanesia seems to be the most heterogenous part of the world. The total number of languages spoken here reaches nearly a thousand. Bi- and multilingualism was widely spread here, but there had been no linguae francae known on large territories up to the end of the nineteenth century. From that time on the official functions in the area have been hold by the metropolitan European languages: German succeeded by English in New Guinea, English in Papua and British Solomon Islands, English and French in New Hebridies. Yet the natives acquired almost no knowledge of the European languages, the function of interethnic communication media being gained by the English-based pidgins. All those pidgins descend from Bichlamar, a trade jargon spread during the middle of the last century on the Melanesian seashore, in Micronesia and Western Polynesia. In the second half of the nineteenth century Bichlamar arose as the only means of communication between the Melanesian labourers on the European plantations in Queensland, Samoa, Fiji, New Caledonia. Different variants of the jargon stabilized in different parts of the Pacific, thus leading to the resulting divergence.

These stabilized pidgins came into common use as linguae francae due to Melanesians returning home after the completion of their contracts. Beginning from the first decades of our century interethnic marriages resulted in the creolization of the pidgin in New Guinea, and later - in the New Hebridies and in the Solomon Islands. Meanwhile missionaries began applying pidgins in church and at school. Thus the process of lexical enrichment and sophistication of grammatical structure of noncreolized pidgin variants started.

The number of native speakers of the newly formed languages is not great, and up to now they exist chiefly in the forms of expanded pidgins (in the terms of Mühlhäusler /6/), nevertheless in the last decades, being used in press, radio, TV, and fiction, they began to acquire new communicative functions; in the 1970's they got the official status.

Now a linguistic family consisting of three closely related Neomelanesian languages has formed, including Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea), Bislama (Republic of Vanuatu and Neosolomonic or Pijin (Solomon Islands).

The report deals with some aspects of Neomelanesian comparative phonetics and is based on the data of Tok Pisin and Bislama, the languages that have representative dictionaries and a number of available texts.[I]

In the formation of Neomelanesian languages, English segmental forms were applied to the semantic system of Melanesian and underwent the influence of the aboriginal pronouncing habits. Mother tongues of the early pidgin speakers belong to the Oceanic branch of the Austronesian. Phonological structure of the majority of the Oceanic languages is rather simple. Usually a five vowel system is present: i, e, a, o, u. The opposition of voiced – voiceless stops is generally accompanied by the prenasalization of the former; labio-velar p^W and k^W are common; the phonological r/l opposition may be absent. Labials may have stop and fricative allophones p~b~β~v opposed to the sonorant bilabial w. Affricates are rare, fricatives are usually represented by s; h is often non-phonemic. Typical syllable structure is CV(C). Consonant clusters are rare, being usually impossible word-finally.

Comparative linguistics deals with regular phonetic correspondences of the inherent lexicon and interprets the irregularities, yet it is not easy to destinguish the inherent and the borrowed in pidgins and creoles. In spite of the obvious lexical similarity of Neomelanesian languages and of English[2], the latter cannot be regarded as their direct ancestor: "Protoneomelanesian" was an early trade jargon with unstable grammar and a scarce vocabulary of some three to four hundreds of items not necessarily of English descent. For many words of English origin it is difficult to define the exact period of their arising in the trade jargon / stabilized pidgin / expanded pidgin / creole,

and to determine, therefore, whether these words can be treated as inherent in any sense. It seems doubtful if words of the German origin adopted at the begining of the stabilized pidgin stage, should be regarded as loans.

Let us first consider English-to-creole sound correspondencies taking into account all the creole lexics of the English origin indiscriminately.

The time-limit and the restrictions of exclusively written sources do not permit to dwell on the question of consonant cluster simplification and vowel epenthesis. Any standards seem hard to be found here, for, on the one hand, Neomelanesian languages exist in the form of different thnolects, and on the other, the degree of proximity to the English models varies greatly depending on the sociolect.[3]

Regular corresponcences are rather trivial and coincide in Tok Pisin and Bislama for the majority of the English phonemes.

Vowels. I, i: > i; e, ei > e; æ , ʌ, ɑ: > a; ɒ, ou > o[4]; ʊ, u: > u; eə > ea; iə > ia; uə > ua; difference between the reflexes of the English diphthongs ai, oi, au exists only when written: ai, oi, au in Tok Pisin and ae, oe, ao in Bislama. English ə: is irregularly reflected as o, a, e; in particular items of the basic vocabulary, traceable back to the trade jargon, the reflexes in Tok Pisin and Bislama are identical: doti – toti 'dirty', tanim – tanem 'to turn', gel – kel 'girl', sket – sket 'skirt'. The final ə > a; non-final ə has different reflexes in orthography. Such variability (as in Bislama supos ~ sipos ~ sopos ~ spos 'if') leads to the supposition that this is just means of coding in written form. In the vowel system the reflexes of the final -ə: should be pointed out (non final ɔ: in both languages becomes o). In Bislama final -ɔ: > o ~ oa (free variants?): sto ~ stoa 'store', lo ~ loa 'law'. In Tok Pisin after labial con-

sonants -ɔ: > oa (for some words monophthong variants also exist): moa ~ mo 'more', boa 'drill' (< bore), woa 'war'; after non-labial consonants -ɔ: > ua: plua 'floor', sua 'I. sore, 2. shore', stua 'store'. In late borrowings no diphthongization exists: lo 'law'.

Consonants. In Tok Pisin stops generally retain the distinction of non-final voiced and voiceless, final stops being always voiceless. The loss of voicing is registered also in other positions: kalap 'to gallop', dispela ~ tispela 'this'. In Bislama voiced stops are generally devoiced if not after the nasal. On the contrary, the sequence nasal – voiceless stop may result with the voicing of the latter: rapis 'rubbish', kampani ~ kambani 'company'. At the same time in the initial position not only can b retain its voiced characteristic, but p also can be voiced: bambu 'bamboo', baenap 'pineapple'[5]. Interdental ð and θ in both languages are reflected in the same way as dental stops. English s, z, ʃ, ʒ are substituted by the Neomelanesian sibilant s. In Tok Pisin tʃ and non-initial dʒ have the same sibilant reflex, initial dʒ retaining its quality. Affricates are preserved in Bislama, varying by voicing, however in the orthography j is chiefly used: fiuja 'future', haejin 'hygiene', safrej 'suffrage', jusum 'choose'. Labial consonants w and v are generally retained, but in Tok Pisin can merge with the resulting bilabial w. The phoneme f is optional in both languages, and can be substituted by the labial stop p. In Bislama substitutions f > v and f > b also occur: tevren 'different', binka 'finger'; there are some cases of hypercorrection as well: fikemap 'to pick up', foes 'voice'. Nasals, r, l, and y are retained in both Neomelanesian languages. The phoneme h in some ethno- and sociolects is optional and can be dropped. Some words in both languages are chiefly used

in a hypercorrect form: hai – hai 'eye'. Some of Tok Pisin speakers pronounce initial hu- as wu-: huk ~ wuk 'hook'.

Regular correspondences shown are found both in the vocabulary inherited from the "protopidgin" and in the new borrowings. However, in the basic vocabulary of the Neomelanesian languages many instances of other correspondences are found. Some of them are ideosyncratic, cf. æ > ia in giaman – kiaman 'to lie, be false' (< gammon) or ou > a in banara – banara 'bow' (< bow and arrow). But the essential part of the "irregular" correspondences is systematic enough.

These are the most important.
I. I > e, e.g. lewa ~ leva – leva 'liver', melek – melek 'milk'. 2. ɒ > a, e.g. stap – stap 'leave' (< stop), antap – andap 'above' (< on top). 3. ou > u, e.g. nus – nus 'nose', bun – bun 'bone'. 4. e > a banis – banis 'fence', salim – salem 'to sell'. 5. t, d > r intervocally, e.g. Sarere 'Saturday', kirap – krap 'to get up'. Significantly, in the earliest indigenous vocabulary the frequency of those "regular irregularities" is quite comparable to that of regular correspondences discussed above. Thus, in the Swadesh I00 word list the correspondences ɒ > o and ɒ > a are found twice each: Bislama tok 'dog', long 'long', hat 'warm' (< hot), wanem 'what' (< what name).

In such cases the principles of comparative linguistics presuppose the reconstruction of two distinct phonemes in the parent language, though it is obvious that different reflexes are traced back to the same English phoneme.

The percentage of "irregular" correspondences in Tok Pisin is higher than that in Bislama, which could be a result of the complete absence of the English normalizing effect on Tok Pisin during stabilization and initial creolization period. Meanwhile, Bislama underwent the stage

of regularizing sound corresponcences. Therefore, the following conclusions can be arrived at. In Neomelanesian, the English-based lexicon taken as a whole permits to establish regular phonetic correspondences. However, in the vocabulary arising from the trade jargon the seeming irregularities prove to be systematic. So in early pidgin Bichlamar phonetic correspondences display almost no regularity. It would be desirable to verify these findings on the data of other pidgins.

Notes.

I. Tok Pisin sources: Rev.F.Mihalic's dictionary /5/, texts narrated by speakers of different Tok Pisin variants /4, I0/, a play /7/ and poems /3/. Bislama sources: J.-B.-M.Guy's dictionary /2/, agricultural show booklet /I/, the book on current problems of Vanuatu /8/, poems /9/.

2. The number of coincidences in the Swadesh I00 word list is: Tok Pisin – English – 70, Bislama – English – 77, Tok Pisin – Bislama – 80.

3. Tok Pisin has standard orthography, but there are many deviations in printed sources. Orthographical practice in Bislama abounds in rough anglicisms. Even the text of national hymn in the book edited under the direction of the Vanuatu prime minister W.H.Lini includes the word klat 'to be glad' in two different anglicized forms: glat and glad /8, p.4/.

4. wɒ > wa in both languages: wasim – wasem 'to wash', was – waj 'to watch'. Here and further Tok Pisin word appears the first in a pair, Bislama word – the second.

5. In many Oceanic languages the prenasalization of the initial voiced is very slight or absent altogether. Besides, the phenomenon described can arise due to

fricativization b > β.

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