

Voices of Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow by Prof. Otto Nekitel

Chapter 3: Language & Society

When we meet strangers we may want to know who they are, where they come from and, depending on situations, may wish to know about their social and educational backgrounds. This seems a common experience which derives from an inherent tendency in humans to be inquisitive about those they meet. The natural curiosity may impel us to guess who the strangers are by inferring from whatever physical clues they exhibit such as the shape of the nose, lips, skin colour, or the material dressings they wear, or the quality of jewelry they have and the types of cars they drive and other attributes to make guesses about the social background of the people we meet in different social contexts or social domains.

In most instances, we find ourselves talking to those we meet, be they friends or foes. Immediate verbal expressions involving an issuance of salutations such as *hi!* *good morning!* or *hai brow!*, (*yu*) *orait* (*o*) 'how are you?' and so on if we are speaking in Tokpisin usually apply on such contact occasions. Societies differ though in the way they behave when meeting people for the first time. The different ways of behaving towards strangers are part of the culture of the speakers with which they are familiar and are determined by the rules or norms they nurture and use over the years and which have become entrenched as part of the societal decorum. (See, for example, Basso 1970, Nekitel 1985, Wardhaugh 1987: 211-235) for specific delineations.

Nekitel 1985 has shown how the Abu' Arapesh of the central Sepik behave towards strangers when they appear in the village. The arrival of strangers in an Abu' village is treated as an alien intrusion and so the Abu' recourse to whatever immediate strategies they have cultivated to keep the strangers at bay for social, cultural or political reasons. Strangers are, after all, aliens whom the Abu' treat with caution and care in the event that they capitalize on the host's amicable hospitality to harm society. Among the unwritten codes of conduct is the one which can be described crudely as: "do not greet or talk to strangers until you know who they are and why they are here". The temporal absence of speech during the time of meeting is usually compensated for by passive mental judgments about who and what the strangers are or might be and where they are or might be from. It is a taboo, so the Abu' children are taught, to ask strangers directly about who they are or where they come from. Only after the hosts have established some sense of trust and confidence in the strangers that verbalizing may commence. At this stage, the Abu' can switch to using the verbal signals as cues for associating or situating strangers with or to speech communities. Verbal cues usually involve the judgments they make of the strangers' accents on the "kind of Tokpisin", being the common lingua franca, the strangers use

during initial verbal exchanges. As many people are probably aware, the use of this particular verbal strategy to identify and locate strangers to different ethnic communities is practised not only among the Abu' of Papua New Guinea, but also practised worldwide (see, Giglioli 1972).

The Abu' can fairly well tell that such and such a stranger is from a neighbouring village or a particular region while listening *to* the way the stranger talks. They can fairly well judge whether a person is from the neighbouring Warn, Aruek or Suain by listening *to* the way she or he speaks

Tokpisin. Tokpisin accents of their neighbours are judged *to* be influenced by the way they speak their respective *tokples* 'vernaculars'. General observations suggest the presence of *some* linguistic elements from the mother tongues (MT) in the "style" of Tokpisin used and these are what the Abu' go by for making such judgments. The Wam, for example, speak Tokpisin which the Abu' regard as "dragged" or "slurred" and is characterized by a prolonged utterance-final mid-front unrounded tense vowel, *e*, or its phonic semblance. This is probably why the language is named *Miye* (heavy accent on *e*). The Aruek, on the other hand, are said *to* speak a variety of Tokpisin which is characterized by complex pitch contours which the Abu' crudely described as "up and down speech". The Suain are said *to* use a much more "straightforward" variety of Tokpisin.

The brief discussion on how the Abu' access the verbal cues to situate a speaker to a society demonstrates vividly that language and society are fairly closely linked and verbal strategists often become interested in the kinds of utterances humans make because their judgments about people can be based on them. The slangs, peculiar lexis, idiomatic expressions, idiolectal features, slurs, drags and other goings-on in language can and, as a matter of fact, are used by the addressees or listeners to decide the speaker's social, ethnic and educational backgrounds. Who and what we are or may be is manifested in the way we speak a language. Hence language and society complement each other in many respectable ways. In spite of this nexus, many people simply take language for granted without bothering much about its social or cultural significance and thus are least aware of the significant role language plays in establishing "interpersonal relationship" as well as the "role it plays in conveying information about the speaker" (Trudgill, 1986:14).

Moreover, language is something that human beings cannot do without. It is a central feature of being human and is thus regarded as a species-specific phenomenon because thus far no other members of the bipedal primates have been found to use a communicative system that parallels human speech. Humans can think up ideas and can also express what they think and feel about all sorts of things. Ideas, thoughts and feelings we have and wish to communicate to others is expressed through language which is phonologically and structurally vexed. Utterances that we make or hear

appear as stream(s) of unfragmented sounds. However, studies into how language works have shown that this stream of speech can be broken down into discreet sound units such as: i,e,a,o,u,b,d,k,g,f,j,k,l,m,n,s,t,w; etc. And further, these phonological segments or phonemes (or important sound units) can be combined to form meaning bearing linguistic elements technically called morphemes and/or words such as: a, man~ big, pig; taro, independence, anniversary, mumu (to cook over an earth oven), and celebrate. These words can be strung linearly to produce a string of words such as: a big man is mumuing a pig and taro to celebrate his birthday - as an expression of a complete thought.

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Having provided some general background about what language is and how it may be used as a means to assign speakers to ethnic or social groupings, there is some need also to discuss some of the sociolinguistic labels or concepts such as "kind of language", "dialed" and so on that we have already introduced. To these, we shall now direct our attention.

Kind of Language

The preceding discussion about the role of language in society makes us aware that one plausible way of finding out about a person's social, cultural, ethnic, educational, areal or regional background is to go by the external verbal cues, especially the accents people have of languages they share with others such as Tokpisin, Hiri Motu and English in the case of Papua New Guinea. It is common knowledge that many people can associate speakers with the different regions of the country on the basis of the regional varieties of Tokpisin used. Tokpisin varieties are characterized chiefly by the type of pronunciations, lexical, phrasal and grammatical variations that are apparent. These language variations constitute what is known as "a kind of language" (Trudgill, 1986:14). The concept "a kind of language", as used here, is meant to suggest that the linguistic clues that seem to give some sense of variance is an untechnical way of talking about what is more technically termed a 'dialect' which we will treat in some detail as follows:

Dialect Defined

Many of us use the term "dialect" frequently. Just because we use the term we may conclude that we know all about its technical usage, Albeit some of us have some vague idea of what a dialect is, it is important to note that dialect is not the same thing as accent. Many people tend to equate dialect with accent and this is not correct. First we can say that a dialect is some "kind of language."

Even given this kind of neutral, untechnical definition, we will be surprised to hear that many linguists disagree with one another on what a dialect is, and, as we will see later, what a language is. It is not that easy to define precisely what a dialect is. Some of the difficulties arise from the imprecise nature of answers that may have been given in response to such questions as: how exactly do we decide what a dialect of a language is? Is there good criteria we can use to decide that a variety X is a language and variety Y is a dialect of a language? Can we pinpoint the essential linguistic differences between a language and a dialect? These kinds of questions as well as others have bothered linguists for decades, especially dialectologists, those who study dialect patterns and diffusion.

Haugen (1966a) showed how language and dialect may be confused because a dialect may mean 'language' and vice versa, depending on the prevailing language situation. He pointed out that the difficulty in distinguishing between language and dialect resulted from several factors, one of which is definitional, 'the other historical. He points out that both terms "represent a simple dichotomy in a situation that is almost infinitely complex" (Haugen 1966a cited by Wardhaugh 1987:24). Haugen showed that the Greeks had these terms confused right from the start. What we now refer to as the classical Greek language was made up of several varieties, namely, Ionic, Doric and Attic which diverged from a common spoken source, each having specific literary traditions such that Ionica was used for writing history, Doric for choral and lyric and Attic for writing tragic stories and the generally regarded unrefined forms of classical literature. At a latter point in history, the Attanian variety, *koine* "common language" became the standard spoken norm as people who spoke the different varieties converged at the major trade centres of the metropolis. The Greek situation became the norm for all usages of the term and thus-the ensuing confusion. From this, Haugen says that a language can refer to a single linguistic norm or several related norms (Wardhaugh 1987:25) while "dialect refer(s) to one of the norms". He was quick, however, to point out the fluid nature of the norms. That is a dialect and language can prove difficult to arrest as a standard because of the mobility of speakers up and down the social continuum thus influencing speakers of the various norms to mix up the varieties and so at times may end up not knowing what to do with the varieties in the different speech situations. From the above review of Haugen's position on the issue of the difficulty involved in defining a dialect, we deduce that dialect and language are difficult concepts to define properly.

However, the general rule of thumb goes something like this: a language is a language if a speaker starts speaking and the listener does not understand any of what said. On the other hand, if a speaker starts saying something and the listener can understand what is said (excluding knowledge of a foreign language), then the two must share dialects of the same language. These are largely social definitions and reflect, as it were, social attitudes of speakers.

Let us draw attention to the issue of dialect in Papua New Guinea and see if we can make out certain linguistic scenarios. In the recent past, we have come to use concepts like MOMASE (an acronym for the north-coast region of PNG including the Morobe, Madang, East Sepik and Sandaun provinces): 'the New Guinea Islands' (NGI), Highlands and Papua to denote regional or political entities. These regional tags have also been used by linguists to refer to the kinds of Tokpisin used in these regions. Similarly, we may also have heard of the 'central' and 'non-central' dialects of Hiri Motu (see Dutton and Brown 1977). The central dialect of HM is the "kind of Motu" spoken by those Papuans who live in the neighbourhood of the Motu speaking villages while the non-central one is spoken elsewhere in the Papuan region. The aforementioned dialects of the two national lingua francas (languages of wider communication used by speakers who do not share a common mother tongue) define certain geographic regions of PNG and are, therefore, conveniently labeled 'regional dialects'.

Theoretically speaking, regional dialects exhibit certain language items (words, sounds or forms of grammar) that speakers born and raised in the region acquire and which when heard listeners coming from other regions can use as cues to identify the speakers with the region' whence they come. Labelling of dialects according to regions or areas albeit serve to capture certain linguistic facts, for the most part they remain only as convenient labels. Let me exemplify what I mean by this comment.

In the case of Tokpisin, a regional dialect is the norm which is colored by certain areal or regional linguistic features. These features comprise words, phonological elements or particular expressions. For example, the Tokpisin word Jor prayer, *beten*, which is a loan from German, is used more so in the MOMASE and Highlands regions, while *raring*, a Tolai loan, is used in the New Guinea Islands dialect while the more recent adoption: *prea* 'prayer' is used more so in the urban standard dialect of Tokpisin. Regional phonological variations are difficult to isolate as these may be more localized than the regional vocabulary differences which tend to stand out more. However, some New Irelanders, Tolais, Manusians and a good portion of Highlanders prenasalize the voiced stops when using Tokpisin and are or may thus be identified by them. There is also the free variation between the liquids which feature prominently in the speech communities representing certain areas of Papua New Guinea. These features are exhibited in the "kind of Tokpisin" used by a number of Tokpisin-speaking Milne Bay people, while the Buangs of the Morobe Province appear to use the /1/ more so than the Engans of the Highlands whose TP variety is marked heavily by the rolling [r] or its phonic semblance. The prenasalization of stops especially the voiced ones, such as: [ʰb, ʰd, ŋg] is common; thus a word like bed is pronounced either as [bed] or [ʰbeʰd] and going as: [goin] or [goiŋg]. These are diagnostic of certain regional speakers' dialects of Tokpisin and may not be readily apparent in formal or standard dialects.

Generally, the Highlands variety and Tolai and some New Ireland communities seem to prenasalize obstruents while the trilled [r], plus the prenasalization of the voiced alveolar stop combination features prominently in some Manus speakers' Tokpisin variety. Some Goilalas of Port Moresby have been heard to substitute / t/ for / s/, thus the word /samtin/ is pronounced [tam tin]. These kinds of linguistic features are being used to assign Tokpisin speakers to certain regions, areas or even villages. Given the "mixed" ethnic situation, attempts that might be made to draw up isoglosses (lines on maps showing dialect or language boundaries) can be problematic and so boundaries that may be proposed to separate one language from another or to separate a dialect from another will remain imprecise. This is the reason why some scholars would prefer to go along with the local communities' perceptions of dialect boundaries based on social (including among others political, geographic and possibly cultural) criteria rather than ones based on linguistic facts (Nektel1985).

Let us consider one situation in Papua New Guinea to gain some idea of the difficulty involved when decisions are made about dialect and/or language boundaries. For instance, in the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea, Arapesh and Boiken are separate Papuan (non-Austronesian) languages which belong to two distinct Phyla. The former belongs to the Torricelli Phylum and the latter, the Sepik-Ramu Phylum. Though they differ, due to on-going social interaction involving such activities as interethnic marriages, inter-cultural festivities as well as the extant linguistic propinquity-speakers living along both sides of the common border, speak each other's languages with varying level of proficiency with some speakers having mastered "near-native competences" in the two linguistically autonomous systems. This case is not unique because language studies done in different areas of Papua New Guinea on the degree of multilingualism in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s show that such a pattern of multilingualism is fairly common (see, for example, Sankoff 1968, 1969 and 1977 and Salisbury _1962; Bradshaw 1978 Laycock 1966, 1979).

Peter Trudgill (1986) also makes similar observations about the existence of similar patterns of doubtful linguistic boundaries in many parts of Europe. For instance, German and Dutch, although belong to the Germanic family of Indo-European, they are regarded as autonomous languages just like Roro is to Motu. However, Germans and Dutch people living along both sides of the common border speak varieties of the two languages which are said to be mutually intelligible.

Another classic case which exemplifies how people can use sociopolitical criteria to declare 'language' out of what are best seen as 'dialects' is the language situation in the Scandinavian countries. Peter Trudgill (1986) notes that politically there are three autonomous- language systems, namely, Norwegian (the language of Norway); Swedish (language of Sweden) and Danish (the language of Denmark). In these

countries most educated people can speak and understand each other quite well when speaking in their mother tongues. Given this degrees of mutual intelligibility among these linguistic systems can we say that these are dialects? In theory, yes. However, Scandinavians will not accept this view, since to do so would undermine each of the country's social and especially political autonomy. Hence, for political, national and other social reasons Scandinavians representing the three countries prefer to be regarded as speaking three independent languages representing three independent states.

Given the foregoing different linguistic scenarios demonstrating the fluid nature of

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language boundaries, it becomes more nebulous when trying to draw up precise language boundaries and so as Trudgill (1986: Chapter 1) queried, do divisions between linguistic and social phenomena into distinct entities have any basis in reality or are they mere convenient fictions? It appears that the latter seem to be the much less popular view yet seemingly a more correct one.

Discussion Questions

1. When do verbal cues or signals become significant in speech events and what can you make out of the verbal cues?
2. Are there rules in your society that govern the way your community conduct itself when meeting strangers? If so, discuss them in detail.
3. Does your community use any criteria to decide what language community a speaker belongs?
4. Discuss or compare what the following terms mean:
(a) kind of language; (b) dialect; (c) language

5. What kinds of problems may ensue when attempts are made to draw up dialect and language boundaries? Indicate what the author of the reading thinks how this problem can be alleviated?

Chapter 5 The Plight of PNG Tokpleses

Introduction

Vernaculars play an important role in the life of Pacific peoples. They serve not only as media of communication but also as symbols of group identity and collective solidarity. Vernaculars enable different groups of people to identify who they are and to what ethnic and linguistic entities they belong. Thus, vernaculars are often said to assume a special social status in the linguistic communities in which they serve as media of communication. Vernaculars are also instrumental in people's perceptions of reality. They influence the way people perceive things found in their immediate environments, the way they think, the way they act and speak other languages, as well as the way they behave when interacting with fellow human beings in any given social context. Consequently, it is important to nurture and guard against the disappearance or potential disappearance of vernaculars, for they are the surest ways for Pacific peoples to safeguard or recover the authentic cultures inherited from their undefiled ancestors, as well as to hand them on to island generations yet unborn. The vitality and continuity of vernaculars must be safeguarded from unnecessary external linguistic interference and replacement.

It seems that not only do Pacific peoples rely on the metropolitan powers (e.g. French, Australia, USA, New Zealand and Britain) for their string-tied monetary handouts, technical know-how, and other so-called "expertise", but also they are largely dependent on foreign experts who advise and literally think and decide for them on what they (foreigners) think Pacific people should do to achieve rapid and effective modernization. Pacific peoples, as pointed out elsewhere, must strive to decolonize their minds (Gilliam 1980). What, for instance, is the meaning of such labels as Pasifiki Toana, the Pacific Way, the Melanesian Way, Fa' a Samoa, the Hawai'ian Renaissance? All those labels, or alertive tags have a common message: beware, Pacific people, of the external forces which, if not screened carefully, will denude the vernaculars, the cultures and other social fabrics of Pacific societies.

Cultural and Linguistic Identity

In 1980, Papua New Guinea hosted the South Pacific Festival of the Arts. This festival was initiated to bring together Pacific peoples, not necessarily to homogenize their diverse cultures but essentially to emphasize the spirit of pan-Pacific cultural consciousness. The festival was a success and many people left enriched with new feelings and different experiences. But, as a vehicle for cultural consciousness, it was

lopsided. While admitting that culture, particularly non-material culture, is important, it needs to be stressed that it cannot exist in isolation of language.

Language and culture are inseparable. Languages or vernaculars are the media through which the varied feelings, philosophies, and other cultural beliefs of the Pacific people are, or can be expressed. They are the media through which authentic cultures can be preserved and safeguarded. Consequently, Pacific vernaculars must be given a central place in any discussion of people's consciousness, get-together, seminars and rallies for the fundamental reason that it is through the respective mother tongues that Pacific people become what they are.

Given the broad expanse of the Pacific and the widespread nature of its human settlements, an exhaustive study of what is happening to vernaculars throughout the region is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, a fair number of Pacific vernaculars has experienced linguistic genocide. The Aboriginal language of Tasmania, as well as some 200 Aboriginal vernaculars of mainland Australia, have disappeared and, to a large extent, so has the Hawai'ian language of the American State of the same name. Within Papua New Guinea, Dutton (1976) has reported that three vernaculars in southeast Papua (Guma, Yoba and Bina) are spoken by less than four people and thus face extinction when the last speaker dies (see Chapter 7). This general issue is addressed here with respect to the declining status of Abu' which is the author's mother tongue. Abu' is spoken by about 5,000 people who live in Womsis and other villages located in the central Sepik Region of Papua New Guinea.² It is a member of the Arapesh Language Family of the Torricelli Phylum.³

Linguistic map of Papua New Guinea

To provide context for the discussion of Abu', we must understand some features of the linguistic landscape of Papua New Guinea: the number and variety of local vernaculars, the position of the two lingua francas (Tokpisin and Hiri Motu), and the use and status of English. There are 854 distinct vernaculars, along with innumerable dialects which are spoken within the mainland and insular areas of Papua New Guinea: None has a large number of speakers by world standards. In terms of speakers, **Enga** is the largest with **180,000**, and spoken in the province bearing the same name located in the Midwestern Highlands Region. Four other vernaculars are relatively sizable:

Kuanua, with **80,000** speakers, located around the Rabaul area in East New Britain Province; **Melpa**, with **75,000** speakers, located in the Western Highlands; **Kuman**, with **70,000** in the Simbu Province; and **Huli**, with **65,000** speakers, spoken by the Tari of the Southern Highlands. Many vernaculars are small, many with 100 or less speakers (see chapter 7).

The basic linguistic division of Papua New Guinea vernaculars is between those belonging to the **Austronesian (AN)** Family and those others that, for linguistic

convenience, have been collectively referred to as **Papuan** (P: also known as non-Austronesian). Austronesian vernaculars (AN) show stronger evidence of lexical, phonological and, to a large extent, structural similarities which, in turn, suggests a genetic relationship. They are mostly found along the coastal, near coastal, and insular areas of the country. Each has approximately three hundred members and is spoken by small communities, apart from **Kuanua** and **Motu** (with more than 10,000 speakers in the villages of the Port Moresby area).⁵ The total number of Papua New Guineans who speak Austronesian vernaculars constitute a small fraction of the total indigenous population.

Papuan or non-Austronesian (NAN) vernaculars constitute the remainder and belong to as many as **eight major phyla** and **many different language families**. A very few have by Papua New Guinea standards a great number of speakers (e.g., **Enga, Melpa, Kuman, Huli**) but most are small. Some are intermediate in size and the **Arapesh Language Family**, to which **Abu'** belongs, has approximately **40,000** speakers. Papuan vernaculars differ quite considerably and belong to a number of unrelated linguistic groups. They are spoken in the interior or Highlands of New Guinea (with the exception of Gulf, Western and some areas of the Oro provinces), parts of East New Britain, some pockets along the East and West Sepik coasts, and some parts of the North Solomons Province. In total, they account for an overwhelming majority of the indigenous population.

There are, in addition to the vernaculars, three **official languages in Papua New Guinea: two lingua francas and English. Hiri Motu**, the lingua franca that is spoken in the southern and southeastern part of the country, owes its origin to contact situations between colonial officials and policemen and indigenous people. It was found initially in and around the Central Province and spread from there as the British or Australian colonial administration expanded its influence to other areas within the former colony of Papua. It is now spoken by about **20,000** Papua New Guineans.⁶

Tokpisin, found in the Highlands, northern, and insular provinces, originated with plantation activities in the 1880s.⁸ Recruitment of men, from the Duke of York, New Ireland and North Solomon Islands to go to Samoa and work as indentured labourers on commercial plantations resulted in the acquisition of the language. On return to New Guinea, many became overseers and passed on their knowledge of Tokpisin to labourers newly recruited from other parts of the former Trust Territory of New Guinea who transferred it to their village communities when returning at the end of the work contract. At this time, Tokpisin was an unofficial language but its importance in cross linguistic communication was recognized by both the colonial government and the missions. These religious institutions used it to communicate with the indigenous people and thus indirectly encouraged its spread. Today, **Tokpisin is the**

principal lingua franca of Papua New Guinea and the main language of communication in most speech situations.

English occupies a special position, being officially sanctioned as the **language of formal education**, government, commerce, and of international contact. It is, however, spoken by a small fraction of the population, mostly the Papua New Guinea intelligentsia and educated elite along with the overseas community in the country. Any of the three official languages may be used in any given speech situation. Since only a small minority of Papua New Guineans have acquired passable skills in all the three, the choice of which is determined extemporaneously by the interlinguistic context, the topic of discourse, and the language known by the participants. For example, bilingual speakers in Hiri Motu and English may switch codes between these two when addressing bilinguals in the same languages.

Position of Abu' Twenty Years Ago

The author's visit to Womsis in January-February 1980 enabled him to make several observations. Abu', the symbol of ethnic and cultural uniqueness, was dwindling. The acquisition of Abu' as a first language by children born of Abu' speaking parents is no longer as common as it was two decades ago. Children are generally left to learn and use what their peers use. Since Tokpisin is the dominant language of communication in the village, especially among children and the younger generation of Abu' parents, naturally it becomes the first language that the children acquire. Subsequently, the process of creolization, when a pidgin gains its own native speakers, begins right in the village. Nowadays, Tokpisin is used in most speech situations, for perhaps 60 to 70 per cent of the time. That is, about 60-70 per cent of any discussion is conducted in Tokpisin, either throughout its entire length or interspersed with Abu'. A switch from Abu' to Tokpisin for specific lexical or phrasal loans is more frequent, but the converse is not so. Most meetings of the local government council or the school board as well as Church services and religious instructions were done in Tokpisin. With this alarming shift from Tokples to Tokpisin, there is a real danger of Abu' being replaced or dying out. The survival of this vernacular, in future, is questionable unless Abu' speakers realize what is happening to it now and begin to encourage their children to acquire it, most preferably as their first language. The reasons for this subtle process of linguistic shift in favour of Tokpisin are not that obvious, especially since no systematic survey of influencing sociolinguistic factors has been attempted. The following, however, are some of the causes:

Colonial Attitudes towards Abu'

Foreigners who visited Womsis and other Abu' villages never showed any interest in learning Abu' because their communicative needs were well served by Tokpisin which was and is the language of communication between the villagers and foreigners, and also with **fellow Arapesh** from other villages. The parish **priest**, the **kiaps** (patrol

officers), the **medical officers**, and numerous other government or mission representatives always used the urban variety of Tokpisin. Those Abu' who did not know Tokpisin were often labelled *bus kanaka*, *manabus*, or *daluoh*; literally, a person from the interior, but used derogatorily to mean idiot or stupid *kanaka* or hillbilly. Thus, certain social attitudes emphasized the prestige of Tokpisin to a point where it was seen as the language of those in power or in positions of influence. When a language is regarded as part of the culture of the colonizing power, be it pidgin or a metropolitan language, the colonized may and can be prompted to think that their vernaculars are inferior. Consequently, they would make efforts to use the prestige language to identify themselves with people who represent the dominant culture. Thus, prevailing social attitudes increasingly encourage the use of Tokpisin at the expense of Abu' in Womsis and other villages where once Abu' was the only main language known.

Interethnic Marriage and Abu' Continuity

Inter-ethnic marriages are now more common than in the past and a number of Abu' speaking adults have spouses from other ethnic or linguistic groups. General observations suggest that many parents of interethnic marriages leave their children to acquire whatever happens to be either the language of wider communication or the functional language of the given locality. In most areas of Papua New Guinea these are either Tokpisin or Hiri Motu, which often become children's first languages. This is particularly true when the partners of an interethnic marriage reside in towns, cities, and on plantations where ethnolinguistic integration occurs and is actively encouraged. In certain cases, the mothers of inter-ethnic marriages teach children their own vernaculars, especially if they do not have a paid job or, more importantly, are concerned about the future social, cultural and linguistic identity of their children. Working parents seem generally less concerned about what vernaculars their children acquire and if they do, they rather have them learn their own. Inter-ethnic marriages may also lead to bi- or multilingualism, but more so to the detriment of indigenous languages.

In general, children born of Abu' and non-Abu' parents reflect the situation for the country as a whole. Three of the author's six cousins by marriage have non-Abu' speaking wives and their children learnt Tokpisin and some English but hardly speak the language of either their fathers (Abu') or their mothers' languages. Tokpisin and English often become the media through which inter-ethnic communication takes place and hence generally become the spoken languages of children of inter-ethnic marriages. Initially, such children tend to be monolingual but later progress to become bilingual, trilingual, or even multilingual especially if sociolinguistic conditions espouse the learning of other languages.

Abu' Members Living Outside their Area

Those who leave Womsis to attend schools or get jobs elsewhere in the country either lose command of Abu' or else retain, to a varying extent, a passive knowledge of the language if they had learnt some prior to departure from the villages. One reason is that either they are not fluent in Abu' or they feel ashamed to use it lest they become objects of ridicule for not knowing their language or for speaking it with a strange accent. And so when they return to Womsis village for holidays, they find it easier and more convenient to use Tokpisin. When some begin to use Abu', those claiming to be authorities on the proper use of Abu' make fun of them for speaking it with a strange accent. Given such attitudes, the only option for those unable to accept linguistic intolerance have no choice but to use the language with which they are familiar and which does not invite any form of social stigmatism. Many of those long absent from Womsis have little or no opportunity to actively reinforce their knowledge of the vernacular. On return, they find it difficult to express themselves in Abu' and thus communicate through Tokpisin, which only serves to give greater support to it at the expense of the local language. So, in general, there is a decrease in the knowledge of Abu' with increasing distance from the area where it is spoken.

Easier to Use Tokpisin

Speakers of a vernacular may resort to the use of another for reasons of economy and ease of articulation. This reflects the tendency for those communicating in a language believed to possess a complex phonological system and syntactic structure to turn to the Use of a vernacular or a language whose phonological and syntactic systems are seen to be less complex. It is often said that Tokpisin is an easy language to learn and perhaps this is one of the main reasons why the Abu' prefer to use it. From the linguistic point of view, this is a rather unorthodox position, since all full-fledged languages are either equally difficult or else equally simple. The notion of one language being simple or more complex than another very often reflects the *naïveté*, personal biases, or value judgments of a particular individual or groups.

Assuming, however, that some languages do fall under the rubric of "easy" languages and that Tokpisin is one of them, a question arises as to what linguistic features make Abu' more difficult to learn than Tokpisin? Are there any aspects of Abu' that appear awkward to master and may thus discourage children from learning it?

The first phonological problem with Abu' has to do with the unpredictable occurrence of the glottal stop, represented by an apostrophe in written form / '/. Preliminary observations suggest that the glottal stop was awkward to master by a number of Abu' children. Although Tokpisin and Abu' have basically a similar grammatical order, in that both are subject-verb-object languages, Abu' possesses very complex morphophonemics. We give one example in each language:

Example Abu'

<i>aleman</i>	<i>ubahi-n-e-r-i</i>	<i>aliali-n-e-r-i</i>
man	big- 3SGM-EV-PAR-AT	dark-3SGM-EV-PAR-AT
man	big-man	dark man
<i>n-u-bulawa-</i>	<i>n-a-he</i>	<i>kani aulaf enin-i</i>
3SGM-R-run	3SGM(SA)-R-go	LOC house 3SG-GEN
'The big dark man ran to his house.		

Example Tokpisin

Bikpela blakpela man i ran i go long haus bilong em.
A very big dark man ran to his house.

Since there are about thirteen different genders in Abu',⁹ the nominal modifiers and verbs take on affixes to agree with the noun of whatever class that noun is drawn from. Thus, the degree of irregularity in noun agreement increases to a point where it can cause problems for young children learning the language.¹⁰

Beyond the difficulty of learning the tokples, the Abu' society is changing. Thus, its language, too, is changing by absorbing loans from Tokpisin, English and several other vernaculars. Generally, when nouns are borrowed from Tokpisin, they retain their singular forms but take on the Abu' plural ending. Some examples are:

Tokpisin (Singular)	Abu' (Plural)	Gloss
pater	paterimi	priest
sista	sisteiwa	sister/nun
tisa	tisaimi	male teacher
angelo	angeloim	angel
redio	redio	radio
ain	ainab	iron
tos	tosihes	torch
nes	nesiwa	nurse

The main disadvantage about borrowing is that when the process picks up pace, it can be difficult to stop and so Abu' may become 'so heavily pidginized and thus it may lose its ethnic characters.

Consideration for Others

In the Abu' society, certain linguistic norms forbid people from using a language not understood by visitors, unless one wishes to swear at them or say something that they do not want their visitors to know about. To ensure that the relationship between visitors, and guests is maintained without feelings of suspicion, Abu' speakers try to avoid using their own vernacular but will communicate quite freely in Tokpisin. This practice, in a way, supports the rising dominance of a pidgin over Abu'.

Parents' Failure to Foster Abu'

Finally, parents themselves are largely responsible for the apparent decline of Abu', because they are not concerned about it, It was common to see and hear parents speaking to their children in Tok Pisin in fact all the time.

The Position of Vernaculars in Papua New Guinea

In the absence of a national survey, it is difficult to comment on the statuses of other vernaculars of Papua New Guinea (see Wurm forthcoming). Tokpisin, undoubtedly, is becoming the main language of communication in many parts of the country and what has already been said about Abu' certainly applies to other villages located to the north and south of Womsis. In the villages of Balup, Malin, Wolum, Aspeis, Welihika and Amom, Tokpisin is increasingly the main language of communication and this is also the case for most Sepik villages.

What can be done to ensure that Abu' and other Papua New Guinea or Pacific vernaculars remain alive? It is difficult to specify hard and fast rules about language maintenance, because languages are dynamic systems and hence subject to forces of social and cultural fluidity. They change and grow to meet the demands pf the changing social, cultural, political, economic, and educational conditions that feature prominently in all Pacific societies. Yet, the fact of the matter is uncontrolled change which can be detrimental to the authentic media of the cultural heritage of the Pacific people.

Conclusion

We would like to think that the best language teachers are the parents. If parents fail to teach vernaculars to their children, it is not always easy and possible for other people to do so. Parents should ensure that their children learn their parents' languages, preferably as they grow up. If this does not occur, the children will not pass on the vernaculars to their offspring, thus indirectly compelling languages to decline.

The network of national and provincial radio stations should be coordinated and become involved in language and cultural programmes. Once these are devised, vernacular and cultural experts from different language groups could be asked to present traditional stories, singsongs (folk dances), and other aspects of local culture.

These programmes could also be translated into Tokpisin and Hiri Motu or the lingua francas of the countries of the region for the wider audience and thus help people recognize the overall value and richness of the Pacific vernaculars.

Governments must assist professional linguists and knowledgeable persons to develop orthographies for unwritten vernaculars and to encourage the production of literature in them to demonstrate their importance and enhance their continuity.

Such is the rapid pace of social change in Pacific island societies today that members of various speech communities may not be able to spend the time needed to reinforce their knowledge of vernaculars. In this situation, literate members of different speech communities need to use whatever talents gained from western-oriented education and any technological advances and means available to research, document, and produce literature in their rich vernaculars. Such poems, stories, folk dances and tales would represent a visible token of appreciation at being a speaker in a specific local language and, therefore, a member of a particular and special group of people.

Tutorial Guide

1. What is the author attempting to say in this reading?
2. Do you agree or disagree with what he is saying? Why?
3. Are there any specific views that you feel the author should have mentioned but failed to mention?
4. Is what is happening to Abu' happening also to your vernacular? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. Go through each of the concluding points and discuss their pros and cons and provide alternative views to support your position.