

## UPNG Students' Voices: On the future of Tok Ples

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What strategy would you recommend for the preservation of the 'smaller' languages of Papua New Guinea?

Dasiga K.:

In this day and age, globalization has made the world become a Global Village, where people are exposed to many languages and cultures, especially in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Many people in PNG become multilingual speakers, as a result of this ever-changing world of information technology. Many prefer the use of the English language, because it is the language that is a widely used medium of communication. This poses a challenge to the smaller languages of PNG.

This situation requires urgent measures to preserve PNG languages. I believe language documentation is an effective strategy to use in order to preserve the smaller languages of PNG.

The Internet has made it much easier and faster for people to source information and also to know what is happening around the world. However, to use the Internet, one has to know the language that is necessary to go about browsing the net. This is where the English language comes into play. People from different language and cultural backgrounds use English to communicate for business and other purposes. Here in PNG, it is used especially in education, business, government, etc. It has pushed the smaller languages of PNG to the periphery, threatening their future.

Tok Pisin is another lingua franca used in PNG. It has become popular in urban and in the rural settings as well. Tok Pisin has replaced the vernaculars. This puts the future of the native vernaculars at risk. That is why preserving vernaculars is of such importance. Language documentation not only saves the language, it also saves the culture of the people. This is because language and culture are inseparable (Nekitel, 1998).

Language documentation helps save identity of the people. For example, the Zia people can be identified when they speak the Zia language. Language documentation should be used to preserve the smaller languages of PNG, because language is a very important prestige of the people. Without language, we cannot survive.

What does the future hold for Tok Ples languages of PNG?

Amanda M.:

In today's society, the common languages spoken are either English or Pidgin. English is made a compulsory language to be spoken at school. Students are taught in English by their teachers in school. Children in a school setting, and especially in major towns and cities of the country only speak a language that is common, which is either of the two. Given this, most children learn to speak in English or Pidgin at a tender age, making it their first language. Their own vernacular does not seem of any importance, given a town setting where you live amongst other people who don't have the same Tok Ples as you. Hence, English is given importance in terms of languages taught in school, English being a universal language. ... technology keeps improving and changing, and so is the global community. People are exposed to things they see on television, social networks, etc. Youths, especially off today's

generation, are easily influenced by what they see. They see people wearing certain brand clothes, and they, in turn, want to buy and wear them. They see famous celebrities sing and dance on TV, they want to do the same. They see the latest things out there, and they want to have them.

The young generation of today who are the future of this country, don't see the importance of culture or heritage; they are busy trying to keep up with the latest trends. Many, as a result, do not speak their own tokples, as a result of not being exposed to it when growing up. Only those who grow up in their village tend to know their language. However, with the growing population and development, many people prefer living in towns and major cities for work purposes and school – and that is where English and Pidgin are the two common languages spoken.

As a result, the different tokples spoken by different people are not in their original or pure form, as they were spoken generations ago. Therefore, tokples languages will die out in the future, due to the influence of the modern world.

#### Priscilla B.:

Papua New Guinea is a diverse country with the population of 7 million, speaking over 700 plus languages. Since PNG is the fastest developing country in the world, it has been having a lot of Western social influence, even though it is regarded as a high-context culture. My research project was on the Tok Ples that I speak, called Avaipa Tok Ples. My research shows that the Internet has impacted Avaipa in many ways, like: people in the community now use short forms or acronyms when facebooking or whatsapping; for example: '**Tebateba**' (meaning 'show me') is just '**tebax**'; '**arebane**' (meaning, 'what') is only 'arex' when facebooking, and the list goes on. The second way the Internet has impacted my language is by borrowing English words, like 'spoon' → **sipuni**; 'kettle' → **ketoro**, etc. Thirdly, the mixing of Tok Ples with English phrases, for example, "I went to the **mitox**" means "I went to the garden" in English. When people in my community are facebooking or surfing the net, they mix the Tok Ples with English for fun, with the idea of making a remix.

I suggest the government should put more funding in educating people about the importance of language, so people can be aware and accept it as our identity.

#### Lamech J.:

How many of us know how to speak our Tok Ples languages? How many of us speak our Tok Ples language at home with our families? How many of us write letters, text messages, emails, and post on social media sites, using our language? To be honest, I don't. Most of us don't. Why? Because:

1. With new technologies, we want to improve our living standards and, therefore, we move coiled up in the Western ideas and language. We then begin to use the Western lifestyle, adopting their language (English), because all technologies today are in English. When doing this, we forget our Tok Ples and, eventually find it very hard to speak it.
2. Papua New Guineans have three national languages, and none of them is our tokples! Motu is only for one part of the country, which is Papua. However, even still, most Papua New Guineans do not speak or listen to Motu.

3. Most of the children, including our generation, are brought up with all sorts of slang, and the way we speak is so different from the way our parents speak. The languages we grow up with these days are Pidgin and English, not our tokples. Therefore, we find it very hard to speak and learn our tokples.

Papua New Guinea is seriously losing grip of its tokples languages – only because we, our generation, are not taking our tokples languages as priority in our culture. So, the question is, are we going to do something to save our tokples languages of Papua New Guinea? It's like the future holds nothing but an empty space that will be filled with another language. So let us do something starting now by informing people and citizens.

### Isaac M.:

Tok Ples languages have no future in PNG. In the past, people used to communicate only with those who shared the same language with them. Some say, these tokples languages will survive for generations to come, but will they? There are two important reasons as to why the tokples languages will not have a future in PNG: educational system and socialization.

Firstly, the educational system that is in place in PNG is outcome-based, and centered around English; it does not recognize the existence of the local language in a particular area. Students right across the country are taught to read, write and speak in English. This has caused many students to forget or simply ignore their native languages, due to lack of usage in the society. For instance, 95% of school students in my village don't really understand their own language (Melpa); some can hear, but cannot reply in tokples. This is a clear indication of language dying away in society.

Secondly, tokples languages will not have a future in PNG due to socialization. In PNG, socialization is one of the main factors that cause language to be forgotten, and that is due to the reason that when people from different parts are to communicate, they require a common language for communication. However, in PNG, where there are too many languages, people from different places don't know all languages, so when communicating, they tend to use a common language, rather than using their own tokples. So, they tend to use languages commonly understood by all parties, i.e., Tok Pisin and English; this eventually causes them to forget their tokples.

Therefore, for these two reasons, it can be concluded that 'NO' – tokples languages have no future in PNG.

### Timothy Teine:

There is no future for tokples languages of Papua New Guinea. It is scary, but it is a fact that the future of tokples languages of PNG is not secured. In fact, in UPNG alone only 10 out of a hundred students speak fluent tokples. Almost half of the student population can hear but cannot speak their tokples (they are not fluent). From this scenario, consider after 10 to 20 years' time, when all these students have children, their children will be lost, and the tokples languages will be lost before their children's children.

Numerous factors contribute to the situation: civilization, modern technological advancement, social integration, social media, the use of the English language as the formal language of the country, and inter-cultural marriages.

Civilization brought in major developments into the rural parts of PNG; thus, when villagers adopt the new lifestyle, they also adopt their new English language. Further, in interactions with other Papua New Guineans, they had to use a common language – mostly Tok Pisin and English; whilst their children were growing up, they also interacted with their mates in pidgin or English, and, as time went on, less emphasis was given to tokples, as parents also emphasized English at home, so their children could excel in education. Today, it is sad but true that our children's children will know only a few words of tokples, and will not hear nor speak fluent tokples. That is true due to the fact that about 89 % of children from birth to age 23 cannot speak fluent tokples. Tokples will not survive in the next 60 years.

### Desmond A.:

Development is the Future – English owns the Future – Will Tok Ples be understood in the Future? These are the issues we are faced with today. Development is occurring. Change is inevitable! And with the English language moving with the flow of Western lifestyle influences as the medium for development, what chances does a stationary, locally used language have against such a juggernaut?

To prove the inadequacy of Tok Ples languages in a future owned by inevitable development, the following questions with regards to the use and existence of Tok Ples languages and English must be addressed:

1. Why is development necessary and inevitable? 2. How and why is English the main medium of development? 3. Will Tok Ples languages survive in the inevitably developed Future?

First, Why is there a need for development? It comes with the territory of having the need to improve the standards of life – sanitary needs, medical needs, educational needs, population needs, etc. are all examples of why there is a need for development. The essential need for development has thus become a requirement, and consequently, ... we find it in our Constitution that development is to be sought for the benefit and betterment of the country's people.

Having established why development is necessary in Papua New Guinea, how do we achieve it in the world where there are thousands of cultures that vary not just by way of living, but also by way of languages spoken? Thus, the English language was the solution to this issue, and acted as a bridge to a uniformity of exposure to the Western ways that were influencing the world with better living standards. Therefore, the essence of English is such that it is necessary to have it, and it has been proven so by history that having it promotes and makes way for development to occur.

Finally, we look at the question whether Tok Ples languages will survive in the developed future. Tok Ples languages do not have a bright future, considering how the children of the current generation have been born into a developed world, where English is their mother tongue, and they have no exposure, no idea, of what their Tok Ples language(s) are. Also, seeing how development must branch out to rural areas, the very little traditional areas will have to acquire English to allow effective development; and

when that occurs, we find the remaining havens for Tok Ples languages to be challenged, in the sense of importance, by the English language. Thus, where these havens acknowledge the need for these changes, not much can be hoped for, for the following generation will not be born into the rural cultural setting where Tok Ples is utilized, but they will now be born into another world (a city or town) where Tok Ples is not of much use. Thus, there will be a neglect for Tok Ples, and English will substitute it.

Development changes our way of living, which includes behavior, speech, thinking, etc. So, where there is a need for Tok Ples, it will be incorporated; however, seeing how the developed world now has no use for Tok Ples languages, these traditional languages face inevitable death in a world that will find no use, no need for them, but will only have the need for development, and it is the English language that caters for that.

### Leontine I.:

There is no future for Tok Ples languages of Papua New Guinea; they are dying out, and will soon be no more.

Reasons:

1. Causes:
  - a. All educational and learning materials are written in English
  - b. Rural-urban drift
  - c. Goods and services are provided by English-speaking companies
  - d. Day-to-day conversations are made using Pidgin and English.
2. Effects:
  - a. Children and adults are forced to learn how to speak English, in order to understand written material for educational purposes
  - b. Children caught in the rural-urban drift suffer from lack of knowledge of how to speak their tokples language
  - c. To avoid social alienation, one has to let go of tokples and start speaking in pidgin and English, for effective communication.

Before Independence, only a handful of people knew how to speak Tok Pisin, and even fewer spoke English – most people spoke their local vernacular/tokples. Today, Tok Pisin and English are languages that are spoken nationwide, while tokples is slowly dying out. Twenty years into the future, tokples languages will be no more.

Like in the past, majority of today's population are still illiterate and live in rural areas. However, even village people these days do not know how to speak their tokples. Due to rural-urban drift, children can only hear and understand their tokples, but they cannot speak it.

Social media uses English. At present, social media is an attraction site for children and young people. All these factors will ensure that there is no future for tokples languages in PNG.

### Joseph U:

What does the future hold for Tok Ples languages of Papua New Guinea? I believe they will die out one day in the future.

Firstly, Papua New Guinea has a very rough terrain, and development is accessible only to places that can be reached by all forms of transportation. In this case, people that live in the most remote places, have not yet experienced the modern influence, and still practice their cultures, and Tok Ples is still spoken in those areas.

Secondly, with the slowness of development in the rural areas, the people there still speak Tok Ples and learn Tok Ples in schools. However, to the urban children, English is the essential language.

Some think that Tok Ples languages have survived for thousands of years, and that, therefore, they will stay like, forever. However, I strongly believe that Tok Ples languages will die out one day in the future. This is because of the fast development of technology and the introduction of modern cultures into villages. For example, nowadays, tourists travel to the most remote places for sight-seeing, and when they go into remote places, they have already brought in the outside influence.

On the other hand, children from the city schools are an influence on those in the villages. For example, during holidays, I go to my Dad's village which is in the most remote area of Kairuku. When I am there, I teach the village children how to speak English, instead of speaking to them in language.

It can also be noted that children in village schools are already being taught in English, once they are in senior primary school levels (Grades 6, 7, 8). From school, they take their homework to their parents, and this is where the modern influence is transferred from children to the parents, by teaching the parents the English language.

Another point is that the introduction of electricity into rural areas has caused people there to own televisions, mobile phones and electrical appliances that can provide information about the outside world. Rural people now have access to the Internet, and can browse and be influenced by outside/modern cultures. They also watch television and are influenced already by the way people talk and dress in movies. This all will cause the traditional and cultural norms to be forgotten. As a result, it will cause Tok Ples languages to vanish one day in the future. In conclusion, I stand my ground: Tok Ples languages will die out one day in the future.

Thank you for listening.

### Harry N.:

The sad news is that more than 800 Tok Ples languages of Papua New Guinea are fading very fast. The reasons for that are many, but the main two factors that are killing these languages are the rural-urban drift and mobile phones. Many villagers have left their homes to come to the cities, especially Port Moresby, Lae, and Mt. Hagen, to look for work or find money somehow. These migrants bring along their families, including children. When the children grow up in the streets and settlements, they tend to learn Tok Pisin and start to forget their Tok Ples language. They don't have other options, since during

the day the parents are very busy marketing or looking for money, while the kids play around with other settlement kids. The parents are so busy that they don't give enough time to speak their language, so that the kids will learn and remember. The children eventually forget all about their language.

The other factor that is creeping very fast into this society is the usage of mobile phones. The children and people can't speak and write in their languages, since they are too lengthy, so they speak in Pidgin for convenience' sake. This results in language fading away. A Hagen man who wants to text his wantok saying, 'Num neil pun' which means, 'Where are you going?' will text, 'we 2.' This indicates that Tok Ples languages are declining very fast, and that in the next 20 or 30 years, we won't be speaking our Tok Ples languages. Sadly, they will be replaced by Pidgin and English. Tokples is dying very quickly, and in the next couple of years, it will not be in use any more.

### Tinnett T.:

"ADAPTATION" is the future of Tok Ples languages of PNG. Have you noticed that the phrase 'tok ples' is actually borrowed from the root English terms 'talk' and 'place'? In other words, we could bluntly say, 'Tok Ples' is the 'talk' of a 'place'/ language of a particular place. I believe that the future of Tok Ples languages of Papua New Guinea is neither advancement nor degradation in the language – it is *adaptation*.

Many English terms that we learn and try to translate into our vernacular languages end up being borrowed most of the time, instead of being translated into the understanding of our own language. A clear example of this is when Public Speaking students did a project on language change, caused by mobile phones, social networking and other media. For me, I found it difficult to translate most of the English computer jargon into my own language – these concepts do not exist in my language. In other words, it would be a description in my language, rather than a definition of the actual English term. I learned from other presentations that students conducted (on the same project) that, when trying to translate the English terms into their languages, they still had to use the same term, but only added suffixes or prefixes to the English base form. The terms did not exist in their languages, but could be adopted into their languages.

When comparing PNG to other countries that still speak their local languages, we see a clear difference. In Japan, majority of the population speak their own language and don't know English as well as the majority of people in PNG. However, the country of Japan is well developed and is advancing, while PNG is still a developing nation. The Japanese not only speak their own language, they have written records of their language for generations. They have their own alphabet, and they can read and write in their own language. Sad to say, this is not the same for PNG, where you have to know how to read and write in English, before you can read and write in your own language.

It is true that PNG may have over 800 languages. But now the figure may not be so. With the change and advancement in technology, the use of social media and exposure to outside influences, only those languages that are used and taught to the young people may be able to survive. Those languages that are able to borrow English terms and incorporate them, may change, but they will still exist.

Engan language may be easily heard, if you travel anywhere in Port Moresby city. Engans are not ashamed to speak in their language, and can even speak their 'tok ples' in public places, since it is the only language spoken by the Engan people. This may seem annoying at times (especially for non-highlanders), but it is good in a way, because the people are able to protect their language and help it go on for generations, the more they speak it and use it. However, for those other ethnic groups that are turning away from their language and speak more English and Tok Pisin, they will soon find out that they have lost their language.

My Father's language, called 'Tungag' of the Lovangai people of New Ireland, has changed dramatically. Just like Tok Pisin, where people tend to shorten words like 'pikinini' to 'pikini', the same is done in Tungag. Tungag words have been shortened and changed, to adapt to the new generation, thus they have lost their essence and roots.

Only those languages that are able to adapt to the changes in society will survive. In PNG these days, most people speak English and Tok Pisin. These English and Tok Pisin words are mixed up in the local tokples languages. Our Tok Ples languages will not advance. Maybe they'll lose some of their essence and roots, or origins, but they will adapt to change and time.

### Mathew J.:

Because of advances in technologies, today's Tok Ples languages of Papua New Guinea are assimilating all kinds of new words – they've become really different from the past. The invention of the Internet has made people come up with all sorts of new words, and influenced people's ways of learning, speaking and living. During our research, we found out that there are hundreds of words that have been created because of Internet. These words are learned by students and people from different language communities. They try to speak these words using their tok ples language – it's like they have many new words formed in their own language. And it became part of the society in which we live.

However, in the Enga language, research has found out, when students or other people, when they want to communicate using mobile phones, they try to shorten these words/ use acronyms, when texting their friends. The words that they learn from the Internet, they use them in their tokples language every day. Even the little village kids know what google or face book is.

In line with this, when you travel around the city, you will notice that kids will sit in pairs and discuss what they see on FB or Google in their vernacular language. FB and Google are really becoming part of every day's life of people. When they go to FB or Google and find anything new or interesting, they will talk about it in their tokples, and will try to use these new words with their fellow students or mates. And also, they will go around, telling everybody that they have discovered something on FB or Google, using the names of these new things, and they become new words to that person. After a time, people start using that word in their tokples, and it goes on and on.

This is not good; we have to stand firm with our own language, for the betterment of this nation.

### Justin N.:

In order to keep the smaller languages of our country alive, we should encourage the teaching and use of them in each family. Families have lots of time together, so during these times, family members can learn their mother tongue. The parents can teach children their first languages after school, and at weekends, during meal times.

In a situation where there is intermarriage, both the language of the father and the mother can be taught. Speaking both languages is good for the children. It will make them feel they belong to a larger group, because they can use the languages to fit themselves into any group, either that of father or mother.

It has never been Papua New Guinea cultures' tradition to express thoughts in writing, so it can still be maintained that way without worrying too much about expressing it in written form. However, for written record purpose, understanding English language better can help them write their vernaculars. This is because the experiences are universal. It is only the symbolic representations that differ, so while learning English, they will understand that they refer to the same thing in their vernacular.

In class, the children can be told to write in their tokples and translate it in English, to make learning fun. In doing this, the children will relate sound representation in both their mother tongue and English, when referring to the same experience, so they will understand things better by means of translation.

In primary schools, there will most likely be more than one person from the same language speaking group, so comparing their translations in vernacular of a story in English can confirm their understanding, or assure the teacher that the translation is not a made-up thing.

I think that in this way, we can keep our PNG languages alive, while accepting English as a means to access most scientific information for development in this modern world.

### Benjamin K.:

The changes that took place in Papua New Guinea in the past few years have caused great changes in the way people think and do things. Also, the tokples languages of the societies have changed. Through the Internet, people have learnt many new things, and the ways in which to put them into words and sentences.

Social media, such as facebook and twitter, have changed the life of the native people in PNG. New words which were never before, have been established, and tokples languages are now used in social media by the people, to communicate with their wantoks and friends. Instead of using Tok Pisin or English, people also use their tokples to pass some secret information between them.

The use of computers, and Internet access made the speakers to name some parts or programs of the computer, using tokples. For example, in my tokples (Boiken), 'hard drive' is *khenjing*, and the word 'two' is spoken by some of the native speakers of my language as *frik*, which can either mean 'two things' or the figure 2 itself. They use social media to send messages or SMS, in short, using some abbreviated tokples, as well as other languages, like Tok Pisin and English.

Since 2007, the Internet has had a great impact on our native vernaculars – it changed the way of saying or referring to things, which means that the past ways of saying, pronouncing and speaking have changed with the technology that was invented.

Therefore, in the future, our native vernaculars that we speak today will change with the technologies that will be invented later. This happens because the minds of people change and evolve in time.

### Veronica E.:

In the past, everyone spoke their own Tok Ples – there was no lingua franca/ common language of communication in PNG. Thus, there was a great division among people from different parts of the country. However, as the country moved into the more advanced technological era, with mobile phones Province and the Internet, the Tok Ples languages have been greatly impacted – lots of Tok Pisin/ English words have blended into the tok ples languages, to create new words, while others have been shortened.

I researched into the changes that have taken place in the Kuman language of the Simbu Province since the introduction of mobile phones in 2007. I discovered the Kuman language has no words for computer jargon terms, simply because my ancestors did not know what computers were – they were non-existent back then. Also, mobile phone and Internet- associated terms are non-existent in Kuman, because those concepts also did not exist back then. Therefore, so many words have been borrowed and adapted from English and Tok Pisin. For example:

- Coined words: 'chill' + 'relax' = 'chillax'
- Substitute words: there is no 'Internet' in Kuman, so 'kompiuta' is used as a substitute for the 'Internet' and also for 'computer' (the machine itself), as well as related concepts, such as FB, etc.
- Borrowed words: Since there is no Kuman or Tok Pisin word for 'web', it has been adopted into the Kuman vocabulary.

These are just a few of so many other words that have changed in the Kuman Language, since the introduction of Internet, as according to my research.