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A Plea for Language Planning in Papua New Guinea

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A Plea for Language

Planning in Papua New Guinea

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Papua New Guinea, linguistically the most complex country in the world, paradoxically has no clearly formulated and implemented language policy. In this it stands alone among the nations of the third world all of them with far less linguistic complexity. A good deal of this negligence can be traced to the historical circumstances under which Papua New Guinea emerged as a nation. What language policy there was and the reasons for or against it have been documented by Johnson (1974 and forthcoming). Although there is as yet no comparative study of legislation and regulation of language teaching and language use in multilingual societies, there are numerous studies of language policies in other third world countries which might be of benefit to the language planner in Papua New Guinea. I do not wish to discuss these in detail but instead attempt to document the need for a language policy for Papua New Guinea from within. Some of what I have to say I have incorporated from a review of Savard and Vigneault (1975), Lang (forthcoming) and Lang (1976), a short paper submitted to the Central Planning Office.

While the Papua New Guinea government at present pays lip service to the importance of the national cultural heritage in the development of a modern nation, its practice leaves much to be desired, whether by design or from ignorance. This is especially true in the field of language about which the government utters pious sentiments, but takes little concrete action to make positive use of the nation's linguistic heritage. By doing so it commits the basic fallacy of considering a sentimental attachment to language sufficient to satisfy people in matters linguistic. While people undoubtedly have a sentimental attachment to language, this is not so unconditionally and there has to be something else to make the attachment worthwhile. Language has to have a very practical use for people and language policies ought to be based on functional considerations as well. This is brought out most strongly in the literature by Kelman (1971:40) who points out that

in selecting languages for various purposes, in influencing the population's language behavior, and in planning the educational system, central authorities

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1 For the Trust Territory of Micronesia see Umneck (1973), for Uganda Ladefoed et al. (1972), for East Africa in general Whiteley (1971), for the Asian multicultural federations (India, Pakistan and Malaysia) Watts (1972).
ought to be concerned primarily with two
issues: (1) how to establish and facilitate
patterns of communication (both internally
and internationally) that would enable its
socioeconomic institutions to function more
effectively and equitably in meeting the
needs and interests of the population; and
(2) how to assure that different groups within
the society, varying in their linguistic repertoires
(for either ethnic or social class reasons),
have equal access to the system and opportunities
to participate in it.

Kelman argues that once instrumental attachments have been created for
a national language (or several, as the case may be), sentimental
attachments will gradually emerge.

Alternatives to English

The Central Planning Office's strategies for Nationhood: Policies and
Issues (1974:6ff.) comments on how further expansion of both the
primary and secondary school system is clearly based on the aspirations
of the mass of Papua New Guineans. The volume points out that this can
be extremely costly and warns that these aspirations are "for well-paid
monetary sector employment" and that such aspirations are becoming
increasingly difficult to realize. To avoid the socially undesirable
consequences of expansion, the 1974 Report of [the] Five Year Education
Plan Committee proposed a number of changes in the education system,
such as emphasis on preparation for self-employment and community-based
education, the latter to orient the students towards the community and
reverse the trend to the cities. To this purpose it was proposed that
"junior primary education [be undertaken] in a functional language of
the community (vernacular, Pidgin, Motu)" (Central Planning Office 1974:
63). English was to be the language of secondary and higher education,
introduced in the third year of community school as a subject and in
the fifth year as the language of instruction. The volume also points
out, however, that curriculum reform and structural re-organization of
the system cannot alter certain realities, these being

(a) access to higher-paid occupations depends largely on
educational achievement;

(b) consequently, earnings differentials within the
workforce tend to be closely and positively related
to educational differentials:
(c) with a policy of mass entry to primary schools, selection of students proceeding to higher levels must occur at some point in the system. (Central Planning Office 1974:63).

Due to the problem of selection, English, the language of secondary education, tends to overshadow the vernaculars. The final Five Year Education Plan as approved by the National Executive Council has as its second feature English to be the language of instruction in all schools (PMG Government News Release F/241 ED/HED/RG, Feb. 6, 1976), that is, the plans for vernaculars or langue franche as media of instruction were not even attempted. The realities of the selection system undoubtedly contributed to this, but it appears that the possible costs of adaptation to vernaculars as the media of instruction and fears that if English was not introduced as early as possible it would be correspondingly harder for the child to acquire a sound knowledge of it, contributed to the decision as well. There is very little likelihood that the factors that contribute towards the selection pressure will change, unless the government decides at some time to change the educational system sufficiently so as to make it more attractive for people to aspire to things other than an education in English.

Basic to Papua New Guinea's policy seems to be assumption that the most economical way of catching up with modern technological life is to do it in English. The materials are already available and all that is needed is a crop of Papua New Guineans with a knowledge of English good enough to tap this vast pool of modern technology. But this desire to catch up with modern technology tends to be in conflict (although it need not be so a priori) with a wish to remain authentic, to do things the Melanesian way. Where to modernize, where to remain authentic, how much of each and under what circumstances are problems faced by all third world countries. The question, for Papua New Guinea, is whether it is possible to modernize in a mode other than English. Assuming the attempt is made: what exactly will be involved, what will the costs be absolutely and in comparison to the present set up? Lest government officials reject a non English modernization alternative out of hand, there are enough voices and examples to indicate that the alternative is at least worth considering, if only to bring into better focus the very real problems posed by the English alternative. There is firstly the evidence from other former colonies of English speaking nations -
India, the East African countries, American Micronesia and others—which faced language problems similar to those of Papua New Guinea, i.e., a multitude of local languages more or less neglected, English as the official administrative language and various lingue francce, such as Swahili in East Africa. Some of these countries have come full circle, from initially the vernacular as the language of instruction replaced by a policy of an all-out effort to have English as the medium of instruction which in turn was replaced more and more by a policy of the vernacular and/or the lingue francce as the media of instruction. The reasons for the switch back to the vernaculars are manifold but on the whole it has been found that the social costs of modernization in terms of urban migration which raised but unfulfilled and unfulfillable aspirations, and alienation from traditional society have proved too high. The lesson generally has been: in order to modernize rapidly you have to do it well, extremely well, and in order to do this you need the kind of money that probably not even the rich nations could find for their own educational systems.

Deutsch (1975:12) has drawn attention to the fact that the theory that modern technology cannot be easily expressed in non-western languages is found almost exclusively in former Britain [sic] and French colonial possessions. By an odd coincidence it is not believed by Turks, Japanese, Thais, Iranians and for that matter in Europe by Hungarians, Finns, Danes or Norwegians ......(11). The notion is that the visible cost of translation would be much higher than the vast invisible cost of popular education for industrial backwardness.

It should be noted in this context that India is attempting to give all college-level instruction in one of the fourteen regional languages and that Tanzania is attempting the same in Swahili. In the German educational system, where I grew up, no foreign languages were taught during eight years of primary school. Those wishing to go on to high school had to pass an entrance examination after four years of primary school and they were then taught one foreign language as a subject for a further nine years. Even though I had access to native speakers of English and broadcasts in English were readily available to me, I did not acquire an acceptable active command of English until I had spent a year in an English speaking country; by that time I was 22 years of age. Whatever I learnt until then I learnt through my native tongue, including a reasonably good background in English literature which was readily available to me in translation.
Modernization need not necessarily proceed through English, but this is precisely the assumption upon which the decision to undertake all teaching in English as the medium of instruction is based. Thus it becomes imperative for the planners to investigate possible alternatives to education in English and once this has been done, to look at the costs this would entail both in instituting a non-English system and continuing it as well as what the savings would be in comparison to maintaining the present system. There is no doubt that access to higher-paid occupations depends largely on educational achievement, but this need not be achieved, as it is at the moment, at the cost of alienating the vast majority of youngsters attending school from their traditional background. To recount again from my own experience, I entered primary school together with 800 other children in a town of approximately 20,000 inhabitants. Four years later 180 of us entered high school, i.e., of those who took the high school entrance examination, 180 passed. After a further six years, 31 of those 180 decided to go beyond the intermediate leaving certificate (the equivalent of a form 4 education here) and attend high school for another three years to take their leaving certificate examinations. Of these 31, 27 passed the examination to qualify for entry into a university. In percentages this means that to 77.5 percent of the youngsters secondary education was closed for all practical purposes; to a further 18.6 percent tertiary education was closed, so that only 3.9 percent of the original 800 school entrants were able to have what amounts to unrestricted access to the higher-paid occupations. The question is, what happened to the 77.5 percent who did not proceed to a secondary education? They became, by and large, useful citizens of their home community to carry on where the generation before them had left off. Their education during their first four years, along with the education of all others, was oriented in the direction of preparing them for a meaningful life at home. There is no doubt that had the powers that be decided on English as the medium of instruction the experiment would have resulted in disaster. The earning differentials within the workforce of the society where I come from are closely and positively related to educational differentials, but the social discontent that could possibly arise from this is kept within bounds by relating the education of the children to the kinds of roles they meaningfully be expected to assume
in adult life.  

By deciding on English as the medium of instruction the Papua New Guinea government is foreclosing a priori the possibility of a meaningful education for most of her schoolchildren. Not much can be learnt in six years of primary education. With English as the medium of instruction at least half of this time will be lost through the child's struggle of having to learn and communicate in a foreign language. It is a contradiction in terms to demand, on the one hand, English as the language of instruction in all schools and, on the other, to attempt to shift one's emphasis towards community based courses at the primary level. How can the community communicate with the children if education is to be in English?

The gain in terms of a better command of English for those who proceed to secondary school and finally to a tertiary education is minimal at best and non-existent at worst. The Ugandan experience should give Papua New Guinea's language and educational planners food for thought. The main finding of the Ugandan Language Survey (Laderoged et al., 1972: 140) was that

the effectiveness of the instructional programme in English is determined in large measure by the teachers - their training and experience ....

None of the factors relating to the individual was seen to be of great importance in predicting success in learning to read English (emphasis mine).

By analyzing the high and low scores of an English teaching test they had administered and the results of the English paper of the Primary

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2 There are obvious differences between the German and Papua New Guinea situation but I do not think that they detract from the basic validity of the fact that education in a language which is more immediately accessible to the child than English is of greater benefit and less socially disruptive. While there are not yet truly comparable data to the German situation from other third world countries, Papua New Guinea would do well to closely monitor such countries which have attempted to switch from English to local languages - the data will emerge in due time. Two centers which concern themselves with such problems and try to keep up with developments around the world are the Language Planning Center of the East-West Center, which publishes a Newsletter distributed free to interested individuals and institutions and Unesco which publishes the Alsed (Anthropology and Language Science in Educational Development) Newsletter, also distributed free to interested individuals and institutions.
Leaving Examination the researchers found that there was no difference between the two groups of pupils in terms of whether they learned in English from the beginning or whether they began with their vernacular language (Ladefoged et al 1972:131). Other factors relating to the individual aside from the one just cited which they thought might influence the student’s performance in acquiring a sound knowledge of English were sex, home background, aspirations, mobility, and age. None proved statistically significant either individually or in terms of a multiple and partial regression analysis of the data. The overriding variable were the teachers, their training and their experience.

One of the African researchers in the Ugandan Language Survey (Walusimbi 1972:145ff.) noted that the teaching of vernaculars in Uganda was affected by a number of factors, the main ones being:

(i) lack of language teachers adequately trained to carry out their responsibilities;
(ii) lack of suitable and sufficient number of books for teachers and pupils;
(iii) uncertainty of the future of the vernacular languages;
(iv) the over-stress of the importance of the English language;
(v) lack of recognition of the vernaculars as examination subjects;
(vi) vernacular teaching in the teacher training colleges being worse than in primary schools;
(vii) lack of adequate and suitable reading materials which made vernacular teaching in colleges very difficult.

The need for a language planning policy

Walusimbi (1972:150) listed as the first priority in an attempt to alleviate some of the problems noted above that “the language policy requires full implementation”. In regard to Papua New Guinea this is a serious problem, partly because of the question of implementation but more so for a lack of language policy. This is one area where the planners have to get together with the politicians in order to ascertain their opinions and their reasons for these opinions. The planners should be able to supply the politicians with answers to questions that might be raised and the information might have to come from research findings from outside Papua New Guinea; or the planners may have to
carry out the research themselves in order to satisfy their politician customers. But the main thing they have to do is to convince the powers that be that a language policy is absolutely essential if Papua New Guinea does not want to squander her limited financial resources. The language policy so formulated should correspond not only to the political realities but also to linguistic and social facts and therefore, cannot be formulated in isolation from other development policies.

Deutsch (1975:14, 15) makes this point when he remarks that the correlation between the jobs and between the trainees: the candidates for the jobs who emerge from this school—appears to be at the very heart of the problem of language policy. He emphasizes that language planning and development is likely to be ineffective, or even counter-productive, unless it is articulated and synchronized with a development of the job structure.

Sankoff (forthcoming) has pointed out that in traditional society in Papua New Guinea there existed a kind of linguistic egalitarianism. People in linguistic border areas generally learnt each other’s languages, or at least had a passive knowledge of the other language (see, e.g. Deibler and Trefry 1963:6), and one or the other language did not automatically confer upon its members a superior social and economic status. Although this was somewhat interrupted by the arrival of Tok Pisin (and other linge francs) it was not markedly so due to the relative accessibility of Tok Pisin. With the evolution of an urban elite, this parity between various languages has been overshadowed by the introduction of English into the equation. In the urban context (as well as elsewhere) knowledge of English has become a symbolic matter of power and status. This was brought about by the policy of the Australian colonial government to produce an elite that could take over the government when the Australians handed over responsibility to the Papua New Guineans. With it they have introduced the problem of linguistic inequality and thus a potential for language conflict. However, this is not the only area of potential linguistic conflict. Any secession movement worth its salt will attempt to utilize linguistic
loyalties and the government ought to be well aware of this. Deutsch (1975:7) makes the same point when he warns that often "the most expensive thing that can be done about linguistic conflicts is to try to ignore them. Language is an automatic signaling system, second only to race, in identifying targets for possible privilege or discrimination". He is supported in this by Simon (1975:89) who asserts that language "differences become a source of conflict only when literacy ... affects the access of large numbers of people to careers that provide them with a livelihood, positions of authority, and status". Further, he warns that those "affected by language policies ... are apt to be politically effective out of proportion to their numbers because they are articulate and aware of their interests". This warning should be read in conjunction with the exchange of letters to the Editor in the Post Courier (February - April 1975) in connection with the Minister of Education's enrolling the children of prominent citizens in so-called "A" schools even though such children were supposed to be attending "T" schools. Like Deutsch, Simon (1975:9ff) warns of the extreme latency of language conflicts. He points out that this is due to the far-reaching social changes that precede them. These necessitate the allocation of scarce material and human resources, the coordination of diverse activities, the planning for the future, and efforts to anticipate consequences of decisions and their frequently inchoate implications. As a consequence all energies are focused upon improvising, solidifying and expanding the needed educational, managerial, judiciary, and governmental institutions while no attention is paid to language problems that evolve unobserved in the shadows of these institutions.

3 Bougainville is a possible exception to this, there being other and stronger reasons for the secessionist movement. It should be noted, however, that demands for regional secession in Papua New Guinea often are based on ethnic/linguistic considerations, vide the calls for a separate province for the Tari people who constitute a significant linguistically homogenous minority in the Southern Highlands Province, and demands for the creation of a separate Mid-Wahgi Province, this being due to the overpowering majority of the Hela-speaking majority in the Western Highlands Province.

In general, in Papua New Guinea linguistic considerations have always played a role at a regional level, firstly in the design of census divisions and later in the area of political-administrative and economic development. The Central Highlands District, as originally constituted, was defined by its physical boundaries, but when it was broken up in 1951 the boundaries of the newly created districts coincided with linguistic boundaries, and every further division or alignment of boundaries since then (such as the creation of the Chimbu and Benga Provinces) has been along linguistic lines.

While the Tok Pisin speaking population does not exhibit the kind of linguistic chauvinism Hiri Motu speakers display against Tok Pisin, there are indications that such a chauvinism is developing in regard to English which is felt in some circles to be the language of the colon oppressors and that of an aspiring educated elite. The seeds for class conflict certainly lie in this.
Simon is not writing about Papua New Guinea but his description has an uncanny application to Papua New Guinea. He also points to the phenomenon in a situation of social and geographic mobility of ambitious parents no longer teaching their children the parental language so as to make social and economic advancement easier for the children and how this, on the one hand, results in "the opening up of opportunities to advance from menial and manual labor to clerical, professional and managerial occupations" and on the other "may actually create and exacerbate conflicts over language policies in the contest for access to economic values, political authority and prestige" (1975:99).

In view of the growing linguistic inequality the Papua New Guinea government must take steps to counter the destructive consequences this will have. To this end the government must look objectively at the present language situation, evaluate honestly the factors that contribute to the linguistic inequality and if possible take measures to counter the inequality. If it does not do that then other elements of social discontent will have a ready rallying point from which it will be very difficult to retreat. This possibility is given voice to by Simon (1975:91) also when he remarks "that language conflicts are extremely difficult to accommodate [sic] peacefully once they have been articulated effectively by the spokesmen of polarized political camps".

This should be read together with Deutsch's finding (1975:16) that social mobilization -- which puts people in the position where language becomes important for them and where they become, so to speak, potential customers or a potential market, for language development -- moves so much faster than assimilation.

If, therefore, the Papua New Guinea government hopes that the language problem would go away quietly, they should seriously reconsider their position. In sum, language problems tend to go unnoticed, and when they are noticed they have assumed such proportions that they either prove unmanageable or disproportionately difficult to manage -- the disproportion refers to the amount of money that needs to be spent on their management. This is so because language problems become ready rallying points for the expression of social discontent. Papua New Guinea has neglected her language problems. The Central Planning Office has not concerned itself officially with the language question and instead left the field to the Education Department, thus leaving the vast majority of the people who have not had or do not have access to formal education out in the cold. This applies especially to the field of adult education. This has also been remarked upon by Conroy (1974:269ff) when he challenges the assumption "that practically all the resources of the education system should be
devoted to children". He argues that examination
is likely to show that it is neither efficient and
inequitable to favour one section of society in a
situation of general under-development of human re-
sources. The nature of the inequity involved is
obvious enough, though the inefficiencies may be
less clear. They take the form of virtually writing
off and abandoning the adult population, although
it is probable that many skills are acquired more
quickly and easily by adults than children.

English, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu, and the vernaculars

What little language planning there has been done by the Education
Department and this shows up clearly everywhere in Papua New Guinea.
But a comprehensive national language policy and its implementation
involves more than worrying about the language of instruction in primary
school. There are a number of issues that confront Papua New Guinea
and they cannot be ignored. These are the competing claims of English,
Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu and the vernaculars. Expatriate advisors on the
whole have been predicting the ready demise of Hiri Motu due to the
inroads Tok Pisin is making in the former Papuan districts.

The scenario predicts that English will continue to be the language of
education, administration and business, while Papua New Guineans carry
on their daily affairs in Tok Pisin. It is hard to say what role is
intended for the vernaculars, but partly they are expected to disappear,
partly they are expected to be spoken in restricted circumstances, such
as the home, and possibly during ceremonial occasions. This is notwith-
standing the Papua New Guinea Constitution's call for "all persons and
governmental bodies to achieve universal literacy in Pisin, Hiri Motu
or English and in "tokules" or "ita eda tano gado" (Papua New Guinea
1975a; 3) and "for the fostering of a respect for, and appreciation of:
traditional ways of life and culture, including language, in all their
richness and variety, as well as for a willingness to apply these ways
dynamically and creatively for the tasks of development (Papua New Guinea
1975a; 5).

At the risk of having set up a straw man, let me examine this scenario
in more detail. There is no doubt that Tok Pisin is making inroads
everywhere. But Hiri Motu is also increasing its share of the market.
if one can trust the 1966 and 1971 census figures. Thus in 1966, 8.14
percent of the population of ten years and over claimed to have a
speaking knowledge of Hiri Motu (Bureau of Statistics 1960:31); while in 1971 9.24 percent made that claim, an increase of nearly 14 percent (Bureau of Statistics 1974:9) over the 1966 figure. What is more significant, however, is the attitude of Papuan leaders towards the language. The Governor-General being one of its foremost defenders as witness his remarks in 1971 at a conference on the future of Hiri Motu organized by the Department of Information and Extension Services⁴ and his criticism of Radio Australia (Post Courier, 2 July 1974) for not broadcasting in Hiri Motu as well as Tok Pisin. Paua Besena stresses the importance of (Hiri?) Motu to the movement and to the population of the former Faswan districts and the people in Port Moresby respond positively to attempts by foreigners to communicate in Hiri Motu. There is a strong sentiment that Hiri Motu expresses something of and for the people which is essential to their spiritual well-being. It is unlikely, therefore, that the people will give up Hiri Motu in favor of either English and/or Tok Pisin and the government is recognizing this to some extent by having national broadcasts such as the news and certain other programs in both Hiri Motu and Tok Pisin. The Governor-General has long pledged that as long as he is on the political scene Hiri Motu will continue to be a living and national language and his influence has made itself most clearly shown in the National Parliament where the three languages English, Hiri Motu and Tok Pisin enjoy a truly equal standing in the sense that what is communicated in one language is interpreted simultaneously and translated afterwards into the other two languages. The Governor-General's warning that if the neglect of Hiri Motu continues it could become a serious political issue should be taken seriously.

Let us look at the second point of the scenario, namely that English will continue to be the language of education, administration and business. There is some doubt that English was ever entirely the language of any of these fields. During the practical day-to-day affairs of the government, the times when the government interacted with the people, English was definitely not the language used and it still is not. English was the language used interdepartmentally and it still is, but the kind of English one encounters nowadays leaves a lot to be desired. What, for example, is a magistrate to make of a summons that reads:

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⁴ See Department of Information and Extension Services (1971:3-4).
"Failed to make a garden in a forbidden area..."? The kind of officialese one encounters is one of the most unintelligible sort, at least at the lower levels of the administrative hierarchy and the chances of there being an improvement are remote. This must have effects on the general ability of public servants to communicate with one another and with the people. As regards the use of English in education, there is a long and venerable tradition in vernacular education in many mission areas and education in the langue Francaise has long been carried on in both government and mission schools. With the departure of teachers who are native speakers of English and their replacement by Papua New Guinean teachers whose command of English is often tenuous at best, the kind of English being taught and spoken will be undergoing some drastic changes. It is unrealistic of the government to close its eyes to this. It will retard the progress of pupils in secondary schools and it will retard their progress in the universities. There is widespread feeling within the universities that standards are not what they ought to be and that a good portion of this state of affairs is due mainly to the students' lack of a satisfactory command of English. The evidence from Uganda and elsewhere indicates that starting primary school in English is not going to improve this state of affairs.

The official day-to-day business transactions likewise take place in English only, because business is still dominate by native speakers of English, but practical affairs of business with their employees are more likely to be carried out in one of the langues francaises.

As far as the role of vernaculars, as concerned, there is some evidence that what is regarded as official business will be carried out in one of the langues francaises, with the Enga Area Authority's decision to make Tok Pisin its official language, the Enga Province being probably linguistically the most homogeneous province in the entire country, with the linguistic minorities in the province being to a large extent bilingual and often trilingual in Enga, their own vernacular, and Tok Pisin. In most of daily life, however, the vernaculars will continue to be spoken, mainly because none of the Papua New Guinea cultures have experienced the massive depopulation and cultural disorientation which have resulted elsewhere in entire populations giving up their culture and mother tongue. Given the present government's emphasis on the Melanesian way, such a state of affairs should theoretically never come into existence in Papua New Guinea. However, there is a difference between ideology and practice and the present government's practice is decidedly in favor of English, rather than the vernaculars or the langue francaise. Virtually all government publications are in English; the Constitution, the nation's foremost
document is available only in English: all official communications in
the Public Service are in English (there having been talk for a number
of years to offer incentives of one sort or another for public servants
to learn Hiri Motu and/or Tok Pisin, but to this day no action has been
taken); most airport announcements are in English; most road signs are
in English; both the Prime Minister's and Governor-General's addresses
to the nation on the eve of independence were delivered in English
(although the Governor-General added a few words in Hiri Motu after his
English speech); the list is a never-ending one. The message this
practice carries to the population-at-large is a very clear one: to
share in the power and enjoy it, a knowledge of English is essential.
This in turn entails a popular demand for children to be taught in
English because without it the door to social and economic advancement
will be closed to them. And closed indeed it is; including to those
who have only a rudimentary knowledge of the language. If the govern-
ment continues with this practice of active discrimination against
people with little or no knowledge of English by denying them access to
areas of life which matter to them, then this will create real tension
and the kind of linguistic and other inequalities mentioned above. In
such a situation the potential for the large-scale destruction or a
abandonment mentioned above exists and the resultant cultural disorienta-
tion would cast doubt on the future of the vernaculars.

But while there are strong pressures at the moment for English as the
language of education, there are nearly equally strong counter pressures
for more utilization of the vernaculars. This is evidenced quite clearly
in the solution proposed to problems identified by the recent Planning
Workshop, Central Province. Of the eight discussion groups every one
listed as one of the main problems that of communication. The main
culprits were thought to be officials using English rather than the
linguistic varieties or the relevant vernacular. One group made the very
relevant point that to "avoid bad communication is better than undoing
the wrong information passed on". Another thought a simplification of
the official language would help along with an effort "that all Central
Province staff (be) conversant with Hiri Motu".

Communication problems

There are serious communication difficulties between the government and
the people. Not only is good communication essential, for a number of
departments communication is of crucial significance: in the case of
law the question being one of justice or injustice; in the case of health
between life and death; in the case of agriculture between economic
prosperity and poverty. The Department of Education's Education Plan
(1975: 95-97) points to the fact that all "government departments have
extension branches which have become increasingly active in the field".
The plan notes, however, "that there is some degree of wasteful duplication
of effort and under-utilization of resources and facilities". The plan,
therefore, calls in the first instance not for an increased expenditure
on adult education, but for an attempt "to rationalize what is already
available". The plan proposes "to establish training courses, preferably
in common, for all kinds of field officers, government and other, which
will add useful adult education techniques to the professional and technical
skills they already possess". There is a similar need, and not an
unrelated one, to find out how each department has handled the problem
of language (there are likely to be differences within the departments
depending on what level of the administrative hierarchy one looks at).

The Chief Minister's Department has traditionally communicated with the
majority of the people via one of the two major lingue franche and an
interpreter (who received little, if any, training for his job). Nowadays
much of the communication between government field officer and villager
takes place directly in a lingua franca and some of it in English, but
the records are kept in English. For example, the official language of
the courts is English and records are kept in that language. However, in
practice one of the lingue franca is the language of the court or a
combination of the lingue franca and vernacular (again with the aid of
an interpreter). None of the people involved have any training in how
to transcribe and interpret, although there is often an extensive chain,
such as the defendant talking in his local language, this being interpreted
by the interpreter into one of the lingue franca, this being written down
by the magistrate in English, this, if the case is appealed, being then
read by some other magistrate and communicated to an interpreter in the
lingue franca, with the interpreter interpreting it into the vernacular,
with the expectation (or more often, hope) that the original statement
in the vernacular and the latter would match.

The Departments of Health and Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries have both
engaged in extension services and they have both trained people in the
vernacular and produced materials in the vernacular. The Office of
Information and the National Broadcasting Commission are constantly
faced with the problem of adapting materials in English and translating
them into a lingua franca or vernacular. What have their experiences been, how have they trained their people, how would they like to have them trained? The National Parliament engages in a significant amount of translation and interpretation. The Administrative College, and the teachers' colleges, all have experience (and problems) in the field of communication in languages other than English. To what extent have the experiences, problems encountered and solutions adopted a common base; to what extent can their endeavours be co-ordinated, rationalized, duplication avoided and precious funds saved?

Part of the current confusion and uncertainty in Papua New Guinea lies in the lack of a comprehensive language policy. Such a plan must go beyond the narrow confines of formal education; it must encompass as many areas of modern Papua New Guinea life and it must ensure that these areas are linguistically accessible to the large majority of Papua New Guineans. The government will have to decide what exactly it means to have two national languages, i.e., Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu, and one official language English. In what way are these languages intended to be equal? What is needed to make them equal? Would one want them to be equal? In what areas of life should information be available in all three languages? How can the government encourage more people to learn Hiri Motu?

If the government decides to treat these three languages equally, then it will have to act in ways that will show the equality or that will bring about the equality. Johnson (1975:266) has argued that much "post-primary trade training could and should be conducted through the lingua franca and the major vernacular languages". He has also advanced a number of concrete proposals for the de-anglicization of the curriculum. The majority of people do not aspire to become diplomats, e.g., where a knowledge of English is absolutely essential. But they do aspire to a range of middle-level jobs for which a knowledge of English is not essential. The government, therefore, must make these middle-level jobs linguistically accessible to the people. In other matters of daily life the government could insist, e.g., that car importers provide service and maintenance booklets not only in English, but also in Hiri Motu and Tok Pisin. This would not cost the government anything and it would provide some additional employment for Papua New Guineans who could to the
translating (the booklets might even be printed in Papua New Guinea). There is ample precedent for this outside Papua New Guinea and there is no reason why it could not be done here. The government would have to make road signs trilingual throughout the country rather than making them, say, bilingual in Hiri Motu and English in the Hiri Motu speaking areas and English and Tok Pisin in the Tok Pisin speaking areas, or English only as at present. If the government does not practice trilinguality throughout the country then it runs the risk of creating a dual structure, one where people can say Hiri Motu and English for us, Tok Pisin and English for them. The National Broadcasting Commission, for example, has been doing certain news broadcasts in English only, others in Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu, and some in all three languages. On the national program, however, English enjoys a definite advantage, even though it is received more clearly than local stations in some parts of the country where there is little or no knowledge of English. The practice of having the Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu news broadcasts juxtaposed is to be applauded as it does communicate to people that the two languages are on an even footing. The NBC’s program Songs of the Islands when it was still a full one hour program used to be an example of true equality between the two lingue franca: the songs were introduced alternately in Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu, i.e., the listener was constantly exposed to both languages. It was an unfortunate move, in my opinion, when

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5 Even though it might be argued that eventually the car buyer foots the bill it might well be worth the additional expense to him when we consider that the information in the maintenance and service booklets will suddenly become intelligible to him. It could well result in improved maintenance and therefore longer life expectancy for the vehicle (the average life expectancy for a new vehicle at present in Papua New Guinea is about five years, less than half the average life expectancy of a comparable vehicle in Australia (Maine et al. 175:23).
the BBC decided to broadcast the program in two one-half hour segments, one entirely conducted in Firi Motu, the other in Tok Pisin, precisely the division into us and them to be avoided. I am sure the significance of the Prime Minister’s address to the nation on the eve of independence in English only did not escape the notice of his fellow-citizens. To avoid this sort of thing in the future the leaders of the country when addressing the nation will have to do so trilingually in order to make the message intelligible and acceptable to the large majority of people. There is a large reservoir of tolerance in matters linguistic among the people of Papua New Guinea and a ready recognition that the national leaders cannot possibly be expected to learn the local languages. But there is also a feeling that English will not do for the Melanesian way of life.

I have not entered into a discussion of the costs a non-English alternative might entail, although I have pointed out repeatedly in the paper that the question of costs is a crucial one and one that needs to be tackled. The argument of costs in the implementation of alternative language policies is a recurring one, but there is as yet no detailed analysis of the costs and benefits of alternative policies. Such an analysis is a priority of the highest order and the research for it ought to be carried out as soon as possible. In Lang (1976) I considered a few of the parameters involved in the consideration of two alternatives: initial literacy in the vernacular versus initial literacy in English. Much further detailed work is needed to arrive at a comparatively complete listing of the parameters involved and how they are to be weighted.
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