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Series A: General & Theoretical Papers

ISSN 1435-6473

Essen: LAUD 2004

Paper No. **614**

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2004

Series A

General and Theoretical

Paper No. 614

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University of Duisburg-Essen

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Abstract

While the previous neglect of Pidgin and Creole languages has been more than redressed in the past three decades in theoretically driven linguistic research, English-lexifier Pidgins and Creoles still tend to be overlooked as worthy objects in work aimed to promote the documentation and preservation of endangered languages. If anything, European-lexifier Pidgins and Creoles are sometimes even seen as aggressors in precarious linguistic ecologies, as they are considered as spearheads in the spread of European languages. In the postcolonial world European standard languages tend to be associated with the open prestige carried by technological modernization, and the „pure“ indigenous languages (i.e. those less obviously affected by language contact with European languages) have often come to signify an „authentic“ cultural tradition and local identity. Pidgins and Creoles, however, are caught „in between“, in a way symbolizing the worst of both worlds: the erosion of indigenous traditions through contact and modernization, on the one hand, and the downsides of Western-type modernization on the other.

Thus, in an age in which the status of Creoles as viable natural languages is not in doubt on the theoretical-linguistic plane, considerable stigma may still attach to them in the minds of their own speakers. This stigma often affects decisions made by language planners and – to some extent – may even influence the thinking of their expert linguistic advisers.

We will present data from two endangered English-related Creoloids from the South Pacific: Norfolk (NF) and Palmerston (PE). It will be shown that in addition to the risks threatening all languages with small communities of speakers it is, paradoxically, their relation to English which poses an additional threat to their survival. Owing to their many superficial resemblances to their socially privileged lexifiers, such languages must not only be described as abstract, decontextualised structural systems but also on the discourse level – as typical strategies of using the community's linguistic resources for specific aims in specific contexts. Such a process-based view of what constitutes a language is obviously transferable to the study of many other endangered languages in similar situations.

Our paper will discuss theoretical concerns on the ground of freshly collected data in the field (field trips to Rarotonga in August and to Norfolk Island in December 2003).

1. Background

From the earliest days of contact between Europeans and Pacific islanders, small mixed ‘beach communities’ were set up, often Utopian and often of very limited duration. The best-known of these communities is the community of British sailors and their Tahitian consorts who, subsequent to the mutiny on the *Bounty*, settled on unoccupied Pitcairn Island, where a new contact language (called Pitcairnese, Pitcairn English or Pitkern) developed. This community and their language were subsequently relocated to Norfolk Island, where the language is referred to as Norfolkese, Norfolk English, Norfolk or Norfuk. During work for the *Atlas of Languages of Intercultural Communication in the Pacific, Asia and the Americas* (Wurm, Mühlhäusler & Tryon, eds. 1996) Mühlhäusler compiled existing information on English-Oceanic contact languages (including Pitcairn/ Norfolk), and identified a number of additional cases (Bonin, Palmerston, Ngatik). There were probably a number of other beach community contact languages that have since disappeared and remain undocumented.

The linguistic nature of the various English-related Pacific contact vernaculars, like their Atlantic counterparts spoken on Tristan da Cunha and St. Helena, remains an issue and labels such as ‘Pidgin’, ‘Creole’, ‘Creoloid’ that have been applied to them, remain problematic (see Mühlhäusler 1998b). Our choice of the labels Palmerston English and Norfolk is not meant to prejudge the issue of typology of contact languages.

2. The Norfolk Language

2.1 General Description of Norfolk Island

Norfolk Island is located 1,575 kilometres east of Australia in the South Pacific Ocean (24° 05’S x 167° .59E). It occupies an area of about 40 square kilometres and has a permanent population of about 2,600. It is visited by about 35,000 tourists per annum, with projected numbers reaching 50,000 in the near future. The political status of the island has been a matter of dispute between the Federal Government of Australia, the State of New South Wales and the descendants of the Pitcairn Islanders and there are ongoing constitutional talks designed to clarify the status of the island. There are also moves by some islanders to take Australia to the International Court of Justice for committing ‘cultural genocide’.

Norfolk Island was discovered by Captain Cook in 1779, and because of its ample natural resources and isolated position, was made a British Penal Colony in 1788. The first penal settlement was abandoned in 1814, but a second penal settlement was built in 1825 at a location for the ‘extremist punishment short of death’ (Hoare 1982:35) and ‘a cesspool of sodomy, massacre and exploitation’ (Christian 1982:12). Following much criticism, the settlement was closed down in 1854. This is where the story of the Norfolk language begins. Rather than abandon the island the British government decided on what was referred to as

‘the experiment’ - to settle a small community of simple god-fearing people on an isolated island and watch their moral progress. To this purpose, in 1856 the entire population of Pitcairn Island were relocated to Norfolk Island.

The story of the mutiny on the *Bounty* has been popularised by numerous novels, plays and films, and Pitcairn Island, where the *Bounty* mutineers settled in 1790, has come to stand as a metaphor for a South Sea Utopia. When nine British sailors, twelve Tahitian and Tubuaian women and six Tahitian men arrived on Pitcairn, the island was uninhabited.

By 1800, following a period of violence, John Adams was the sole survivor with 10 women and 23 children. When he died in 1829 the island had become a model Christian community of about 80. Because of food and water shortages, Pitcairn Islanders were removed to Tahiti in 1831, but returned to the island in the same year. In 1839 the population had grown to 100, and by 1850 it had reached 156. In 1853, as fish stocks became scarce and the island degraded, the inhabitants solicited the aid of the British Government to transfer them to another island. In 1856 all 194 Pitcairn Islanders were relocated to Norfolk, but a number of families returned to Pitcairn shortly afterwards to be joined there by a number of newcomers over the years.

2.2 Notes on the language (NF)

Earliest references to an English-Tahitian contact language date to 1789 when the British sailors, to taunt their captain, deliberately mixed Tahitian words into their language. On Pitcairn, the Polynesians communicated with the British mutineers in a pidgin exhibiting a mixture between Tahitian, West Indian Creole and English. Ross and Moverley (1964) characterise what they called Pitcairnese as the outcome of language mixing, and provide numerous details about Tahitian lexicon and grammar, as well as details on dialect features. They provide (page 49 and 137) details on the provenance and likely dialect affiliation of the mutineers. As most men were killed in the first years of settlement, only the following are likely to have influenced the emerging language: Matthew Quintal (Cornishman), William McCoy (Scotsman), Edward Young (St. Kitts, West Indies) and John Adams (Cockney). The two dominant linguistic socializers for the first generation of children born on Pitcairn were:

- Edward Young, the story teller, who contributed a number of St Kitts pronunciations and lexemes, [l] for [r] in words such as *stole* ‘story’ or *klai* ‘cry’ and *morga* ‘thin’;
- John Adams, the patriarch, who created the social conditions in which standard acrolectal English against all demographic odds could prevail as the dominant language of the community.

Though Tahitian disappeared in the 1830s, the mixed contact vernacular continued to be used side by side with English in most families. Though there is some evidence of influence

from Pacific Pidgin English, the contact language is structurally far closer to the Atlantic Creoles (see Baker & Huber 2001).

The ambivalent attitudes towards Tahitian language and culture are reflected in two areas of language mixing. First, it is remarkable that words of Tahitian origin tend to be predominant in marked domains of language: taboo words, negative characterisations, undesirable and unnatural phenomena and properties. Examples include:

<i>Eeyulla</i>	‘adolescent, immature, or not dry behind the ears’
<i>gari</i>	‘accumulation of dirt, dust, grime, grease, etc.’
<i>hoopaye</i>	‘mucous secreted in the nose’
<i>howa-howa</i>	‘to soil one’s pants from a bowel movement, have diarrhoea’
<i>hullo</i>	(1) ‘a person of no consequence’, (2) ‘having nothing of any value; dirt, poor’
<i>iti</i>	‘any of the wasting diseases but mainly referring to tuberculosis’
<i>iwi</i>	‘stunted, undersized’
<i>laha</i>	(also lu-hu) ‘dandruff’
<i>loosah</i>	‘menses, menstruation’
<i>maioe</i>	‘given to whimpering or crying a lot, like a child, but not necessarily a child’
<i>nanu</i>	‘jealous’
<i>pontoo</i>	‘unkempt, scruffy’
<i>po-o</i>	‘barren or infertile soil’
<i>tarpou</i>	‘stains on the hands caused from peeling some fruits and vegetables’
<i>tinai</i>	(1) ‘to gaze at with envy’, (2) ‘an avaricious person’
<i>toohi</i>	‘to curse, blaspheme, or swear’
<i>uuaa</i>	‘sitting ungraciously’
<i>uma-oola</i>	‘awkward, ungainly, clumsy’

Whereas the lexicon is suggestive of the wish of the Pitcairners to distance themselves from their Tahitian heritage (something also manifested in their switch to European dress, food, pastimes and religion), there are other linguistic features suggesting close integration. For instance, words of English, Tahitian and other provenance do not differ, as they do in most contact languages, in their susceptibility to morphosyntactic rules, suggesting a full integration of the two languages:

a) progressive marker -en

<i>Yu tuhien.</i>	‘You are swearing’.
<i>Mais aanti kuken f kresmes.</i>	‘My aunt is cooking for Christmas’.

b) stages of comparison

<i>agli — aglia — aglies</i>	‘ugly — uglier — ugliest’
<i>pili — pilia — pilies</i>	‘sticky — stickier — stickiest’
<i>meyameya — meyameyara — meyameyares</i>	‘withered - more withered - most withered’
<i>morga — morgara — morgares</i>	‘thin — thinner — thinnest’

The Norfolk language, as spoken today, differs in many ways from the records of the early 19th century contact language and indeed contemporary Pitkern. It reflects contacts with other languages such as the Melanesian Pidgin English spoken in the Melanesian Mission community on Norfolk Island between 1867 and 1920, and a great deal of internal lexical and grammatical development.

An interesting aspect of lexical development is the strong tendency by the speakers of the language to establish links between people, the land and the new life forms they encountered. Place names record events and people as in ‘George and Isaac’s rock’, where Christian brothers of that name were put ashore. Further south there is ‘Steven’s Rock’, where Steven Christian was landed to go and get the horses harnessed. Close by Steven’s Rock is ‘Farder’s Pool’, a natural swimming pool in fine weather, but whose father it was named after is unknown. ‘Simon’s Water’ is a stream running through Simon Young’s allocation of land, and further inland there is ‘Pot’s Farm’, possibly after Rebecca ‘Pot’ Christian.

The metonymic relation between plant names and names of islanders is seen in examples such as:

Austin grass	Hilo grass (introduced by Austin Young)
Big Jack	Indian mallow, (probably names after Jack Evans who introduced it as goat feed)
Hilda flower	tiger lily (introduced by Hilda Young)
Hattie tree	pink orchid tree (after the missionary Hattie Andre)
Isaac Wood	Exocarpus (named after Isaac Quintal, who first pointed it out)
Dr. Codrington	type of banana introduced by Codrington of the Melanesian Mission
William Taylor	pest plant first introduced by William Taylor of the Melanesian Mission

The relationship between people and their island is also manifested in the development of an absolute spatial orientation system, which complements the English-derived egocentric, relative one. This could be an instance of linguistic adaptation to the topographical conditions of steep volcanic islands. Without apparent input from a source language, Norfolk has become one of the few languages in which one can document the emergence of an absolute spatial orientation system, comprising up-down, near-to and distant-from the main settlement coordinates (Mühlhäusler 2002a).

There are a number of accounts of both the Pitcairn and Norfolk varieties of the language and the grammar of NF is far better documented than that of Palmerston English. There remain a number of problems, however:

- The data basis for existing descriptive accounts has been very limited, a reflection of the difficulty of obtaining speech samples (particularly unmonitored style) from speakers of an esoteric language.

- The language has tended to be described in terms of its differences with Standard English though differences were frequently not seen. For instance, existing descriptions ignore that the Norfolk determiner system distinguishes between specific and non-specific (as do most English-related Creoles), but not between definite and indefinite.
- Available documentation of Norfolk does not (or only insufficiently) cover areas such as intonation, word-formation, the copula, TMA and several more.
- Most existing accounts are common-denominator descriptions which abstract from the extensive range of variants. It remains unclear at this point to what extent the variation encountered is a reflection of separate family traditions (as some informants insist), an absence of focussing as encountered in several Creole languages (see Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), and/or a reflection of language death, hypercorrection in elicited texts or other factors.

2.3 Degree of Urgency (NF)

It is well known that the sustained coexistence of a standard language and a lexically related pidgin, Creole or contact vernacular in the same language ecology requires separation in terms of domains, speech functions or speaker groups. As Robertson (1982) has argued for the disappearing Berbice Dutch Creole, the development of a linguistic continuum will result in language death.

The social and psychological factors that sustained stable diglossia in the past have been eroded in both Norfolk and Palmerston English. The first source mentioning that Norfolk was becoming an endangered language appeared in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* of 26 August 1932: 11.

One of the reasons is the increasing number of outsiders (referred to as mainlanders on Norfolk) who come to settle. The latest available statistics for Norfolk Island (census for 2001) indicate that Islanders of Pitcairn descent are not only a minority of the population of the island, comprising 1574 permanent residents plus about 500 tourists and 500 TEPs (temporary entry persons) at any one time, but have also become a minority among the permanent residents (about 47%). No statistics are available of residents of mixed Pitcairner-mainlander descent but informed observers confirm that marriages within the Pitcairner community are becoming rare. The language in mixed households is almost always English.

A second reason given is ‘the passing of the eldest generation’, who were social and linguistic role models. The absence of Norfolk-speaking role models continues to be a major problem. The majority of economically successful islanders are monolingual English speakers; the overwhelming majority of teachers are recruited from the Australian mainland, as are the clergy. The global youth culture is increasingly embraced by the younger generation.

A third reason for the endangerment of Norfolk mentioned in 1932 is educational policies. Between 1913 and about 1980, the language was systematically denigrated by the Australian teachers. Children were punished when caught speaking the language during school time, and at parent-teacher meetings, parents were encouraged not to use the language at home. A consequence has been that Norfolk is no longer taught to the children in many households, including households whose members are of pure Pitcairner descent.

The Ethnograph provides a speaker number of 580 for Norfolk which is unrealistically high and includes semi-speakers and users of what Laycock (1989: 625) has labelled 'Instant Norfolk', a variety of Standard English modified by two phonological rules, some sprinklings of NF syntax, and a small number of formulaic expressions and lexical items. The number of those who can speak traditional Norfolk amounts to about 200, mostly members of the old generation who learnt the language before 1930 (there are 177 permanent residents aged 70+, about half of them of Pitcairner descent). The Ethnograph also states that there are no first language speakers of NF. This requires a comment. It is true that there never were monolingual NF speakers but before 1930 NF was the dominant language of many households and usually the first language children learnt. This would seem to be the reason why some of my very old informants are losing their ability to speak in English and revert to NF.

NF through its entire history has coexisted as the low language in a diglossic relationship with English. There has been some reevaluation of NF's position. Being able to speak NF is regarded by an increasing number of islanders as prestigious and desirable. Such positive attitudes towards the language are rarely matched by active efforts to revive it. Existing language programmes offered within Norfolk Island Studies at the central school are under funded and understaffed, and suffer from the lack of language resources, as well as the reluctance of the mainlander teachers to learn Norfolk and encourage its use. One language lesson per week for a couple of years is insufficient to arrest the decline of the language.

The number of Norfolk islanders who live a traditional lifestyle (comprised of small near self-sufficient farms, fishing, and processing primary products) is shrinking and most Norfolk islanders now work in the service industry surrounding tourism as guides, drivers, cleaners etc. The annual number of visitors (usually staying 7 days) has increased to 35,000 per annum, and their problematic impact on the cultural and natural resources of the island is currently being debated in the Norfolk Assembly. The language of tourism is exclusively English. Two islanders offer a one-hour cultural and linguistic experience as part of a bus tour, and tea towels and T-shirts featuring Norfolk language are offered for sale as souvenirs.

In recent years, attitudes towards Norfolk have improved, but there are several serious obstacles to reversing its decline. In the late 1980s two islanders, Beryl Nobbs-Palmer and Alice Buffett, both devised an orthography for the language. The community remains

deeply divided over the writing system. This has prevented the use of written Norfolk in public signposting and many islanders are reluctant to write anything in Norfolk. It has also led to some parents not allowing their children to attend Norfolk classes at school, where the Buffett system has been used. The draft dictionary Mühlhäusler prepared for use by community members and teachers, lists all documented spellings (up to half a dozen for some words), and has therefore escaped criticism. The question of the spelling system remains a potential source of unhappiness and even social violence.

As long as there were few contacts and intermarriages with outsiders, Norfolk was strengthened rather than weakened by being an esoteric language (to be spoken by *aklan* [= first person plural pronoun referring to Pitcairner descendants and contrasting with the neutral pronoun *wii*]). Today, there are very few occasions involving Pitcairners only. Nevertheless, non in-group residents continue not to be accepted, even those with a reasonable knowledge of the language. Mühlhäusler has discussed this question with many islanders and included it as one of the main issues in the Draft Language Plan (see Mühlhäusler 2002b).

2.4 Focal Point of Documentation (NF)

Mühlhäusler has compiled a near exhaustive collection of language samples in archival and printed sources as well as the transcripts of recordings made by Flint (1960s), Harrison (1970s) and Zettersten (late 1960s). He has recorded a small body of language materials in the 1990s himself. At present, this is not an adequate data base for more detailed linguistic documentation and the principal task is now to compile a representative corpus of the Norfolk language, extending the very small number of existing texts and translations of decontextualised English sentences to a variety of text types, in particular informal ones such as spontaneous conversations.

As regards **speaker types** the greatest urgency is to obtain a representative sample of the language as it is used among the oldest generation (70+) speaking traditional Norfolk.

There are a small number of speakers in the age group 40 – 70 whose speech has not yet been recorded, other than for a brief word list for preliminary phonetic analysis. Again, the aim is to obtain a representative body of samples for different text types. A subset of this category that has as yet to be documented are second generation mainlanders, a number of whom have acquired reasonable competence in Norfolk (but are not generally encouraged to use it).

The speech of children and adolescents has never been recorded up to date.

The range of **speech/text** types is constrained by the fact that NF is in a diglossic relationship with English and that it is not employed in all domains and functions. It is intended to obtain 'danger of death' accounts which are likely to yield unmonitored language, to extend the existing data base for traditional fishing and ghost stories and to record songs and political debates.

Written and printed examples of NF in the **media** are rare. From time to time islanders use NF for private letter writing. Letters to the local press tend to be in English, as is all official correspondence. There is very little public use of written NF (occasional brief advertisements, death notices, the phone card, and the boarding card for Norfolk Jet Express). In its written form NF usually exhibits a great deal of an individual, spontaneous creation which can provide insights into the phonological properties of the language.

Eliciting reliable information on language competence is not going to be an easy task as informants are likely to over report and under report their knowledge and use of the language for a variety of reasons. There is no language question in the official census and the usefulness of private questionnaires is limited by the NF norm of interaction which makes answering requests for information optional. It would be helpful to produce an Ethnography of Communication, employing the standard categories developed by Hymes and modified by Saville-Troike (2003).

Many descriptions of English-related contact vernaculars approach these languages as unsystematic approximations to the acrolect rather than systems in their own right. As already mentioned, the range of texts tends to be very restricted – this is a monitored style. Ethnographic information on language use (diglossia) and the relationship of creoles to the wider language ecology tend to be absent. Phonetic analysis and phonetic details are patchy or non-existent. The studies of speech evaluation, attitudes and phenomena such as hypercorrection and code-switching are largely absent. Special semantic fields such as ethno-botany or fish names are underrepresented.

In sum, the focus of our documentation will be to produce a comprehensive corpus of primary data together with a description of the grammar, the lexicon of the endangered Norfolk language as well as an ethnographic statement of its use.

2.5 Possible Special Analysis (NF)

The question of language genesis on uninhabited islands is one that from time to time has been addressed by linguists such as Hermann Paul, Derek Bickerton or Robert Chaudenson (see Mühlhäusler 1998a), but conclusive answers to questions about the influence of nature, substrate languages and cultural adaptation have not been forthcoming, partly because the range of parameters involved in earlier studies was very large. Norfolk and Palmerston English, one might wish to argue, share more factors in their history than most other contact languages and therefore are ideal test cases. The investigators will make use of the opportunity of comparing the two outcomes of language contact between English and a Polynesian language.

Eira, Magdalena and Mühlhäusler (2002) have produced a 1500-entry basic dictionary of NF, and Mühlhäusler has begun a modest collection of fish and plant names. Knowledge of both these life forms and their NF names is declining and it is intended to produce an

illustrated comprehensive list of life form names as well as a second list of cultural objects (such as coconut grinders, shingle splitters, troughs).

2.6 Details of Collaboration

Mühlhäusler has worked with the Norfolk community since 1997. In response to the wishes of the community he has:

- Collected documents on the social history of the language. Copies of individual documents have been given to members of the community and a full set has been deposited in the library of the Norfolk Central School.
- Developed a draft language plan which has been discussed by the stakeholders and at a public meeting. A small working party has been established to develop the document and to promote interest in language issues on Norfolk.
- Trained a semi-speaker of Norfolk in language maintenance and syllabus design at Adelaide (see Appendix 6) and organized a small amount of money to pay Norfolk speakers to give language lessons in Norfolk Studies
- Compiled a draft dictionary of all Norfolk words documented in writing which is used in language classes at the school. Over the years Mühlhäusler has made many friends on Norfolk Island and has learnt the language (which he dare not speak often as it is an esoteric language). However, Norfolk Islanders are happy to speak Norfolk in his presence and since 2000 have consented to be recorded.

The main difficulty encountered when working with a small community dominated by a number of families with very different agendas and conflicting views has been to avoid inheriting the enemies of those with whom one is on good terms.

3. Palmerston English (PE)

In its methodological foundation and general orientation, work on PE will follow the principles laid down for NF in 3.2. above. General points which have been made above, such as the emphasis on the discourse level as the only possible starting point for a comprehensive description of the two creoloids studied, will not be repeated here.

3.1 General Description (PE)

Palmerston English is a contact language combining elements from:

- a variety of mid-19th-century British English (with Gloucestershire and Yorkshire being mentioned in the oral tradition, information which would need to be confirmed in the course of the project) and,
- Polynesian, especially in its variants of the islands of Manihiki and Rakahanga in the Northern Cook Islands.

In the bilingual Marsters family, Polynesian speakers were compelled by the English-speaking family head to give up their mother tongue and to use English. The linguistic features of PE show evidence of the modification of English used as an L2 by L1 Polynesian speakers.

Polynesian influence can be noticed in the phonology: the glottal stop (indicated by 'ʔ) appears as a variant of /h/or /T/, there is a partial loss of the voiced/voiceless contrast in the consonant system: *dis ʔausis* „these houses“, the vowels tend to present a basic 5-vowel-system in stressed position and a centralized schwa-like vowel (indicated by /@/) in unstressed position.

English and Maori are the main sources of the lexicon. Northern Cook Maori words are used for fishing and agriculture and Rarotongan Maori words in the fields of administration and Polynesian culture with no equivalent in the Palmerston tradition (administration, Polynesian dance). There are expressions in archaic or dialectal English like *tu ev @ ya@n* „to have a yarn [=talk to each other]“ and *yond@* for „under, over there“. Navigation terms from English are over-generalized and also used for movements inland.

The syntactic structures of PE deserve far more thorough study than has previously been possible. In fact the only provisional account is Ehrhart-Kneher 1996. The pronouns are of particular interest, with dual constructions and inclusive/exclusive differentiation following the Polynesian system: *yu tu en matavia a@ i@* „you and Matavia are here“. In the verbal group, aspect is a central subject for further observation, in particular constructions of the type *bin+verb* to express perfectivity or anteriority. Repetition expressed by reduplication is frequent: *de boi noknok ʔis ʔed* „the boy is/was knocking his head repeatedly“ and might be a trace of the Polynesian substrate. A comparison with reduplication in NF (cf. the preliminary study by Mühlhäusler 2003b) would suggest that reduplication is much rarer there – a contrast for which it would be interesting to uncover the reason. The verb ending for the present tense is *-s* throughout: *I goes, you goes, we goes, dej goes...*, except for the third person singular: *he go*.

According to several of Ehrhart's informants, sentences like *ai tu:k a paka soup en ai uen tu de fare kaukau* „I took a piece of soap and I went to the bathroom“ go back to the first generation of language contact (the Polynesian women trying to speak their husband's language). Nowadays, the speakers dissociate themselves from this kind of speech, which they consider to be corrupt, unstable and of little prestige. The lack of stability of PE in the early stages of contact is explained by the fact that the words of the two languages were just placed side by side or mixed arbitrarily, rather than being properly integrated, as would be the case in the present.

3.2 Degree of urgency for the documentation of PE

Due to the high mobility of Palmerston Islanders in the Pacific region and the consequent dilution of their traditions, the number of fluent speakers of PE is rapidly decreasing, which makes the language a highly endangered one.

The core area of PE is situated on Palmerston Island with 52 fluent speakers, the entire population of the island. The Diaspora is much larger, though still small in absolute terms, with about 400-500 more speakers living on other islands of the Cook group and a further c. 400-500 persons in the Pacific region having a passive or an active knowledge of PE.

There is a very strong migration movement from and to Palmerston (often with Rarotonga as an intermediate stage) and it is considered as natural by the families to be mobile, despite the very poor transport conditions. The island and its language and cultural traditions have an important symbolic unifying role for the whole family and they are held in high esteem by the family members not living on the island. However, their knowledge of the language can be considered as dormant and it is not automatically transmitted to the next generation while living overseas.

On Palmerston, PE is the language of internal communication. The patterns of language use can be described as diglossic, since other languages are used for the contact with the outside world: English in its Rarotongan or in its New Zealand variety, Rarotongan Maori and the Polynesian languages of the Northern Group of the Cooks. English is mastered at different levels of proficiency depending on the individuals; the knowledge of Maori is passive or very poor in most of the cases. The local radio operator gets some special training in Maori in order to be able to communicate with the other outer islands of the Cooks.

The perspectives for the language depend heavily on the island's demography. How many of the young people want to stay on the island? At which stage of their lives do Palmerston Islanders leave their island? Under which circumstances do they wish to come back? Are they then planning to stay definitively or do they have another project of migration for later on? What kind of English variety do they bring back? If they get married abroad, where is their partner's place on Palmerston?

PE is even more strongly threatened outside the home island, in the Diaspora, which is where the bulk of the speaker community lives – a phenomenon not uncommon for Pacific Island cultures. Our project will study the links between language use and identity and we will try to measure whether the pull of the homeland is strong enough to stay the loss of tradition and the de-focussing/ diffusion (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) of the PE linguistic system and the associated discourse traditions.

3.3 Focal points of documentation

Palmerston English is not a well documented language. The only widely available published account so far is a brief sketch based on Ehrhart's fieldwork of 1991 (Ehrhart-Kneher 1996). There are incidental observations and comments in books written by South Seas travellers and locally-based researchers, but there is no video documentation of either the island or the language. Recent material which has been published by travellers/sailors through the World-Wide Web offers interesting glimpses but is very often too limited in quantity and quality to provide a basis for a scholarly analysis.

Information on language use is not easy to obtain because of speakers' attitudes, which reflects PE's status as a *pyjama language*, a language which is used only in a very intimate circle. Ehrhart's standing in and contacts with the island society for over a decade (and recordings with members of the family that have now passed away) have been very helpful for the recordings.

There is **no written tradition** in PE. Some elements of local documents composed traditionally in Standard English (land contracts, official documents or epitaphs on tombstones) show the influence of a PE substrate. Until the very recent past, writing was not an important aspect of island life, which – among other things – is reflected in a high rate of illiteracy, especially amongst the old people.

The Island community is aware of the need for modernisation and is planning to commit to writing important aspects of their oral tradition, in particular narratives on early settlement, important family events and the foundation myth.

3.4 Possible special analysis (PE)

PE is a contact language of high interest. Compared to the better described cases of Pitcairn and Norfolk, it remains an underdocumented language. Hence, data from PE have not been considered in linguistic discussion in which they would clearly have been important (cf., e.g., Baker and Huber's (2001) comparison of world-wide features in English-derived contact languages), and the systematic comparison of PE and Pitkern, NF, Ngatik and other English-derived contact varieties suggested in Ehrhart-Kneher (1996) remains to be undertaken.

The aim of our comparison of NF and PE is to bring together two communities with historical connections and with obvious similarities in their sociolinguistic development and in the ecolinguistic environment in which they communicate. For example, it is striking that in both instances the numerically dominant female speakers of Polynesian were not permitted to pass on their language to the mixed offspring. On Palmerston this was due to the influence of a single English-speaking male, and on Pitcairn Island after 1800, again a single Englishman succeeded in imposing the English language and much of English culture. In the linguistic history of both islands the children were an important factor

because it was they who developed a contact vernacular on the basis of the pidginized English used in intercommunication in the initial years of settlement.

Finally, on both islands written and formal English (initially established mainly through the Bible and religious literature, latterly also through education and literacy in general) has remained unchallenged as the High variety. Understanding the factors that sustain and weaken small island contact vernaculars could be of potential importance to an understanding of wider issues of language decline.

The areas in which a structural comparison between NF and PE would seem particularly promising are dual and plural pronoun systems, prosody (yet to be described) and the extent of Polynesian influence in the lexicon.

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