Simple English in the South Seas Evangelical Mission

Social context and linguistic attributes*

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The general point of this paper is to highlight the important role of Christian missions in the development of language planning. We document this with a case study: the attempt of the South Seas Evangelical Mission to devise a simplified English, intermediate between Pidgin English and full Standard English, for their mission work in the south west Pacific. The relatively unsophisticated approach to corpus planning by this body is contrasted with Ogden's more elaborate proposals for Basic English.

1. General setting

1.1 Studies on the spread of English

Over the last couple of decades a great deal has been written about the development of English into a world language, with emphasis being placed on its competition with French and other major languages (e.g. Grillo 1986, Wardhaugh 1987), governmental policies and imperialism (Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1992) or socio-historical factors (Crystal 1988). There are two considerations that are missing from these accounts: first, an appreciation of the role of the Christian missions in the spread of English and, second, the importance of Pidgin and artificially simplified English as precursors of 'full' or 'proper' English.

That missionary views on, and practical involvement with, languages constitutes an important part of Western linguistic history is slowly being realized, and the new sub-discipline of missionary linguistics is attracting an increasing number of scholars (see collections by Wendt 1998, 2001). Missionaries from the nineteenth century onward were part of an important network which enabled European scholars to disseminate their ideas to the more remote mission

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posts and, in turn, to obtain data about exotic languages and their speakers. A number of leading nineteenth-century philologists (e.g. Lepsius, Meinhoff, Codrington, Crystaller, Müller) were either themselves missionaries or had close links with missionary societies. These philologists took part in the wider discourse about language development, universal languages and translation theory. Importantly, they were the precursors of modern day language planning and policy making.

This article addresses the neglected topic of mission involvement in the spread of English, and in the development of simplified versions of English in the South West Pacific area. Watson-Gegeo in her introduction to a well-known collection on English in this area observes (1989: 1):

> Missionaries played an important role in spreading both English … and English-based Pidgins/Creoles in the islands [e.g. Whiteman (1983)] although, in many places, missionaries and colonial officials initially attempted to restrict islanders' access to English because it was the language of political power.

Most articles in her collection, however, provide only a few details. Nor is there much awareness among contemporary missionaries of past missionary policies and practices as is evident from Hitchins' (n.d.) account of mission work through the medium of English. One of our arguments is that much can be learnt from the past and that an understanding of the work of earlier generations of missionaries can help contemporary language planners avoid the necessity to reinvent the wheel.[1]

1.2 Sociohistorical background: English language and missions

The metaphor of Babel is deeply entrenched in mission discourses about language:[2] the high degree of multilingualism in many parts of the mission field was interpreted as a divine punishment and its replacement by a single lingua franca was spoken of as an act of regaining paradise. Opinions varied as to which language should become the mission medium:[3] Latin was used by the Catholic Mission in Indochina, indigenous languages such as Guaraní in Paraguay were cultivated and elevated to mission media, major European languages such as French, Spanish and English were used or simplified or Creolised forms of these languages adopted. In many instances there was no ready solution and missions were forced to devise ad hoc policies.

The development of a universal language is by no means an innovation of the modern age. Philosophers, politicians and diplomats and indeed missionaries have all previously written and spoken of the advantages to be gained

from a common world language. When various mission bodies began operations in the Pacific area, they initially met with an almost ideal situation. There were only a few closely related Polynesian languages spoken over a wide area by a substantial number of people. Moreover, these languages had a very simple phonology and were relatively easy to learn. The principles developed for the orthography and grammar of Tahitian, Hawaiian and Samoan could be relatively easily transferred to other Polynesian languages. When missions turned their attention to Melanesia (Vanuatu, the Solomons, New Caledonia, New Guinea), they encountered a very different set of circumstances. Here, about a quarter of the world's languages were spoken by about three million people, and many of these languages exhibited great grammatical complexity. With the average number of speakers of these languages amounting to no more than 1500, mission work doing justice to all of them was not possible. The solutions considered varied from mission to mission. The first Bishop of Melanesia, Bishop Selwyn of the High Anglican Melanesian Mission, and his fellow Anglican bishops intended to make English the lingua franca of the Pacific in the mid-1850s. Thus, in a resolution passed by the Anglican bishops' meeting in Sydney in 1850, it was declared that "the multiplicity of languages makes it necessary to conduct instruction in some one language common to all, which must be English." An interesting oversight in this resolution is that English was common to none of the Melanesians, only to the missionaries who wished to convert them (see Mühlhäusler 2002: 238ff).

Despite this decision, however, the resources required to teach English to such a large number of Melanesians were, at this time, insufficient. A small trial program in English missionary instruction conducted in New Zealand, at St. John's College near Auckland, did not provide results. The use of English as the medium of instruction was abandoned by Selwyn's successor Patteson[4] when the training school shifted to Norfolk Island in 1864, and a standardized and streamlined form of the Mota language (Banks Islands) was developed as an alternative mission lingua franca. Interestingly, teaching in Mota was abandoned when the Melanesian Mission was relocated to the Solomons in 1920, and English became the medium of instruction.

Another missionary with an interest in artificial languages was Revd. Brown (n.d.), the first missionary operating in the New Guinea area. A survey of his personal papers suggests that he occupied himself with the study of Esperanto, but there is no direct evidence that he ever implemented an Esperanto policy in his highly multilingual mission field.

The Low Anglican Evangelical Kanaka Mission (Mühlhäusler, forthcoming) differed from other missions in that it did not operate in the islands but on the Australian mainland (Queensland), where thousands of Melanesians (or Kanakas as they were referred to) worked on the sugar plantations between about 1860 and 1906. The aim of this mission was simple: to convert, and not to educate, the Kanakas; and Pidgin English, which had grown up around the plantations (Dutton and Mühlhäusler1984), was deemed sufficient. When employment of black labourers in Australia ceased in 1904, the mission relocated to the workers' homelands in the Solomons and Vanuatu and was renamed the South Seas Evangelical Mission (SSEM). Here the language situation was very different from that prevailing in Queensland. Most notably, access to native speakers of English was minimal when compared to the situation on the plantations of the Australian mainland.

Initially, the Mission continued to use Pidgin English as the main medium of instruction, and also experimented with a number of local vernaculars. By the early 1920s, pressure from both within the Mission and from the British Government in the Solomons forced the mission to reevaluate its language policy, and make the change to English. To facilitate this change a simplified form of English was developed which forms the main topic of this paper.

The data used for this article are primarily archival data, personal letters, notes and internal memos. Many of them are not dated and/or have no details as to authorship. The fact that much of this correspondence involved the numerous members of the Deck family does not help, and the precise chronology of events and the role of some individuals remain to be determined. Note also that there have been a number of inconsistencies in the way the principal mission journal *Not in Vain* was organized. In spite of such difficulties, we are confident that it has been possible to compile a fairly coherent account of the language debate in the South Seas Evangelical Mission.

1.3 Some notes on artificial languages

Artificial languages have been devised, developed and introduced into societies to fulfill a range of political, economic and military needs. In spite of this, and as discussed by Large (1985), most, if not all, of these languages possess several common attributes. The key attribute common to all artificial languages is that they are intended to be easier to learn than a second natural language. This feature may have been particularly relevant in the SSEM, where limited time and resources were available for the instruction of the natives. A second

motif is that of overcoming the curse of Babel. The multitude of languages in Melanesia was often interpreted by the missionaries as a divine punishment and a source of conflict and human misery. Replacing this diversity with a uniform language was often talked about as part of the salvation process.

Technically, one can distinguish two forms of artificial language. The a priori languages have "no connection to existing tongues" (Pei 1958), and instead aim to "link language to logical thought." These languages characteristically make use of symbols or numerals in place of standard vocabulary. The rationale for developing a priori languages was to enable an enlightened scientific community to communicate in a single language or to facilitate military communication. Typically, a priori languages are written rather than spoken and concerned with cognitive rather than emotive aspects of language. A number of a priori systems were developed in the 18th and nineteenth century (Laycock & Mühlhäusler 1989, Libert 2000). By the early twentieth century however, there are few examples of the emergence of new a priori systems, apart from some isolated examples such as the Hazchem code and international signing at airports.

In contrast, the second form of artificial language, a posteriori languages, are based on existing tongues. These languages seek to simplify natural languages by removing irregularities (Laycock & Mühlhäusler 1989). Esperanto, for example, is a language which combines the structures and vocabulary of several classical and modern European tongues. There are many examples of missionaries unifying and standardizing a variety of local languages and dialects into a standard mission language. This can be taken as an example of a posteriori language planning. A posteriori forms of English are predominantly a twentieth-century phenomenon though there are nineteenth-century precursors. A particularly interesting example are the one-syllable books by Mary Godolphin, such as her rewriting of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in one-syllable words (except for proper and place names, which are hyphenated). The twentieth century also saw the introduction of several a posteriori languages whose basis was English. Next to the best-known form (Ogden's Basic English, 1929), there are several other examples of a posteriori languages based on English: the Easy English developed by the Wycliffe Bible translators (SIL: www.wycliffeassociates.org.uk/ee/), the highly standardized and regulated international maritime Seaspeak (Crystal 1988: 163ff., Stevens & Weeks 1985), the Policespeak used for the Channel Tunnel Operations (Johnson 1994), the Voice of America Standard Simple English and the widely used Plain English (Eagleson 1990), among others.[5] These a posteriori variants of English differ quite considerably from

each other — a reflection of varying assumptions on the part of their creators about the nature of human communication and linguistic simplicity. The Simplified English developed by the SSEM shares a number of assumptions found in other a posteriori forms of English, but also exhibits some unique properties and, like most other a posteriori forms of English, was developed in isolation.

2. Background to simplified English

2.1 The language policy of the SSEM

Whilst the global environment of linguistic imperialism and colonial expansion may be important factors in the development of simplified English for the purposes of missionary teaching, consideration must also be given to the reasons that the missionaries gave for teaching natives in English. Their justification ties in closely with the language policy of the SSEM, which is clearly shaped by both the political and social environment. The South Seas Evangelical Mission (SSEM) was born from the experiences of Florence Young, subsequent founder and leader of the Mission:

> God brought me for the first time into contact with men and women who had never heard of Christ, and for whom nothing was being done to teach them the way of salvation. (Young n.d.: 38)

The vision of the Queensland Kanaka Mission was to train a growing number of religious teachers who would bring the South Sea Islanders from the darkness of heathenism into the light of Christianity. The mission undertook religious instruction among the South Sea Islanders who worked on the sugar plantations of Northern Queensland (the Kanakas).

As long as the mission's work was concentrated in Queensland, Kanaka Pidgin English was the most convenient language for mission work and the Queensland Kanaka Mission was one of the main promoters of the spread and development of this Pidgin (Mühlhäusler, forthcoming). Whilst there is clear evidence in several of the missionary texts that Florence Young had reservations about the use of Pidgin as a medium of missionary instruction, she also recognized that there was no logical alternative:

> The only common language was a smattering of Pidgin English, partly acquired from one another, and partly from the overseers in their daily work. It was not a hopeful medium for spiritual instruction. Yet surely God expected us to do something. (Young, n.d.: 38)

Florence Young's views on language dominated mission policies and practices for a long time (1880s–1920s), and both white and Melanesian Mission workers employed Pidgin English as their principal means of communication throughout their work in Queensland. Not all of the English-speaking mission personnel were well informed about the linguistic nature of this Pidgin.

Examination of the missionary reports and other relevant primary sources reveals frequent references to this form of English as "broken English." However, the realization that it operated according to quite distinct grammatical and lexical conventions was also encountered, as can be seen from a report by F. Lancaster (*Not in Vain*, 1901: 13):

> Before my first week closed I began to think pidgeon English was not so hard as I had feared. It was only necessary to churn the English up and well sprinkle the jumble with pet expressions such as "plenty," "which way," "what name," and "fellow!'" Alas! When I gave my first address a few days later I found that there was a right and a wrong way to churn, and my way did not turn out the language! Never did my vocabulary seem so full of big, hard-sounding words, and "simple" ones would not come! It was some months before I realised how absurd many of my sentences must have sounded to my fellow missionaries. It was good of them not to laugh.

When the plantation workers returned to their island homes and the focus of the mission shifted to the Solomons and New Hebrides (Vanuatu), the role of the vernaculars grew dramatically. From the beginning Florence Young recognised the importance of the vernaculars in native instruction. She never changed her views on language and resisted all efforts to move to standard English. These views were echoed by many of her close associates, for example Mr. McBride in a letter to Miss Kathie Deck of 3 January 1928:

> Our aim is *"salvation"* not civilization or education. To this end we are training native teachers that they may quickly carry the Gospel to their people. Those thousands still unreached — still sitting in darkness. God wants them to be reached and reached *soon*. We can't afford roundabout methods — we want to put all our strength to that which *tells most*. We have proved that the Word of God is effectual, that the Holy Spirit *reveals Christ* through that Word, even under the limitations of pidgin English, and it has been our ambition to say with our Lord "I have given them Thy Word, for the words which Thou gavest me I have given them, and they received them," yes, and *loved* them!

Kathleen Deck in a letter to her brother Norman of 4 March 1932 warns him:

> Don't mention in your letter the subject of 'good English' or 'not smoking', Aunty does not see the use of either, she is too old to change, and we only distress her, we must just keep off debatable subjects.

Missionaries arriving in the new mission field were required to undertake intensive instruction in the native languages, though with rather limited success, and it soon became clear that promoting vernacular literacy was a fairly costly exercise. The practicalities of this were debated at a conference in Baunani in 1913 which was attended by Florence Young and all the important mission workers. This was summed up by a letter to her 'Dear Friends' dated August, 1913:

> Another pressing matter is how to give the Missionaries opportunities to learn the native languages. Good work has been done in English and we shall continue to use it in the boarding schools and in other places as far as possible. But we all feel increasingly the great advantage of understanding at least one of the native dialects.

The practices that evolved in translation, printing and dissemination of texts in the local languages will be the topic of a separate essay. Suffice it to say that Miss Deck was heavily involved in the translation of the Gospel and Scriptures into native languages as early as 1909, thereby providing the non-English-speaking natives with access to important biblical texts. Over the years these translations became more professional, as Norman C. Deck (NIV 141: 3, 1956) discussed in a review of his translation work. But the SSEM never adopted a vernacular-only policy, and appears to have come to the conclusion that both vernaculars and Pidgin English were transitional means for achieving eventual literacy in English. This was partly determined by economic and pragmatic factors: translation was time consuming and expensive and the large number of local languages severely restricted the audience for translations. It was acknowledged that older Melanesians depended on their own language, but it was felt that the younger generation could be educated to shift to English. As early as 1910, English instruction was carried out alongside instruction in vernaculars and it seems clear that the policy was one of transitional bilingualism.

> The local boys are getting keen on learning to read language by syllables, which is a great thing, as then they will be able to read ahead without much teaching when we have the language printed. (Norman C. Deck to Florence Young, 1917).

The central aim of this native instruction was to give the natives access to the word of God. Their knowledge of English and their literacy were seen as a

means of enabling the natives to read ahead in their Biblical lesson books (i.e. as tools for self-education).

There is evidence that as early as 1913 English was regarded as an important component of native instruction. Norman Deck (1913) recognised that English should be adopted as the favoured language of instruction for the younger generation, but admitted that the middle-aged natives still required that most of the instruction be carried out in the native languages:

> … we must explain that the Bibles we give out are English Bibles. There are such a number of dialects in each island that it is impossible to give each a Bible in their own language… The local missionaries learn the language of the tribes they teach, and the text-book and question book are gradually being translated and printed in the various dialects. But most of the teaching of the future will need to be done in English. From now on, practically all the young men will recruit away to plantations and there learn Pidgin English. We may gradually teach our scholars at the training schools better English, but this will have little influence upon the dialect spoken by the average returned labourer. (Norman Deck, in *Not in Vain*, 1919)

Changes in practices and policy thus occurred in island Melanesia, not all of which would have met with Florence Young's approval. Opposition to the continued use of Pidgin English was voiced by Northcote Deck,[6] a nephew of Florence Young and one of the key figures of the missionary society, who regarded this Pidgin English as a sign that the natives were "unlearned" and "ignorant." The Mission's books displayed English and a local language in parallel columns or sheets and "in learning they taught English and then language, the one being explained by the other; this has been a great success" (Norman C. Deck to Florence Young, 1917).

The cost of teaching English was hardly less than that of teaching in the vernaculars, and the SSEM ran into the same difficulties in the 1920s as those that had forced the Melanesian Mission in the 1860s to abandon teaching through the medium of English. However, the solution to this problem was not the development of a mission lingua franca but the development of a simplified form of English, a solution that seemed obvious to those who regarded Pidgin English as a means of promoting a gradual transition to more acrolectal forms of English.

2.2. Simplified English practice and policies

Ad hoc simplification of English (inspired by Foreigner Talk conventions and knowledge of Pidgin English) is evident from the very beginnings of the mission. As language was predominantly oral, its highly variable character was of little concern. It appears that the Kanaka/SSE Mission workers had excellent accommodation and people skills and major misunderstandings are not in evidence. This appears to have changed after 1904 when communication in the form of letters sent between Queensland and the mission fields gained greater importance, and the mission extended its reach to Melanesians who had never experienced Queensland.

These two factors, together with the difficulties found in teaching in full English, appear to have triggered more systematic attempts to devise a simplified form of English for mission purposes.

2.3 Mission policies and Government

Far greater than mission internal pressures was the increasing involvement of the British Government. Whereas mission language policies were developed in isolation from Government language policies up to the late 1920s, this started to change when the British government began to take a more direct interest in education and social policies in the Solomons.[7] A Report by the Commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to inquire into the murderous attacks on Guadalcanal and Malaita in 1927 (Moorehouse 1929: 25) contains the following recommendation:

> Owing to the diversity of the languages spoken within the Group it seems essential that the teaching should be in some lingua franca which would become the common language outside the village, and I would strongly support what I believe to be the view to which the majority of the missionary societies are coming to that that language should be English. A short experience of the horrible variant of that language at present spoken leads one to encourage any attempt that may be made to obliterate it, but I do not think that this will be achieved by teaching English as a subject in the schools, but by teaching in English.

As Keesing argues (1987), the prevailing colonial ideology was firmly anti-Pidgin English and suspicious of the use of indigenous languages by the missionaries. This colonial viewpoint was first communicated to the mission in 1931, in a meeting between Norman Deck and the British High Commissioner.

Deck summarizes this encounter in a letter to Florence Young dated July or August,1931:

> The High Commissioner is *strongly* against a purely secular education, he differs from Mr Ashley in this, he recognizes that the religious training is essential to develop character. … But they think we are underestimating the values of pure English as a basis for understanding the Scriptures, as the High Commissioner himself puts it. They recognize of course this means a boarding school for the younger generation, who only hear English.

Norman also alerts Florence to the adverse financial implications of not obeying the government's wishes:

> They want the younger folk taught pure English and they want elementary arithmetic taught (and writing of course). The Melanesian Mission have now adopted pure English as their medium and the Government wants to push pure English with all its power. If we fall in line, we will get exemption from poll tax for our trainees and also a Government grant towards expenses.

The government's views on Pidgin English were quite unambiguous, as can be seen in the minutes of the education conference held at Tulagi on 5 February 1934. They were again communicated to the SSEM by the Resident Commissioner in a letter dated 26 July 1935:

> The teaching of English is a vexed question not only in the Solomons but in most Protectorates, and while I personally favour the indigenous language in kindergartens I consider that English which can be easily assimilated is essential in higher forms, as owing to the multiplicity of native languages, a common language is necessary and English takes precedence in my opinion over any standardized native language for the simple reason that it will be of more use to the native student to him after years, which is our ultimate aim. English is not generally taught though the boys use it out of school hours to converse among themselves.

The implication was that the continued use of Pidgin English by the SSEM was unacceptable and that local vernaculars were acceptable only for the very first stages of education. In the same letter, the government disagrees with the mission regarding the desirability of providing a full Western style of education to the indigenous population, and ends with a veiled threat — unless the mission is prepared to implement an English-medium education policy there will be financial consequences. In the end, the economic arguments prevailed and the SSEM agreed to make a transition to English.

2.4 Linguistic properties of the documents in Simplified English

Scrutiny of the various documents and discussions of documents in so-called simplified English reveals two things. First, there was never an explicit set of instructions as to how to modify full English texts. Individuals relied on their own intuitions and, presumably, on their own experience of what worked for them. Second, simplified English does not refer to a single variety, but to a continuum of processes ranging from anglicizing Pidgin English to removing perceived difficult passages from standard English texts. This can be illustrated with a number of examples.

The earliest document appears to be the one titled *First Course: Book of Lessons* (SSEM II, Box 24, n.d., anon). As will be shown shortly, this document is a clear example of the use of Pidgin English as a basis for creating a language more similar to acrolectal English. In 1928, Miss Kathleen Deck (with the help of her brother, Norman Deck) was instrumental in composing a document entitled "Biblical Texts and Hymns" in a simplified version of English (named "Simple English"). The aim of this Simple English was to increase the ease of understanding of the Biblical teachings, thereby providing the natives with an increased appreciation of "God's word" despite their limited knowledge of English. There is also another far more professional document authored by Northcote Deck (n.d.), *The Story of an Island School Girl*, which, its foreword states, "tells in the very simplest language of a great adventure of discovering the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Greatest Friend." The letters we have examined suggest that the first two of the above documents were used extensively and with considerable success. We have found no reference to the use or reception of Northcote Deck's story.

The *First Course* consists of 35 lessons, each devoted to an important biblical theme. The course was produced as an aid for oral instruction in Biblical teaching, and as a means of helping the Melanesian recipients of the King James Bible to understand what they were reading. The first paragraph of Lesson 1 (Creation) runs as follows:

> First time no anything he stop; no tree, no grass, no light, and everything he mix up all about. Time God He want to make this ground He speak no more. He no work in long any something. He *create* — make im long nothing. Suppose you me work im something, we no work im long nothing — only God He savey do that. Suppose we work im house, we must have im timber and leaf; we grow im garden, we must start im first time long come yam and taro, but God Him He speak no more. First thing God He want to make im — light. Holy Spirit He work and God He speak. God He say "Light, you come," now

> light he stop. God He look im light, He look im he good fella, now He make line between darkness and light. He no mix im up little bit light and little bit darkness. Light go all the way; He call im *DAY* now Day, he finish and darkness he come God call im *NIGHT*. Evening and morning make one day. *First day* he finish, (evening and morning, make one day) now two day he start.

The closeness of this text to Pidgin English is evident from many features, including:

- the single negator *no* preceding nouns or verb phrases,
- the presumptive pronoun/predicate marker *he*,
- conditional clauses introduced by *suppose*,
- second person pronoun not deleted in imperatives,
- adjective suffix *–fella* after monosyllabic adjectives,
- transitivity marker *–im* after verbs.

There are, however, a number of features which are distinctly un-pidgin, including:

- English spelling and use of difficult sounds such as th,
- *no anything* for Pidgin *no got samting*,
- variable use of *we* for *you me*,
- "difficult" prepositions such as *between*,
- demonstrative *this*,
- and, most notably, additional lexical items such as *create, darkness, have*.

At the end of each lesson, there is a list of newly introduced vocabulary. In the case of Lesson 1 this comprises (rendered in the format of the rather chaotic unedited original):

> Verse 1.
> In the beginning — first time
> Created — make long nothing.
> The heavens — the sky
> The earth — this ground
> Verse 2
> Without form and void — mix up all about moved — shake
> Let there be light — light you come
> Divided — make a line, separate
> image — likeness male — man, female — woman
> evening — night
> GEN.2
> Verse 2. ended — finished rested — spell

formed — made dust — dirt on ground
breathed — blow nostrils — nose
breath — wind living soul — he live
dress it — work it
freely eat — me let im command — put strong law tree of knowledge — tree for savey evil — bad
alone — stop one fella help meet — help where he fit in
caused — make deep — strong
slept — sleep finish rib — bone long side
flesh — meat long body

It can be noted that new words are often introduced by means of linking them to a Pidgin synonym, a strategy called "systematic synonomy" (Mühlhäusler 1979).

The next body of texts is made up of Biblical texts and hymns found in the *Text and Lesson Book* first printed in 1928. These texts were meant primarily as an aid for teaching and supervised Bible study. By 1939, 37,000 copies of this book had been printed and distributed (Deck & Deck 1928). This book pioneers a strategy outlined in its preface: "For the sake of brevity and clearness in many passages, words or portions are omitted." Over time this strategy appears to have become dominant in SSEM publications.

The first example is the parable of the Prodigal son, followed by brief comments. Again, the numbering is reproduced from the original:

1. His loving father gave this son all good things to make him happy, but he not stop quiet, he want his own way;
2. No matter far country wicked place, he want to try it; v. 12.
3. Sin start, first in his heart, and not long after, he go to the far country;
4. He spoil himself, and lose his father's money in sin; v. 13.
5. He empty, hungry, work for hard master, no friends, he find out his own way no good; wages of sin begin to catch him;
6. God say: Sin sweet to man for little time, but by and by trouble come; Fruit of sin is sorrow; Jer. 2.19.

Compare this to the King James Bible translation of the same passage (Luke 15:11):

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:
12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.
13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.
14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

> 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
> 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

The text in the *Text and Lesson Book* still exhibits grammar and lexicon current in Pidgin English in the 1920s including:

- future/posterior marker *by-and-by*,
- variable absence of the copula,
- *stop* for existential,
- conjunction *no matter* for adversative clauses.

Generally speaking, however, the text is much closer to acrolectal English, as can be seen from the following features:

- possessive pronoun *his* for Pidgin English *belong him*,
- plural *–s* and possessive *–s*,
- complementizer *to*,
- use of article *the,*
- reflexive pronoun *himself*,
- many 'difficult' lexical items such as *wicked, wages of sin, think back about, humble himself, rejoice joy, freely.*

There are even greater approximations to acrolectal English in the hymns by Miss Deck (possibly Kathie) in use in the 1930s and 1940s. The introduction to the SSEM *Hymn Book* states:

> This Hymn Book has been compiled by Miss Deck, in the Solomon Islands, for the sole use of South Sea Islanders, with their very limited knowledge of English. The Hymns have therefore been much altered; poetic thoughts and expressions being changed to as simple language as possible, and rhythm often neglected for the sake of simplicity.

An example of a hymn in the *Simple English Hymn Book* is the following:

> Sinners Jesus will receive,
> Sound this word of grace to all
> Who the heavenly pathway leave —
> All who wander, all who fall!
> Sing, oh! Sing……it all out again,
> Jesus saves…….us sinful men!
> Make the mes……sage clear and plain:
> Jesus saves us sinful men.

Of interest here is the contrast between the relatively complex verse and simple chorus. In the former we find inverse sentence order (topicalization), difficult words and the use of the relative pronoun *who*. In the chorus grammatical and lexical difficulties are avoided.

Our last example, Northcote Deck's (n.d.) *Story of an Island School Girl*, shows few traces of Pidgin English other than the occasional word choice such as *calico* for "printed loincloth." In fact, some of the characters are portrayed as speaking Pidgin English:

> Just as the missionaries were climbing into the boat old John came forward and said, "You take im picanny belong me go long 'Resuna' for school." The old man was told that if Ketia went to school she would be away for quite a long time. "Yes, me savvy. Me willing." Then turning to the Missionary's wife he said, "You look out im picanny belong me good fella." (Deck, n.d: 8–9)

An examination of this text shows few signs of its having been written in "the very simplest language." Instead we encounter many examples of what other theorists of simplified English have explicitly warned against, such as:

- complex sentences with multiple embedding,
- complex tenses,
- numerous idiomatic expressions such as, "they cried at the top of their shrill gay voices,"
- compound verbs, "had heard about God," "chatted away in different languages,"
- difficult word order, "out of a boat stepped a missionary and his wife,"
- abstract nouns, "Ketia did not much like the tossing."

These examples illustrate that there was no single coherent strategy for the simplification of English among the missionaries of the SSEM.[8] Their individualistic approach to simplifying English contrasts with the carefully designed simplification of Basic English, whose design features and role in mission work will be discussed now.

3. The development and use of Basic English

3.1 Origins of BASIC

BASIC (British American Scientific International Commercial) was first developed by Ogden between 1925 and 1927 and completed in 1928 (Haymon 1992). Evans (1949: 50) describes its origins as follows:

> Basic English was produced by the late C. K. Ogden as an outgrowth of his work on the philosophy of language with I. A. Richards, the fruit of which was their book *The Meaning of Meaning*. The idea for Basic came specially from the part of the book on 'definition', in working out which they made the discovery that 'the same words kept coming into the definition of every sort of word, from "mouse" to "beauty"'. This gave Ogden the suggestion that a form of English might be possible with a small number of words covering a field wide enough for the selection to be able to do the work of a complete simple language. 'It seemed that two or three hundred words had in them, in theory, the seeds of all ideas… But a language of that size would not be simple or smooth enough to seem like a natural language.'

Both Ogden and Richards had studied numerous earlier approaches to a priori and a posteriori languages, and saw their own creation as part of a larger philosophical tradition. Richards (1943: 11) lists the reasons for rejecting artificial languages such as Esperanto or Novial or revival of Latin and he also provides arguments (15) against making Spanish or Chinese the world lingua franca. His conclusion is that English is the obvious candidate on demographic and social grounds, and also because of its structural property of combining Germanic and Romance linguistic material. He also explicitly (13) dismisses the accusation that this represents an act of linguistic and cultural "imperialism." Basic English was made up of a restricted vocabulary (850 words plus extra vocabulary for specific disciplines and 50 international words), with which it should be possible to say anything that might be needed for everyday discourse. Despite the criticism, Basic English has been used extensively in international communication and teaching English abroad. In Ogden's original description, this simplified form of English was designed to serve as an international auxiliary language in both its written and spoken forms, and also to provide a simple introduction to proper English (Large 1985: 164). Prior to this, Richards (1943: 62), who initially collaborated with Ogden, notes:

> And from the first it has been evident that these two aims appeal in different degrees to different sorts of people. It has also been evident that in some minds these two aims can get in one another's way and even cause confusions

> as to which features of Basic are most important for which aim. These conclusions are understandable, although Ogden and other expositors of Basic have taken a good deal of care to make the distinction between the two aims clear. Nonetheless, misunderstanding continues.

Very much the same confusions are encountered in the discourse about Pidgin English by members of the SSEM. On the one hand it was a convenient mission lingua franca, on the other it was seen as the first stage in learning proper English.

We can thus summarise the core aims of Basic. In doing so we again make reference to the work of Richards, a strong advocate (Richards 1935: 64):

1. That everything that could be said, might be said in Basic,
2. That the language could be read and interpreted by readers and speakers of Complete English,
3. That it "be capable of being learnt with the minimum of labor by speakers of other tongues — including Far Eastern and African tongues as well as those Indo-European tongues for which other proposed auxiliary languages have been framed,"
4. That the language give insight into the structure and articulation of Complete English.

3.2 Basic in mission work and Bible translation

When the SSEM started developing simplified forms of English, they had little guidance other than their intuitions and own experiences in the mission fields. The solutions they invented were therefore suited primarily as aids to preaching and communication. For purposes of formal instruction in the classroom and for the development of indigenous literacy their methods lacked consistency and vigour. When they became aware that Basic English had been developed and provided a potential solution to the problem, they were quite excited. In a letter to Florence Young, Norman Deck (July/August 1931) wrote:

> I am much interested in the "basic English" which has been adopted for the League of Nations. The vocabulary comprises about 900 words, with which nearly everything can be said barring technical terms (and with us theological terms). Synonyms are cut out e.g. small and little are not *both* allowed, one is chosen. The result is simple pure English which reads quite naturally. The Melanesian Mission contemplate a translation of the Bible into this basic English, such of course would need scrutiny lest wrong doctrine should creep in.

Examination of what the creators and followers of Basic have said about its use for religious language shows that there was indeed a doctrinal problem. The principal aim of mission work is to emphasize the difference between the Christian religion and others which it seeks to replace. By contrast, Ogden has been praised for an intentionally non-confrontational approach:

> In simple truth, much of religious language and terminology is intentionally divisive. These uses developed during ages when religion was involved in tribal identity, confrontation and conflict. The continued use of divisive language is not called for in the modern era. Basic English tries to find a common expression using simple, general words. The use of common expressions for religious concepts calls attention to the features common in all religion. This common usage of shared relationships is desirable to understanding. Understanding leads to a sharing of togetherness, which is valuable in encouraging cooperation.
>
> Examples:
> – Father of all is the term for the divine deity as God, Jehovah, Lord, Allah, Great Spirit….
> – House for worship expresses the sacred building in a more inclusive manner than the separate and exclusive words of synagogue, church, mosque, temple, et al. Specific buildings are called by their proper names in English form, i.e. Cathedral of Notre Dame, Mormon Tabernacle at Salt Lake City.
> – Head of religion suffices for rabbi, priest, minister, imam, medicine man, … Degrees of authority with distinctive titles as allowed in Basic English and as is customary within any organization and much the way that Mayor, Governor, President defines a hierarchy within head of government.
> – Book of Beliefs or just The Book describes the Testament, Torah, Bible, Koran…
>
> (http://ogden.basic-english.org/religion.html, accessed 24 Dec. 2003)

Basic English provided for the extension of the 850-word list for use in specialist domains. In order to translate the Bible into Basic, 100 extra words for religious use (e.g. *angel, curse, heaven, holy, prayer*) were introduced. An additional 50 were also introduced specifically for Biblical translation[9] (e.g. *disciple, revelation, righteousness*, *sin, testament*). The choice of lexical forms for concepts was motivated (a) by expressing complex concepts by phrases rather then semantically complex words (*come back from death* for "resurrection" or *say things without respect* for "blasphemy") and (b) by avoiding synonyms such as *heathen, infidel, non-believer* or *spirit, soul, ghost* (http://ogden.basic-english.org/religion.html, accessed 24 Dec. 2003). Ogden's Basic English, like most artificial languages, was concerned with the cognitive function of language.

Its emotional side was seen to be an obstacle to communication. This may have appealed to the members of the Melanesian Mission, which was run by Oxbridge-trained and analytically-minded individuals. For a fundamentalist group like the SSEM, with its emphasis on emotions and spontaneous conversion, this would hardly have seemed a desirable property.

Like other SSEM missionaries, Northcote Deck was not aware of the philosophical underpinnings of Basic English, and was probably only attracted by having a ready-made recipe for introducing English into mission teaching with the minimum of effort.

An investigation of subsequent correspondence reveals that no Basic English policy was ever adopted by the SSEM. In spite of Northcote's statement that it had been adopted by the Melanesian Mission, we have not located first-hand evidence of its implementation and we note that the first official version of the Basic English Bible was not published until 1965, although translation was completed by 1949. We also note that there was very little time for either mission to develop Basic English policies and materials. This period coincided with considerable unrest among the indigenous populations, and the effects of world economic depression and collapse in commodity prices left few resources for educational developments. This was closely followed by the outbreak of World War II. By the beginning of 1942 the Solomons had been occupied by the Japanese, and the majority of mission stations had been destroyed. As elsewhere in Melanesia, the Second World War created a hiatus in social, political and economic development. By 1945, the attraction of Basic had waned. The old patriarchal ideologies began to make way for programs preparing Melanesians for political independence. The language deemed proper for this was full, standard English.

3.3 Comparison between SSEM Simple English and Basic English

As both the SSEM and the advocates of Basic produced Bible translations, it seems profitable to use a number of selected Bible passages as the basis of comparison. We give two examples here which highlight different simplification strategies.

1. Timothy 3.15–16

Simple (SSEM)

The holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.
All Scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable.

Basic Bible

And that from the time when you were a child, you have had knowledge of the holy Writings, which are able to make you wise to salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. Every holy Writing which comes from God is of profit for teaching, for training, for guiding, for education in righteousness.

King James Bible

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2. Romans 15.4

Simple (SSEM)

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning

Basic Bible

Now those things which were put down in writing before our time were for our learning, so that through quiet waiting and through the comfort of the holy Writings we might have hope.

King James Bible

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Let us first highlight the structural differences between the two approaches to simplifying the Bible and other religious texts. The SSEM approach seems fairly primitive and consists of leaving out passages that were perceived to be either redundant or excessively complex. There is little evidence of a restriction of the lexicon or verb use. Instead, the simplification was intended to be achieved through simplification of the grammar. What remains is still quite difficult to understand and in need of explanation by means of the Lesson Book.

The strategies for simplification in Basic, on the other hand, are substantially more structured and involved and include:

- Avoidance of verbs and their replacement with a small number of operators plus one of the 850 official words, for example "the blood of Jesus makes us clean" replaces "the blood of Jesus cleanseth us."
- Avoidance of synonyms, for example "makes free from sin" replaces "maketh an atonement."

It is clear from the above examples, and many others, that there are major differences in the mode of simplification in these two forms of English. In looking at the reasons, one needs to consider: the purpose for which each language was created, those responsible for its creation, and the principal role of each language. First, the context in which our two forms of reduced English were developed differed dramatically. The simple English of the SSEM was devised as a means of making specific concepts accessible to individuals. It was developed in an atmosphere where the natives had to be "kept in their place," and its use in all kinds of new worldly domains was definitely not the intention of its creators. Basic English was intended for Ausbau i.e. its designers provided instructions as to how its referential power could be enhanced to be useable in new domains. It was designed to give non-native speakers easy access to complete English, thereby allowing the learner to progress to complete or proper English at a later stage.

3.4 Nature of the simplification

The language of Basic English was based heavily on the concept of restricting vocabulary to increase consistency and reduce ambiguity in communicative discourse. In addition, the number of verbs and verb forms was heavily restricted. In contrast, the grammatical features of the language were very similar to those of proper English. However, the reduction of English verbs and auxiliaries to a mere seventeen appears to be a particularly problematic strategy. As pointed out by Voorhoeve (1964: 242), with a very small number of grammatical rules the vocabulary of Pidgins and Creoles is extended considerably by providing for categorial multifunctionality, allowing, in principle, most words to be used as nouns, adjectives and verbs. This grammatical property was firmly established in Melanesian Pidgin English, and the simplified English in the Lesson Book demonstrates how the SSEM missionaries made use of it. Thus in lesson 1 "work" is used as verb and noun, as is "punish."

Ogden and Richards' Basic was designed as a philosophical concept. They did not ask the empirical question, "What makes languages simpler to learn?" and they did not have at their disposal the insight of markedness and

naturalness theories. For example, the voiced and voiceless [th] appear in numerous words (*the, they, thunder, thought, theory* etc) as do consonant clusters (*frequent, street, sand*). By contrast, the SSEM had the experience of employing Pidgin English in the field. They intuitively incorporated aspects of this naturally more simple system into their simplified forms of English. Examples of this from the earlier version of the Text and Lesson Book are:

- The omission of the copula in *they think they ready.*
- A simplified negation as in *they not ready.*
- The omission of the third person singular –s as is *Peter make mistake.*
- Categorial multifunctionality.

As Schuchardt observes in his survey of a posteriori languages derived from Latin and Romance languages (1928: 158) "one could equally well elevate one of the creole dialects of Romance to the status of an international auxiliary language." Mühlhäusler (1992) argues that naturally derived pidgins and Creoles have many advantages over artificially simplified languages. The relative success of the simple English employed by the SSEM would appear to derive from its being based on Melanesian Pidgin English. Unfortunately, colonial ideology made it impossible to follow a course that would have been much less costly, that of modernizing and standardizing the existing Pidgin English.

4. Conclusions

Language planning has two extremes: philosophical schemes developed in a social vacuum and activities driven by pragmatic forces, particularly the need to survive in a complex and ill-defined communication ecology. The planning activities of the SSEM are very much at the latter end of the continuum and as such of necessity quite messy. The different players have different skills and agendas and none of them have the luxury of developing a proper policy for providing linguistic solutions, because of enormous pressures of time. This is unsurprising, as the missionaries never consulted with, or took account of the wishes of, the indigenous peoples in developing language policies, as noted by Hilliard (1969: 62):

> Basically, this attachment to pidgin English was symptomatic of the state of mind which characterized the SSEM missionaries as a class. Among them a conspicuous lack of interest in Melanesian life and customs was joined to a stereotyped, almost Manichean, view of the islanders themselves. Older

> pagans, 'besotted with sin and demon worship', were, in Dr Deck's words, 'Almost animals in mind and thought and habits'; young pagans, though more outwardly attractive', were still 'only splendid animals…devoid of most of the finer feelings of life'. Against this somber background the inward and outward changes wrought by Christianity were depicted in glowing colours. A converted islander, a 'fellow heir to heaven', was raised immeasurably in the scale of being.

The difficulties experienced in preaching the gospel to a linguistically and culturally highly heterogeneous group of Melanesians were never fully understood. Seemingly successful conversions by means of Pidgin English during the Queensland period may have been wishful thinking on the part of the mission rather than reality. One is reminded of the discrepancy between the perceived communicative success and the actual total misunderstanding of missionary teaching discussed by Lawrence (1965: 85–85). These misunderstandings became evident when cargo movements erupted in Melanesia after decades of contact (see Steinbauer 1971).

Problems experienced by the missions operating in Melanesia would seem to be due to the widespread privileging of production over perception in linguistics and language planning. Like other inventors of simplified Englishes, the creators of Basic did not carry out experiments into the intelligibility of their creation and the various products of the SSEM were also not inspired to investigate how they were actually understood. The apparent success of the mission work was due to the emotional appeal of relatively superficial forms of religion, e.g. singing and ritual rather than understanding.

Technical knowledge needed for language simplification was largely absent before 1930. A comprehensive inventory of what made English difficult for Melanesians was produced by Hitchen (n.d.), probably in the late 1960s. Hitchen addresses the problems raised by Peter Lawrence (1965) and by theoreticians of Bible translations such as Nida (1949). Hitchen also addresses the important issue of communicative style and the implicit insufficiency of any attempt to mechanically simplify the structures of a language. Very much the same criticism can be found in Clyne (2002) in addressing the question of whether English is suited to being the lingua franca of Europe. A major omission in the arguments of language simplifiers is that they neglect questions of reception. It is not clear that mechanical reduction and regularization of a language makes it easier for the hearer to process. Given that different planners have come up with a wide range of different recipes for language simplification, one needs to develop criteria for assessing their relative adequacy. Such criteria

remain unknown, even in the most recent debates, as can be seen in a discussion of optimality of Creole languages by Kihm (2000).

The ultimate question, however, is the one which Whorf (1964: 64) raised as an argument against all attempts to reduce linguistic diversity:

> I can sympathize with those who say, "Put it into plain, simple English," especially when they protest against the empty formalism of loading discourse with pseudolearned words. But to restrict thinking to the patterns merely of English, and especially to those patterns which represent the acme of plainness in English, is to lose a power of thought which once lost, can never be regained. It is the "plainest" English which contains the greatest number of unconscious assumptions about nature. This is the trouble with schemes like Basic English, in which an eviscerated British English with its concealed premises working harder that ever is to be fobbed off on an unsuspecting world as the substance of pure Reason itself. We handle even our plain English with much greater effect if we direct it from the vantage point of a multilingual awareness. For this reason I believe that those who envision a future world speaking only one tongue whether English, German, Russian or any other hold a misguided ideal and would do the evolution of the human mind the greatest disservice.

In our introduction we commented on the model of missionary language planning for language planning in general. The policies and practices of the SSEM illustrate the streamlining approach to language planning, manifested in the attempt to reduce linguistic diversity and variation and to reduce multidimensional ways of speaking to simple linguistic codes. What drove the language planning activities of the SSEM was the aim of mass conversion to Christian religion. It should be pointed out, however, as Milner (1984) comments, that the effects of these activities were limited in comparison with those of the 'new missionaries,' the administrators, ESL teachers and language planners who are engaged in present-day decisions about language policy.

There are signs that a new ecological paradigm of language planning which emphasizes the need to preserve structured linguistic diversity (Mühlhäusler 2000, 2002) is gaining wider acceptance by Pacific missions and administrations. It is, however, too early to say whether the effects of the numerous negative outsider-induced changes in the linguistic ecology of Melanesia can be reversed by local approaches to dealing with communication problems.

Notes

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1. What applies to questions of English simplification also applies to the creation of adequate writing systems for unwritten languages: an understanding of the solutions put forward by Lepsius and Müller would have benefited the advocates of phonemic writing systems.

2. Waterston (n.d. 3–4) comments that the missionary James Chalmer "once said that the town of Babel must have been in New Guinea; if so the Solomons must have shared in the confusion."

3. A key factor in language choice was often an ideological one, the belief that languages were not necessarily intertranslatable. Many early missionaries in places such as Australia deemed the local languages too primitive for mission translations and thus forced their speakers to abandon them.

4. Patteson was a personal friend and regular correspondent with Professor Max Müller of Oxford University. He adopted Müller's principles of a standard missionary writing system for unwritten languages and sought his advice on points of grammar.

5. A search of the internet for websites concerned with the simplification of English is an interesting experience. The web abounds with proposals as to how to achieve this aim; most of them are uninformed by previous work, the theoretical difficulties and the problems of implementation.

6. There were a number of key players in the missionary society with the Deck surname, and the Deck family was also related to the founder of the SSEM, F. S. H. Young.

7. Given the minor role that the SSEM played in Vanuatu, and given that it began its operations in Papua New Guinea much later, we shall ignore developments in these two territories.

8. The fluctuations observed in the missionary model are mirrored in the letters written by their Melanesian flock, where, again, one finds a continuum of language ranging from Pidgin English to an approximation of standard English.

9. Ogden 1941: 263 provides a list of the words. E. Evans and T. H. Robinson had developed principles for Bible translation. Richards argued that "150 extra nouns and adjectives permit a very dignified and faithful new translation of the Bible" (Richards 1943: 38). *The Basic Bible,* ed. S. H. Hooke, was published in 1949.

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[It has not been possible to ascertain authorship, date or place of publication for a number of documents used in this article, including the *Hymn Book*, and the *Text and Lesson Book*, and we note that there are a number of variants of these documents.]

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Zusammenfassung

Das vereinfachte Englisch der South Seas Evangelical Mission: Sozialer Kontext und strukturelle Eigenschaften

Dieser Aufsatz betont die wichtige Rolle christlicher Missionen in der Entwicklungsgeschichte der Sprachplanung. Beispielhaft dafür ist der Versuch der South Seas Evangelical Mission, ein vereinfachtes Englisch für ihre Missionsar beit im südwestlichen Pazifik zu entwerfen. Die verhältnismäßig amateurhafte Korpusplanung dieser Organisation wird mit den wesentlich systematischeren Vorschlägen Ogden's zu einem Basic Englisch verglichen.

Astingting o sameri

Wok bilong SSEM long stretim Tok Inglis i isi tru: ol i mekim wanem kain wok na ol i stretim Tok Inglis olsem wanem

Ol Kristen misinari i olsem asman bilong pasin bilong stretim tok. Ol misinari bilong SSEM i kirapim pasin bilong senisim pisin long wanpela nupela Tok Inglis. Dispela Tok Inglis (kolim Simplified English), i no hat tumas long lainim na tok longen. Tasol tingting bilong ol misinari i no stret tumas. Dispela nupela tok Inglis i kranki liklik na i no inapim narapela tok, kolim Basic English.

Resumo

Simpla angla lingvo en la Sudmara Evangelia Misio: Socia kunteksto kaj lingvaj karakterizoj

La ĝenerala celo de tiu ĉi kontribuo estas prilumi la gravan rolon de kristanaj misioj en la evoluo de lngvoplanado. Ni tion dokumentas per kazostudo: la klopodo de la Sudmara

Evangelia Misio (South Seas Evangelical Mission) ellabori simpligitan anglan lingvon meze inter piĝina angla kaj plena Norma Angla por sia misia laboro en sudokcidenta Pacifiko. La relative naiva aliro al korpusa planado fare de tiu ĉi organizaĵo kontrastas kun la pli ellaboritaj proponoj de Ogden rilate al Basic English.

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