

# Marcin Walczyński

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Acta Neophilologica 9, 73-80

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2007

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**Marcin Walczyński**

Institute of English Studies  
Wrocław University

## SELECTED WORD-FORMATION PROCESSES IN TOK PISIN: COMPOUNDING, CONVERSION AND REDUPLICATION<sup>1</sup>

**Key words:** Tok Pisin, pidgin, compounding, conversion, reduplication

The present article scrutinises the linguistic research on word-formation processes in Tok Pisin – the major pidgin language in Papua New Guinea. In the first part of this work, a few important facts about the very language – Tok Pisin – are given. Then, the article presents selected word-formation processes that are employed in Tok Pisin. The attention is focused only on the most interesting word-formation processes<sup>2</sup>, and thus, only compounding, conversion and reduplication are discussed.

### 1. Tok Pisin – Neomelanesian Pidgin English of Papua New Guinea

Tok Pisin, which is also known as: Neomelanesian Pidgin English, Papua New Guinea English (e.g. Hall 1974; Laycock 1970), Tok Vaitiman (Mühlhäusler [1986] 1997) Tok Pisin (e.g. *ibidem*, Romaine 1992, Romaine 1994, Sebba 1997) or Talk Boy (Laycock 1970) is a representative of languages which are called pidgins/creoles. The study of these tongues is usually referred to as *Creolistics* (Swann et al. 2004)<sup>3</sup>.

Tok Pisin is the major pidgin language in Papua New Guinea and, what is more, it functions as one of the key lingua francas of the area (where more than 700 various tongues are used (Romaine 1992)). Neomelanesian Pidgin English has emerged owing to a number of socio-cultural factors. The first phase of its development is closely connected with the European colonisers who came to the Pacific in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to

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<sup>1</sup> The author is greatly indebted to professor Tadeusz Szczerbowski of Kraków Pedagogical University for reviewing the paper, suggesting some improvements and drawing the author's attention to some interesting aspects of the discussed material.

<sup>2</sup> The results of the remaining parts of the research will be published elsewhere. The selection of the word-formation processes to be discussed in this paper was governed by the fact that they were of particular interest to the author.

<sup>3</sup> J. W. M. Verhaar published Tok Pisin grammar (*Toward a Reference Grammar of Tok Pisin: An Experiment in Corpus Linguistics* (1995)), to which the author had no access while working on the presented material.

make business (Holm 2000). They wanted to communicate with the indigenous people of Papua New Guinea, but due to the lack of a common medium of verbal communication, they used a reduced, and thus, simplified form of English. The Melanesians, who were interested in business contacts with the Europeans, learnt English vocabulary, however, with little grammar. In consequence, they created a mixture of languages with English lexicon and grammatical rules derived from local tongues of Papua New Guinea (e.g. Malay, Tolai), which gave rise to Pidgin English (e.g. Romaine 1992, Wurm 1987).

As for Tok Pisin lexicon, whose certain aspects are discussed in this paper, it has been estimated that the common stock of Tok Pisin vocabulary consists of approximately 1,500 items (McMahon 1994). It is composed mostly of items whose origins can easily be traced back to the English language, however, there are also some elements which are derived from German, Portuguese, or indigenous Austronesian systems like Tolai and Malay (Romaine 1992). The lexicon of Tok Pisin is subject to constant changes due to the virtually unlimited access to English – through the media, the Internet as well as higher education. Nowadays, it can no longer be claimed that Tok Pisin lexis is highly restricted and may be successfully used only in certain domains. The evidence provided by Suzanne Romaine (1992: 146) clearly indicates that even in Tok Pisin there are idioms or specialised vocabulary (e.g. *go siksti* – *go rapidly*, *fetilaisa* – *fertilizer*). Interestingly enough, the speakers of Neomelanesian Pidgin English have created a number of euphemistic expressions like, for instance, *troimwe ekskrisha*, (*to defecate*) or *kapsaitim wara* (*to urinate*) (Romaine 1992: 148). It seems that the advertisements in Tok Pisin follow the western tradition of using many euphemisms to express concepts for which Tok Pisin has also "normal", everyday names (*ibidem*).

The development of Tok Pisin vocabulary is strictly connected with the social and historical factors that have been affecting Papua New Guinea and its inhabitants. The influence of the contacts with English-speaking people from Europe and Australia is now well visible in the fact that the main parent tongue – the lexifier language – is English. Many words that are nowadays used in Neomelanesian Pidgin English are of English origin. What is more, sometimes they are quite significantly altered, often also simplified. Similarly, German words were introduced to the lexicon of Tok Pisin because, as Mühlhäusler, Dutton and Romaine claim (2003), in the past Papua New Guinea was under the German control. What is interesting, in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as much as 25 per cent of the whole vocabulary was of German origin. Furthermore, it is claimed that if German control over the territory lasted longer, there is a great chance that pidginised German might have been created.

## 2. The methodology of Tok Pisin word-formation processes research

The analysis of word-formation processes was conducted on the basis of 17 pieces of news (from November 28 and 29, 2004) written in Tok Pisin and downloaded from the official Internet website of ABC Radio Australia, Australian Broadcasting Corporation in November 2004 (<http://www.abc.net.au/ra/>).

For the examination of each of the word-formation processes, a number of representative examples were selected. The selection of lexical items was governed by the

probability of the involvement of a particular word-formation process in the creation of this word as well as by the frequency of occurrence of this item in the texts.

Each text was thoroughly examined to find out whether the lexemes used in the pieces of news exhibit a particular word-formation mechanism. If it was possible to claim with a high degree of certainty that a word-formation process was employed in creating particular items, those items were chosen as exemplification. However, if the structure of a given lexeme was interesting enough but there was little or no evidence in favour of the operation of a specific word-formation mechanism but only the assumption that this process could have had some impact on the formation of the word being analysed, it was decided to put this word in the body of the analysis as a possible example with appropriate comments.

Different possible cases of a given word-formation process were considered and exemplified by the items which occur in the texts. To stress the importance of the illustration, it should be said that no word not used in the texts under discussion was provided as an example.

What should be said, however, is that the analysis encompassed all word-formation mechanisms (including the operation of multiple processes), but for the purpose of this article, only compounding, conversion and reduplication were selected as they, arguably, seem most interesting.

### 3. Compounding in Tok Pisin

Compounding is usually referred to as a process of joining two words to produce one lexical item which usually bears the meaning (often only partial) of the separate elements that were used to form a compound. Yule claims (2000) that such languages as English or German exhibit a great deal of compounding whereas in French or Spanish compounding is less widespread. In Tok Pisin, which consists of many English elements and a few of German origin, compounds are not so frequent, however, the analysis has revealed that there are a number of clear examples of compounds in Neomelanesian Pidgin.

The interesting instances of compounding are those which contain *man* (meaning: *man, person*). The following compounds of this kind have been detected:

- (1) *mausman* (*spokesman*) < *maus* (*mouth*) + *man*,
- (2) *saveman, mansave* (*clever person, learned person*) < *save* (*know, understand*) + *man*,
- (3) *wokman* (*worker, workman*) < *wok* (*work, job*) + *man*.

The example in (2) consists of two elements: *saveman* and *mansave*. These two words have been considered compounds, however, from the contexts of the texts in which both of the elements appear, one may conclude that the meanings of *saveman* and *mansave* are almost the same, however, it would be probably appropriate to assume that the use of these words is governed by some (unknown to the author) principle.

The other group of compounds that have been identified in the corpus includes the word *taim* (meaning: *time*):

- (4) *kwik-taim* (*quickly, urgently, rightly, shortly*) < *kwik* (*quick*) + *taim*,
- (5) *pastaim* (*first, firstly*) < *pas* (*forward*) + *taim*,
- (6) *wantaim* (*together*) < *wan* (*one*) + *taim*.

As for the meanings of compounds with *taim*, they rely on the context of utterances. Hence, it might be claimed that, although *taim* does not have too many meanings, it is difficult to determine what a given compound means only on the basis of the meanings of both parts of the compound.

Another set of the examples of compounding is composed of *tok* (meaning: *say* or *message*) and some other element:

- (7) *tokaut* (*reveal, divulge*) < *tok* + *aut* (*out*),
- (8) *toklukaut* (*warn, caution*) < *tok* + *lukaut* (*look out*),
- (9) *toksawe* (*explain, also advertisement*) < *tok* + *save* (*know, understand*).

Yet, one peculiar word has been found:

- (10) *sit-paia* (*ashes*) < *sit* (*remains*) + *paia* (*fire*).

The lexeme *sit-paia* is certainly a compound. Its first part *sit* stands for *the remains*, so etymologically *sitpaia* (*ashes*) means "something that remains of fire".

On the other hand, during the analysis a number of compound-like words have been found. They seem to have been formed as a result of compounding but, in fact, they do not display many features commonly attributed to compounds. The following words of this type have been analysed:

- (11) *gohet* (*go ahead*),
- (12) *hariap* (*hurry up*),
- (13) *kamap* (*arrive, come up*),
- (14) *kamaut* (*come out*),
- (15) *pundaon*<sup>4</sup> / *pudaun*<sup>5</sup> / *pundaun* (*fall down*),
- (16) *sidaun*<sup>6</sup> / *sindaun* (*sit down*).

The lexemes (11)-(16) cannot be classified as compounds because they are the words in which the particle was assimilated with the verb. Therefore, at first glance, they may be regarded as the instances of compounding, but after a thorough analysis it is apparent that they are verbs with particles – not compounds.

Apart from the above discussed kind of verbs which seemingly are compounds, other words of similar nature have been recognised:

- (17) *antap* (*up, high, on top*),
- and numerals:
- (18) *nain-tausan* (*nine thousand*),
  - (19) *wanpela-ten* (*seven (seventeen)*).

<sup>4</sup> The original spelling.

<sup>5</sup> The original spelling.

<sup>6</sup> The original spelling.

As it has been indicated, the examples (17), (18) and (19) do not belong to the words whose formation is connected with compounding. They have been assimilated only orthographically but their semantics has not changed. Therefore, the lexemes (11)-(19) are not instances of compounding.

To sum up, the word-formation process of compounding is present in Tok Pisin. Although only a few examples have been identified in the texts under discussion, the words presented above bear witness to the fact that compounds are used in Neomelanesian Pidgin English of Papua New Guinea.

#### 4. Conversion

Providing a definition of conversion, Bauer claims (1993: 227) that "[c]onversion is the use of a form which is regarded as being basically of one form class as though it were a member of a different form class, without any concomitant change of form".

The observation of conversion in Tok Pisin is quite difficult because there is no available source on the evolution of Tok Pisin lexicon, with particular attention paid to the functional shift (as conversion is sometimes referred to).

The examples presented below can be indicative of the fact that a number of lexical items have undergone the process of conversion. What should be stressed here is that it is very difficult to establish a historical relation of the converted words/phrases, which means that it cannot be easily determined which function (i.e. grammatical class) of a given form developed first.

The process of conversion could have occurred in the following lexemes and phrases:

- (1) *bilong* (preposition indicating possession) vs. English *belong*,
- (2) *dai pinis* (die) vs. *i dai pinis* (dead),
- (3) *strongim* (promote) vs. *strong* (loud, hard, strong),
- (4) *toktok* (conversation, talk (n)<sup>7</sup>) vs. *toktok* (speak, talk (v)),
- (5) *wantaim* (together) vs. English *one time*.

In (1) conversion could possibly have taken place because today in Tok Pisin *bilong* is not used as a verb but as a preposition indicating possession, thus:

- (6) *pipal bilong Manam Islands* (the people of Manam Islands).

In (2) conversion is well observable due to the fact that the phrase *dai pinis* relates to demise but *dai pinis* and *i dai pinis* differ in function: the former is a verb while the latter – an adjective. The examples (3) and (4) exhibit conversion, as well. Both of the items are used in modern Tok Pisin. The word numbered (3) has undergone conversion probably in the direction from *strong* to *strongim* (*strong* is, arguably, more likely to have been borrowed from English because there is no English verb corresponding to *strongim*<sup>8</sup>)

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this paper (v) stands for "verb" whereas (n) stands for "noun".

<sup>8</sup> *strengthen* is not considered here to be a corresponding verb to *strongim* because of different orthographic and phonological representation. Unlike *strong* + *im*, *strengthen* could have been problematic to pronounce for the first speakers of Tok Pisin.

whereby the change of the grammatical class of the word proceeded. The example (4) is the clearest instance of conversion: *toktok* is today used both as a verb and a noun, though, probably in the past first a verb was used (due to the similarity between English *talk* (v) and *toktok*). It could also be argued that (5) was formed in a very similar way – by changing the function and meaning of a borrowed lexeme. However, this hypothesis of *wantaim* having been converted from English *one time* needs more research and evidence.

The above instances clearly show that Tok Pisin makes use of conversion. The examples (1)-(6) can well validate the claim that this process has contributed to the development and expansion of Tok Pisin lexicon.

## 5. Reduplication

The word-formation process of reduplication involves "(...) repetition of all or part of a word or morpheme with special semantic effect, typically to denote frequency, intensity or plurality" (Swann, Deumert, Lillis, Mesthrie 2004: 257). Reduplication, though this distinction is made only during very thorough studies of morphology, can be partial – with only a part of the base repeated, or complete – when the whole base is reduplicated (Matthews 1993).

Among the well established systems like English, German or Spanish, only few make use of reduplication. This mechanism, however, is present in many languages of Melanesia and Oceania, as well as in pidginised and creolised tongues, therefore, it is to be found in Tok Pisin.

In the texts written in Tok Pisin which are now under discussion, there are a few instances of reduplication. Partial reduplication, that is, the iteration of only a part of a morpheme, has not been identified in Tok Pisin texts at all. On the other hand, complete reduplication is quite frequent. In the researched corpus, several different items have been found. Although their number is not impressively large, it is worth saying that they are used quite often. The following instances of reduplication have been recognised:

- (1) *lukluk* (*look at, look after, watch*) vs. *luk* (*look*),
- (2) *tingting* (*opinion, thoughts*), *passim tingting* (*decide*) vs. *ting* (*think*),
- (3) *toktok* (*conversation, talk*) vs. *tok* (*talk (v), say*).

In the examples above, it has been shown that there might arise a great deal of ambiguity if the process of reduplication was not employed. In (1), (2) and (3) reduplication is used to differentiate between two items whose pronunciation in Tok Pisin is very similar.

On the whole, the reason for using reduplication may probably lie in the fact that the phonology of Tok Pisin is quite limited and lacks many sounds which are common to English. For instance, there is no distinction between /s/ and /ʃ/ or long and short vowels – this is likely to have contributed to the development of the mechanism of reduplication in Tok Pisin. The next example can be the fact that there is no distinction

between /i:/ and /i/, and therefore, there is no possibility to avoid ambiguity between such words as *sheep* and *ship*. To avoid this, reduplication has been introduced, and as it has been presented above, this mechanism functions well and is helpful in distinguishing between two, sounding alike in Tok Pisin, words.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of Tok Pisin texts have provided substantial evidence to the hypothesis that a variety of word-formation processes play the role in the development and expansion of the vocabulary of Neomelanesian Pidgin English. Among these processes, special attention is directed to compounding, conversion and reduplication, which have been very crucial in developing the vocabulary of Tok Pisin.

Apart from the mechanisms characteristic of pidgin and creole languages like reduplication, Tok Pisin makes use of abbreviation, affixation (specifically suffixation), heavy borrowing (mostly from English, though, the words from German, Portuguese and local indigenous languages are also found), compounding and conversion. Furthermore, many lexical items in the corpus of Tok Pisin texts exhibit the multiplicity of word-formation processes. In other words, it is possible to determine that the creation of a particular lexeme is the result of a few different word-formation mechanisms.

The interesting thing, however, is that no instances of blending, back-formation and coinage have been encountered. Tok Pisin is very heavily anglicised and it is the English language which is used to name new concepts. Therefore, the majority of new words which function in Tok Pisin are borrowings from English. This can well account for the lack of coined words in the corpus of researched Tok Pisin texts. Furthermore, the analysis of Tok Pisin text has not led to the identification of blends in this language. Nevertheless, it cannot be explicitly argued that blending is not employed in Tok Pisin whatsoever. The text samples under discussion do not contain blended words but it does not mean that no blends are to be found in the whole lexicon of Tok Pisin. While analysing the corpus of the texts written in Tok Pisin, it has come to be revealed that there are no such items which are the results of back-formation. This may be explained by the fact that back-formation is also not so frequent in English – the lexifier language of Tok Pisin.

To conclude, the research into Tok Pisin lexicon, in particular, word-formation processes has provided a good deal of evidence to validate the claim that Tok Pisin cannot be considered worse or inferior to English in any respect. This claim can also be strengthened by the fact that there have been a few worthwhile publications presenting the complexity of Tok Pisin grammar and lexicon. Among them, the most important works are: *Handbook of Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin)* (1985) by S. A. Wurm and P. Mühlhäusler (eds.) and *Toward a Reference Grammar of Tok Pisin: An Experiment in Corpus Linguistics* (1995) by J. W. M. Verhaar.

What it more, the present analysis has revealed that Neomelanesian Pidgin English has its own oddities, which makes this language as complex as any other natural system used all over the globe.

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## Summary

The present article scrutinises the linguistic research on word-formation processes in Tok Pisin – the major pidgin language in Papua New Guinea. In the first part of this paper, a few important facts about the very language – Tok Pisin – are given. Then, the article presents selected word-formation processes that are employed in Tok Pisin. The attention is focused only on compounding, conversion and reduplication. Each word formation mechanism discussed in this paper is illustrated by a number of examples. The examples are derived from the corpus of 17 news items written in Tok Pisin and obtained from the official Internet website of ABC Radio Australia, Australian Broadcasting Corporation in November 2004 (<http://www.abc.net.au/ra/>).