

Terry Crowley, *Beach-la-Mar to Bislama: The Emergence of a National Language in Vanuatu*. Oxford Studies in Language Contact. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1990. Pp. xxii, 422, maps, tables, bibliography, index. US\$98.00 cloth.

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The Vanuatu Constitution declares Bislama to be the national language of the republic, and one of the three official languages (alongside English and French).¹ As Crowley notes (p. 1), this means that Vanuatu is the only Pacific state or territory "in which a non-European language has a constitutional status higher than" a metropolitan or excolonial language, and one of the few countries in the world where a pidgin or

creole has this status. In a country with one hundred or more indigenous languages (Tryon 1976), which was jointly administered by Britain and France before independence in 1980, and with political tensions (then and now) between anglophone and francophone citizens, the choice of Bislama as a politically and regionally neutral language was a good one.

Crowley's aims are to "chart the history of Bislama" over the last 150 years, examining the role of ni-Vanuatu in the development of the language, and to "look at some of the changes that are taking place so rapidly in the language today." His "credentials" for writing on the history and development of Bislama are impeccable. He has conducted extensive descriptive research on one Vanuatu language (Paamese) and comparative research on Oceanic languages within and outside Vanuatu; he lived in Vanuatu for a decade or more, speaking Bislama on a daily basis; and he has published what has become the authoritative dictionary of that language (Crowley 1990), as well as the only grammar (Crowley 1987, which is written in Bislama).

After an initial introductory chapter, Crowley devotes three chapters to various aspects of language contact. Chapters 2 and 3 divide the period of contact into a preplantation period and a plantation-cum-colonial period, with 1865 the watershed year. Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the Bislama lexicon, outlining the various source languages for Bislama vocabulary and the nature and extent of their contributions. The next two chapters are devoted to the grammar of the language, chapter 5 dealing with earlier stages of the language and chapter 6 with more recent developments. The final chapter is retrospective, covering a number of recurrent themes: the nature of Beach-la-Mar (the name given to the earlier, perhaps less stable, variety of the language), the role of women in the development of the language, and the way in which the language, even though not originally a "native Melanesian" one, functions as an expression of Melanesian identity.

Crowley is at pains "to stress the Melanesian side of the development of the language," stating clearly in his introduction that "Bislama is undeniably a Melanesians' language--and a Melanesian language--and it is certainly no mere broken English, despite the claims of its detractors in the past" (p. ix). This thread, which runs through the whole book, is an extremely important one. Too often, accounts of pidgin or creole languages emphasize the contribution that (usually European) lexifier languages have made and underplay the contribution of the substrate languages. Too often also, the role of the speakers of those substrate languages in the maintenance, development, expansion, and enrichment of creole languages has been ignored. One of Crowley's

achievements is to place in proper perspective these contributions to the development of one such language.

Crowley's discussion of the origin of Bislama vocabulary (chapter 4) is of particular interest in this regard. He gives the proportion of Bislama words derived from various languages as follows: ² English-derived, 84-90 percent; Melanesian-derived, 3.75 percent; French-derived, 6-12 percent; and other, 0.25 percent. A couple of comments are necessary. First, most Bislama words that are ultimately, of Portuguese origin (like *pikinini* 'child' or *kalabus* 'jail') were not derived through contact with Portuguese, since these words were already in the South Seas Jargon-- the variety of pidginized English spoken in the early nineteenth century. (A similar comment can be made about words of Polynesian origin, like *kava* 'kava' and *taro* 'taro'). Second, Crowley goes to considerable lengths to track down the source (or, in many cases, possible sources) of the Melanesian-derived items. He shows that the languages of Efate and the Shepherds, and also those spoken in the Pentecost-Ambae-Maewo region, have been the main contributors to the vocabulary of Bislama, with some input also coming from Santo, Malakula, and the Banks; the languages of the extreme north and the extreme south, however, as well as those of Epi, Ambrym, and Paama have made negligible contributions.

Another feature of the book is the detailed attention to the development of the language--both lexically and grammatically--over the decades. Of particular interest in this regard is the attention Crowley gives to the influence of vernacular substrates on the grammar of Bislama. To give one example only: he shows that there are a number of transitive verbs in Bislama that also have a prepositional function when used in serial constructions. The Bislama verb *kasem* 'get; reach, arrive at', for example, may be used prepositionally with the meaning 'as far as, until', as in:

Sip ia i ron kasem Santo
 'This ship went/goes as far as Santo'

Crowley points to exact parallels in Vanuatu languages like Paamese (p. 328):

S̄iv koanik muloh rokol out Santo
 ship this it-ran it-touch place Santo
 'This ship went as far as Santo'

The book is well presented, with examples clearly set out and with footnotes at the bottom of each page rather than tucked away at the back. One criticism, though, concerns the lists of French-derived vocabulary (pp. 113-128), where comments on individual items occur as normal text in the middle of the lists: these might perhaps have been better treated as footnotes, or moved to the end of each list.

Despite its relatively high cost--but what good books are cheap these days?--this is an extremely valuable addition to the literature on Melanesian Pidgin and on pidgin/creole studies generally. But it is more than that: Because of the attention paid to the effects on the language of interethnic contact and social and political developments in Vanuatu, it is also a valuable contribution to the social history of the Pacific.

NOTES

1. Vanuatu was known as the New Hebrides before independence; its citizens are referred to as ni-Vanuatu. Bislama is probably the most generally accepted name of the language today, though other names have been used in the past (see pp. 26-33, for example): it is often spelled Bichelamar in French, and many people pronounce the *s* of *Bislama* as *sh*.

2. The rather large range given for English- and French-derived vocabulary is due to the fact that quite a number of Bislama words--like *bang* 'bank', *sigaret* 'cigarette', or *futbol* 'football'--might have come from either English or French (or, indeed, from both simultaneously).

REFERENCES

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