

Review: DEREK BICKERTON
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Was it Don Laycock or Chris Corne who once complained bitterly about the " 'Podean bias" in pidgin and creole studies? Whoever it was, they will have less cause for complaint following the appearance of this handsome volume, which goes a long way toward redressing the balance between the northern and the southern hemispheres in that field.

Keesing is an anthropologist whose modesty about his linguistic attainments is uncalled-for: He may not be up on the latest jargon, but

his account of linguistic structures in Oceanic and pidgin/creole languages is admirably thorough, clear, and convincing. His work represents a fascinating detective story that reveals, with a wealth of detail, the growth and development of Melanesian Pidgin (MP) from its earliest stages.

For linguists directly involved in the study of MP, a major interest of the volume will be Keesing's stance on the relationship between Tok Pisin and other MP varieties. Briefly, he claims that Melanesian Pidgin was developed during the early to middle years of the nineteenth century mainly by Pacific Islanders who worked on sailing ships as members of English-speaking crews. Most of these sailors were from central Pacific islands where nowadays no form of pidgin is spoken, for example, Pohnpei, Kosrae, Mokol, Rotuma, and the Gilbert Islands. Accordingly, the nascent pidgin was strongly influenced by the languages of those islands, which fall into the group referred to by Pawley (1977) as "Remote Oceanic." Keesing's first few chapters trace these early contacts in considerable detail and contain much that should be of interest to historians of the Pacific, as well as to anyone who is interested in the relationships among nineteenth-century Europeans, Micronesians, and Polynesians.

Keesing believes that this mid-Pacific pidgin stabilized during the second half of the century and spread to New Guinea, the New Hebrides, and the Solomon Islands as well as to the plantations of Queensland and Samoa, thus serving as the ancestor of all the pidgin varieties subsequently spoken in Melanesia. His thesis thus stands in direct opposition to that proposed by Mühlhäusler (1976, 1978), which claims that Tok Pisin evolved on Samoan and Australian plantations and hence is of different lineage to the other pidgins of Melanesia.

Keesing establishes very clearly, with a range of data extending widely over time and space, his claim that MP had stabilized and (to some extent) complexified by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and that many constructions that were already characteristic of it (for instance, what he refers to as "subject-referencing pronouns," perhaps better regarded as subject-agreement markers, and "transitive suffixes") were later adopted both by Tok Pisin and by the pidgins of the Solomons and Vanuatu. As he points out, any alternative would have to hypothesize convergent evolution in all three places, a development the improbability of which casts strong doubts on Mühlhäusler's scenario. Keesing also provides evidence for supposing that MP was able to stabilize and complexify more rapidly than most recorded pidgins because its original substrate was highly homogeneous.

The only weak link in this argument is the paucity of Keesing's citations from the Remote Oceanic languages that are supposed to have formed the original substrate of MP, as opposed to the indigenous languages of the areas in which varieties of MP are currently spoken. For instance, no Gilbertese or Rotuman sentences are cited, while there is only one from Mokilese and four from Pohnpeian; however, Kwaio, language of the Solomon Islands in which Keesing is fluent, is cited constantly, and we are periodically reassured that the Remote Oceanic languages pattern in a similar way to it. To clinch his argument, he should have paralleled his citations of mid and late nineteenth-century pidgin with citations of similar structures in the indigenous languages of those islands in which he claims that MP originally developed. I leave to experts in the field of Oceanic languages the task of determining whether the grammatical structures of Remote Oceanic languages are as similar to those of the indigenous languages of the Solomons and Vanuatu as Keesing claims. a

The remainder of Keesing's work consists in explaining the data that gave rise to the Mühlhäusler position: the differences that nowadays exist between varieties of MP in Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, and Vanuatu. Keesing claims that a single original MP developed distinct varieties through the influence of idiosyncratic features drawn from indigenous languages in the three regions concerned. Naturally, given his own research interests and experience, this process is most thoroughly documented where it deals with the Solomon Islands variety (but see also Camden 1979 for a similar operation on a New Hebridean variety). Again, the argument might have benefited by some direct comparisons between the three varieties, but one mustn't expect too much: Comparative MP studies is just one of the new research fields that Keesing's work both suggests and provides initial data for.

It is inevitable that this book, touching as it does on important issues of language contact and language genesis, will have an impact that extends beyond the field of Pacific studies, and will be invoked in number of ongoing controversies surrounding those issues. It seems desirable, therefore, to discuss at least two such aspects of Keesing's work: its relation to substratum theory (which claims that the grammatical structures of creole languages are derived from the languages spoken by the parents of the original creole speakers) and its relation to the origins of Hawaiian Pidgin/Creole. a

Keesing himself wisely refrains from any attempt to extrapolate from MP studies to studies of pidgin and creole languages generally. Others, however, will be less cautious (see, already, Mufwene 1989). If one

pidgin/creole can be shown to have developed by relexifying substrate structures (that is, by keeping the grammars of the speakers' original languages intact but substituting an alternative, in this case an English, vocabulary), then perhaps all other pidgins and creoles can be shown to have developed in a similar way. Moreover, since the major, "universalist" alternative to this theory (that creole languages more or less directly reflect a biologically determined language-creating capacity: see Bickerton 1981, 1984) is still ideologically repugnant to many, it may seem tantalizingly easy step from "could have" to "must have." a

As Keesing's work clearly shows, however, the circumstances under which MP emerged were vastly different from those that produced the plantation creoles. In the Pacific, pidgin was built by several generations of adult speakers; Keesing notes that the process began in the latter part of the eighteenth century and that the pidgin was not fully stabilized until the 1880s. Throughout this period, and indeed until much later in most cases, pidgin speakers retained their ancestral languages, permitting a transfer of features between substrate and pidgin. Moreover, the extreme homogeneity of that substrate reinforced a set of shared patterns.

On plantations in the Caribbean and elsewhere the story was very different. Almost everywhere the substratum languages were much less homogeneous in structure and seldom persisted beyond the first generation. Long before there was time for a stable pidgin to develop, children somehow managed to generate languages of their own--languages that share with one another a wide variety of structures but conspicuously lack most of the structures characteristic of MP. In other words, the linguistic and sociolinguistic circumstances surrounding the birth of MP differed radically from those surrounding the birth of the plantation creoles. Accordingly, it is at best highly unlikely that identical language-forming processes could have operated in the two cases.

Nothing, perhaps, shows this more clearly than Keesing's contribution to the second issue: the origins of Hawaiian Pidgin/Creole. The earliest pages of his book might seem to offer support for the thesis of Goodman (1985), Holm (1986), and others that Hawaiian Pidgin derived from some external model that spread across the Pacific and the Atlantic: When Keesing points out that Hawaiian sailors were probably among the first speakers of Pacific pidgin, one can almost feel the hot breath of diffusionists on the back of one's neck. Alas for them, he subsequently provides an inventory of the "syntactic and semantic/lexical patterns of [MP] . . . represented in the texts from the 1870s and 1880s (and the earlier texts we have seen)" (pp. 48-50). Of the sixteen patterns

he lists, only two were fully shared by Hawaiian Pidgin (and one of these, *svo* order, is shared by pidgins and creoles generally) while three semantic/lexical patterns were partially shared. The remaining eleven patterns seem to have played no part in the development of Hawaiian Pidgin--at least, they are not to be found either among the few surviving pidgin speakers or among speakers of creole varieties.

In other words, even where their speakers may have been in partial contact, plantation pidgins and maritime pidgins remained two quite separate ball games. Nor should this come as a surprise: While Hawaiians worked on English-speaking ships and Hawaiians worked on sugar plantations, there is no evidence that these were the *same* Hawaiians, and good reason for supposing--since men used to the variety of a sailor's life would be unlikely to accept the monotony of sugar cultivation--that the two populations overlapped little, if at all. Hawaiian Pidgin's few lexical similarities with Pacific pidgins-- *sapos, baimbai, save,* and so on-- may have come via Pacific Islanders employed on Hawaiian plantations prior to 1876, but these islanders were too few and left too early to have had any effects on the *structures* of Hawaiian Pidgin or Hawaiian Creole.

Only a synopsis of Keesing's book could be used to support a general substratist or diffusionist position. The text itself, admirably balanced and thorough, affords no such comfort. Keesing is concerned simply to chronicle a process that, as he himself implicitly recognizes, may have been unique in linguistic history, and, unlike some other scholars, he does not attempt to make his findings carry more theoretical weight than they will readily bear. If the book has a defect, it is the complete absence of maps: Even those familiar with the Pacific will find it by no means easy to follow the tangled trail Keesing pursues in his hunt for origins. If this book enters a second edition, as it surely should, this deficiency should be removed.

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