Authenticating a Creole:
Language Ideological Debates on Tok Pisin

Christoph Neuenschwander

University of Bern

- Project and Data

- Language ideologies and authentication:
  a theoretical approach

- Examples from the Tok Pisin case study

- Discussion

Dialect Project
(Laura Tresch)

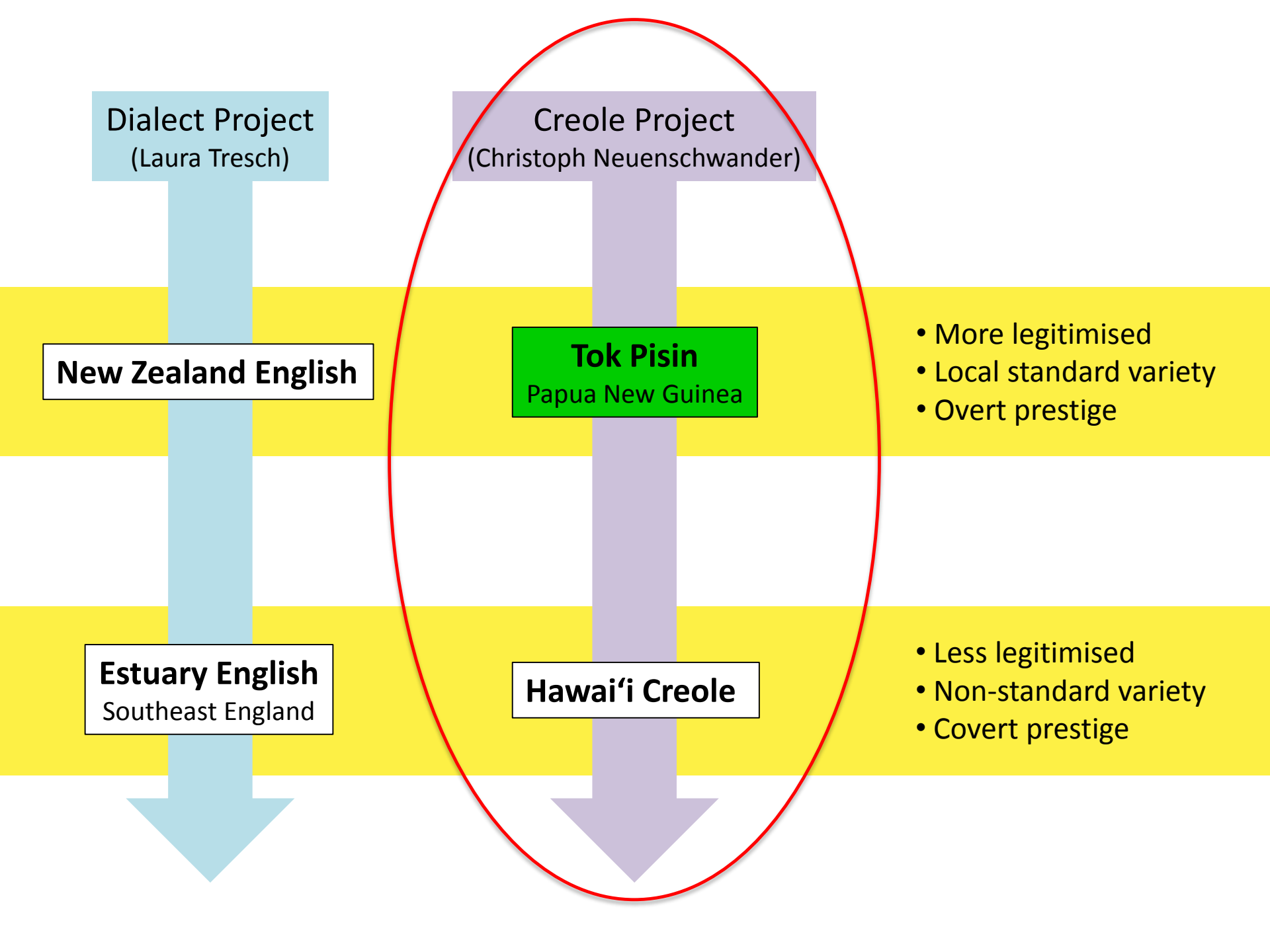Creole Project
(Christoph Neuenschwander)

New Zealand English

Tok Pisin
Papua New Guinea

- More legitimised
- Local standard variety
- Overt prestige

Estuary English
Southeast England

Hawai'i Creole

- Less legitimised
- Non-standard variety
- Covert prestige

Tok Pisin

Tok Pisin

- is an English-based pidgin spoken by 3 to 5 million of the approximately 7 million inhabitants of Papua New Guinea;

- serves as a lingua franca in an extremely multilingual environment (with about 800 local languages);

- is increasingly spoken as a first language in urban areas;

- is regarded as an expression of national identity.

How are ideologies constructed, how do they relate to social, cultural and political change?

What actual impact do these ideologies have on the status, legitimacy and perceived authenticity of Tok Pisin?

Data

Newspaper articles, editorials, letters to the editor, official written documents, blog articles and comments

Interviews

Second World War – now

includes the pre-independence phase for PNG and the pre-statehood phase for Hawai'i

includes 1960s and 70s, which are crucial in the acceptance of many non-standard varieties

Authenticity/ Authentication

Woolard (2008)

"Within the logic of authenticity, a speech variety must be perceived as **deeply rooted in social and geographic territory** in order to have value."

Kramsch (2012)

"A few decades ago, when (...) the boundaries of speech communities were more clearly delineated and everyone knew their place, legitimacy and authenticity were simple. (...) If **authenticity** means "with a **recognizable origin**," then the monolingual NS was that origin. If **legitimacy** means "authorized by a **recognizable authority**," then the monolingual NS was that authority.

Coupland (2001)

Level of authentication	Feature
Authentic language 1	Attested and attestable language
Authentic language 2	Naturally occurring language
Authentic language 3	Language encoding fact and truth
Authentic language 4	Fully owned, unmediated language
Authentic language 5	Language indexing personal authenticity
Authentic language 6	Language indexing authentic cultural membership

Language ideologies

Geeraerts (2003) points out that language ideologies are essentially cultural models that have been conventionalised to the point at which people are not aware anymore that they are only dealing with models.
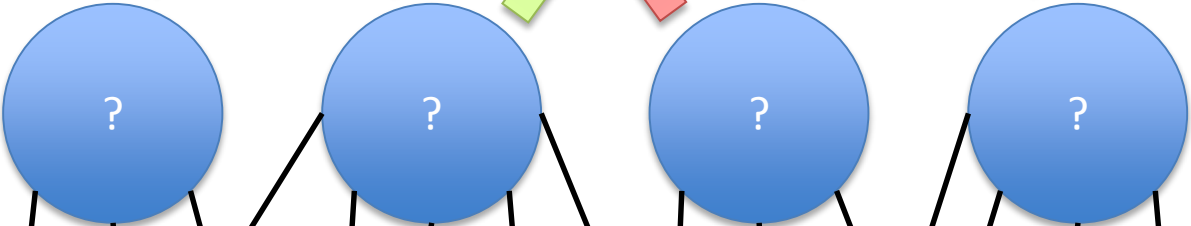
Language ideologies

Language ideologies are seen as "sets of beliefs" (e.g. Watts 2000, Woolard and Schieffelin 1994) or sets of "language myths" (Watts 2000).

→ Identifying individual beliefs is crucial in order to understand the ideological construction and representation of a variety in public discourse.
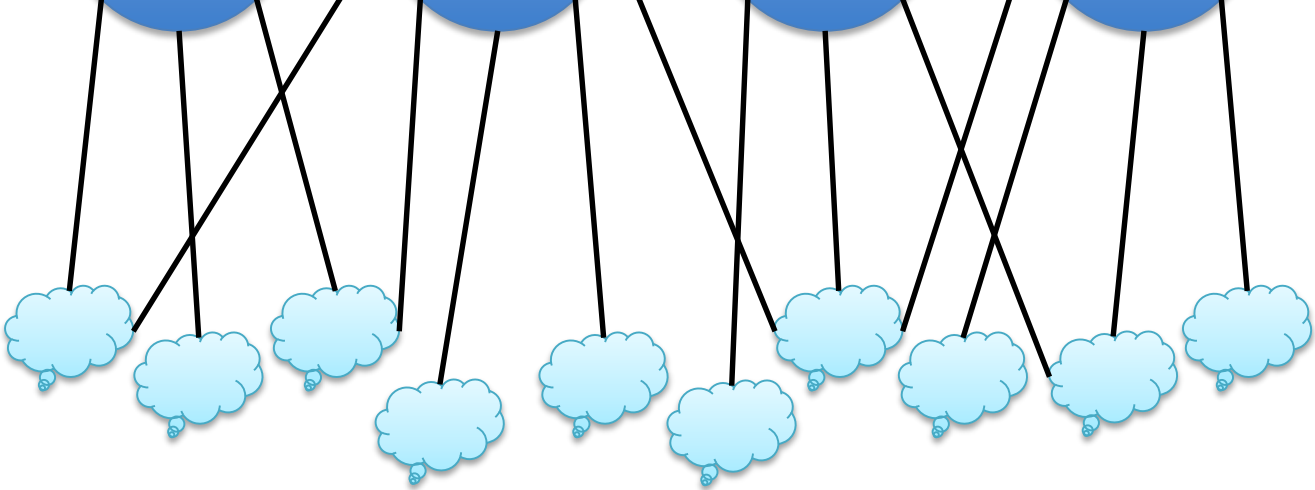
Authentication   Legitimisation   effects/ processes

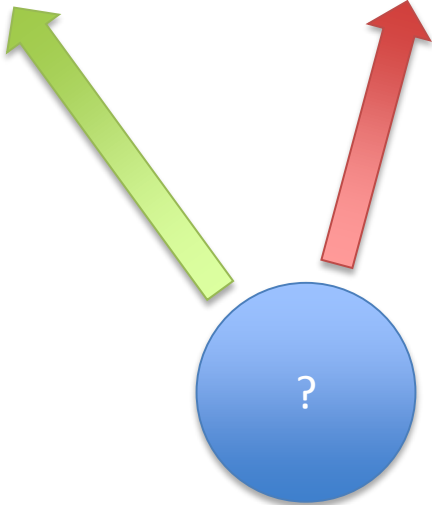?   ?   ?   ?   language ideologies

beliefs/ myths

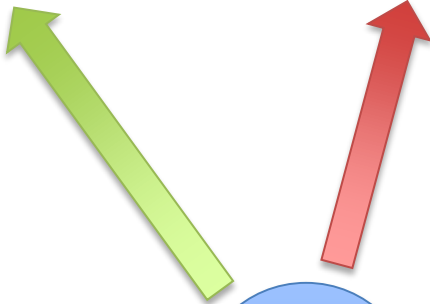| Authentication	Legitimisation	effects/ processes

?

language ideologies

Authentication

Legitimisation

effects/ processes

?

language ideologies

How is this possible?

Simplicity
promotes authenticity, but holds back legitimisation

Some examples

1950s

Towards the end of colonialism

A brief history

In 1953, the United Nations urged Australia to "eradicate this jargon", because it showed "characteristics (…) which reflect now outmoded concepts of the relationship between indigenous inhabitants and immigrant groups" (*Report on New Guinea*, 1953).

Some examples

"So **rudimentary a means of expression** causes a hobbling, a **crippling** of the most developed aspects of the **indigenous mentality**."

Leon Pignon, France, member of the UN Visiting Mission to the Australian administered Trust Territory of New Guinea, 1953, quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *South Pacific Post*

Some examples

"The simple fact, of course, is that, unrecognised both by us and by the rest of the world, pidgin English has become **a language in its own right**, and, no matter how many pious sentiments are expressed in the U.N. or elsewhere, its use and continued spread cannot be curbed."

Sidney J. Baker, philologist, July 1953, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Some examples

But: One major "reason for survival" of Tok Pisin, Baker claimed, was the "**crude simplicity of pidgin**", which made it easy to learn, and thus a more efficient communicative tool than English or German.

Some examples

"**Pidgin can be regarded as a full, mature language only if we expect the natives to settle down to their present level of culture**."

"[T]he natives themselves realise their **limitations by being restricted to pidgin** and crave instruction in English. They are coming to regard pidgin as **a badge of caste**, and resent it."

Reaction to Sidney Baker's article, letter to the editor, July 1953, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Summary

→ Regardless of whether people argued in favour of or against Tok Pisin, its simplicity was a reoccurring theme. In some comments, this simplicity was associated with the current state of Papua New Guinean culture.

→ While some imply that Tok Pisin is a language 'owned' by the people of Papua New Guinea, others see it as a colonial language, imposed by the Europeans.

Some examples

1970s

Nationhood and unity

1970s

Around independence in 1975, Tok Pisin, together with English and Hiri Motu, had been established as one of the major lingua francas.

Some examples

"**If the language is properly to fulfil its *rôle* in the new functions into which it has recently been elevated** (…), **it is imperative that it be standardised** without much delay. Its **vocabulary especially needs to be expanded and enriched** in accordance with the nature and character of the language."

Stephen A. Wurm, 1974, *Hemisphere*

The legitimacy of Tok Pisin

"**I am beginning to detest the word 'unity'.** Not because I don't believe in unity. I do. But **most of those who use the word in Papua New Guinea equate it with 'uniformity'**. I believe in unity. I will fight with my last breath against uniformity."

Percy Chatterton, missionary, politician and columnist, *Pacific Islands Monthly,* 1973.

The legitimacy of Tok Pisin

While Chatterton appreciated "the possibilities of Pidgin as a medium for creative writing", he thought it pointless to try and turn the language into "an adequate vehicle for **transacting the business of a nation caught up willy-nilly in the complexities of the 20ᵗʰ century world**."

Turning point

→Tok Pisin is seen as the language of unity, and potentially an official language.

→At the same time, the notion of Tok Pisin as a simple language is perpetuated.

Language ideologies "are being reproduced", which "may result – willingly or not – in *normalization*, i.e. a hegemonic pattern in which the ideological claims are perceived as 'normal' ways of thinking and acting" (Blommaert 1999: 10-11).

Turning point

The idea that Tok Pisin is a simple language is hardly ever questioned – because it has been deployed as an argument for and against the use of Tok Pisin.

Some examples

Today

Tok Pisin in a globalised world

Today

People regard Tok Pisin as their national language, the linguistic variety that unites Papua New Guinea and reflects the "Melanesian way".

However, Tok Pisin is marginal in the education system, and literature in Tok Pisin is limited to genres with a more oral character: poetry and short stories.

Some examples

"We continue to **bastardise both English and Tok Pisin in our search for more words** to fit into our modern Tok Pisin."

Blog comment by MD on *PNG Attitude*, 2013

Some examples

"Tok Pisin works well in shared contexts, but can be **difficult when expressing concepts because it is difficult to be precise** and concise. But this kind of **ambiguity** is a **useful trait in poetry** and metaphors are very common in Tok Pisin."

"The most important point about using Tok Pisin is that it is **uniquely Melanesian**. (…) Tok Pisin is the language expression of our lifestyle and our intermingled cultures."

MD, blog article on *PNG Attitude*, 2013

Summary

→ The 'limitations' of Tok Pisin's vocabulary are still seen as a problem; English borrowings are perceived as a corruption and threat to the authenticity of Tok Pisin.

→ Sense of inferiority: English is regarded as the language that should be used in education, literature, (international) trade, etc., because it connects PNG with the world. Tok Pisin does not.

Anti-colonialism

simplicity + no ownership + colonial oppression

→ Authentication (-), Legitimisation (-)

Functionalism

simplicity + ownership + useful at current stage
→ Authentication (+), Legitimisation (+)

Perspective: Communication within PNG, and within current (colonial) setting

Functionalism

simplicity + ownership + useless in development
→ Authentication (+), Legitimisation (-)

Perspective: Communication with outside world, and within a country that needs to keep up with modernity

Today – nationalism vs globalism

Simplicity + national identity

→ Authentication (+), Legitimisation (+)

(focus on cultural and oral production)

Simplicity + international positioning

→ Authentication (+), Legitimisation (-)

(focus on educational and written production)

Conclusion

→Globalisation is one of the driving forces against the legitimisation of Tok Pisin, because it is seen as less valuable in an international context. But it supports the authenticity of Tok Pisin as a national language.

→Pay attention to multiple and multi-facetted effects of language ideologies.

Thank you very much for your attention

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