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Attitudes towards Tok Pisin: A comparative study of male and female Papua New Guinean Students in Melbourne**Selmina Rumawak**

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Corresponding email: selmina.rumawak@yahoo.com**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the gender differences in attitudes of male and female Papua New Guinean students in Melbourne towards Tok Pisin (TP), the widely used lingua franca in Papua New Guinea, which has attracted both positive and negative views from its speakers. A language attitude questionnaire was developed to meet the aim of the research and was administered to 14 participants (7 males/7 females). The questionnaire composed of two main parts, language use and attitudes, designed to elicit information on the gender differences in language use and current attitudes to TP, that is, attitudes to importance, usage; language structure; likelihood and beliefs of using TP. For language use, results show men use more TP than women, whereas there was not much differences in attitudes of males and females towards Tok Pisin. Most men and women tended to have positive attitudes about TP, this is supported with the questionnaire findings that they perceived it as an important part of the identity of PNG, and even thought of maintaining the creole. It is worth remembering that regardless the crucial communicative role of Tok Pisin today, based on the findings, a minority of both males and females still has negative perceptions towards the creole.

Keywords: Tok Pisin, Papua New Guinea, Gender differences, Male and Female Attitudes, Language Use

INTRODUCTION

My current research focuses on gender differences in attitudes of Papua New Guineans towards Tok Pisin (TP), the widely used lingua franca in Papua New Guinea, which has attracted both positive and negative views from its speakers.

Smith and Siegel (2013) stated the following:

Like many other contact languages, Tok Pisin has received its share of abuse and has been ridiculed as a corrupted or degraded form of English, especially by expatriates in the territory in earlier years, and some of these attitudes may still persist. However, countering this is a pride in the language as one that belongs to the people of Papua New Guinea. (p.215).

A few studies and articles have been published regarding attitudes to TP in Papua New Guinea: the earlier seminal writings, presumably, were works of both Mühlhäusler (1979) and Wurm (1984), who briefly discussed indigenous¹ attitudes towards New Guinea Pidgin (NGP)². Mühlhäusler listed at least three stages of the historical account of indigenous attitudes towards NGP: the initial phase was from 1880 – 1914. The two principal beliefs in this period were: NGP was “a knowledge of the language of the whites” referred to as ‘tok waitman’, and it allowed locals “rise to a position of relative power within the colonial system”. The second period occurred in 1915 – 1941, at this stage, “NGP consolidated its status as a language for communication across tribal and linguistic boundaries”,

¹ Indigenous refers to the local or native people of Papua New Guinea.

² New Guinea Pidgin refers to Tok Pisin.

young local males were the users of NGP and indigenous believed that NGP was not the language of the whites. The final phase was in 1942 – until the time of publication, locals have ambivalent attitudes to NGP, that is, some were opposed, due to “the growing awareness that English leads to membership of the elite”; however, Wolfers (1971, as cited in Mühlhäusler, 1979) mentioned that NGP “enables the urban sophisticated and the illiterate labourer in town to converse as linguistic equals”. Moreover, Mühlhäusler stated indigenous desired “that national identity and solidarity is best promoted through the medium of NGP”.

Wurm (1984) emphasized “the important communicative role of Tok Pisin” (p.71) between various tribes and languages in Papua New Guinea, in which, it is a language of ‘solidarity’ and ‘unity’.

Piau and Holzknacht (1984) observed Papua New Guineans attitudes towards TP, Piau found that for rural PNG, TP was somewhat deemed as being a prestige language when this cohort used it with outsiders, on the other hand, in urban PNG, TP serves as a lingua franca, minimizing language barrier for diverse cultural groups of people. The author pointed out that TP is a unified identity language for PNG. Holzknacht asked some Papua New Guineans about their viewpoints on Tok Pisin, they responded as such: “liked it, enjoy speaking it, feel at ease with it, and prefer it to English” (p. 490). The information acquired here was obtained via conversation and observation in Lae, Madang, Port Moresby, and other parts of PNG. There was not any systematic survey conducted – it was entirely subjective.

Devette-Chee (2015) studied “attitudes of teachers, parents and students towards the use of Tok Pisin and vernacular languages in lower primary schools in the Kokopo District of East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea” (p. 16). Her results showed “a general feeling of appreciation and support for the use of Tok Pisin more than for vernacular languages like Tolai in the education system” (p. 16).

As far as language attitude towards Tok Pisin in PNG is concerned, little is known about gender differences in attitudes. In this paper, I present current attitudes of a sample of Papua New Guinean students towards TP, that is, their attitudes to importance, usage; language structure; likelihood and beliefs of using TP. I will, then, draw a conclusion of attitudes differences between Papua New Guinean men and women. Additionally, I will also present differences in their language use.

METHOD

This survey involved 14 participants studying across six universities in Melbourne, Australia namely: Deakin; La Trobe; Melbourne; Monash; RMIT and Swinburne; there was one undergraduate and thirteen postgraduates, comprising of seven males and seven females. The participants represented four distinct regions in Papua New Guinea (PNG): Islands, Highlands, Momase and Papua.

Main Research Question

What are the attitudes of male and female Papua New Guinean students studying in Melbourne towards Tok Pisin?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are the similarities in the way in which male and female Papua New Guinean students (studying in Melbourne) view Tok Pisin?
2. What are the differences in the way in which male and female Papua New Guinean students (studying in Melbourne) view Tok Pisin?

An attitude questionnaire was developed and adapted from three primary sources: Devette-Chee’s (2014) language use in PNG, and general attitudinal statements of two questionnaires created by Baker (1992) for Welsh context, and another by Wassink (1999) for Jamaican setting, to study Jamaicans

attitude towards Jamaican creole. The questionnaire consists of four parts: Part 1. Background Information, Part 2. Language Use, Part 3. Language Attitudes, and Part 4. Open-ended questions.

Data Collection Procedures and Management

The data collection for this study was carried out between April and June 2017. A total number of 14 questionnaires were distributed: nine of them online via emails and 5 by hand; one week was given to the participants to complete the questionnaires. The data was, then, collated in MS Excel and calculations were performed using its functions. High scores in the data analysis signify participants both positive or negative attitudes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reported language use

In this section, only an overall summary of the data was presented. The aim of the language use is to identify the widely used language between males and females, and inclination of language preference, from the three given languages: Tok Pisin, English and mother tongue. Altogether, there were 16 situations as listed in table 1 below, classified in three categories, family members and relatives, friends and public places.

As shown on figure 5 and 6 below, Tok Pisin tends to be generally employed across all situations by both users; the data suggests that Tok Pisin prevails in public situations. Generally, women use more English than men in all situations; this clearly appears in friend's category, whereas men make use of Tok Pisin in almost every situation. Unfortunately, mother tongue is the least language utilized by men and women.

Table 1: The 16 situations where Tok Pisin, English and Vernacular were used³

Family members and relatives	Friends	Public places
1. Spouse	6. Colleagues at work	12. Market
2. Children	7. Colleagues after office hours	13. Store
3. Siblings	8. Public servant in another government department	14. Bank
4. Family members at dinner	9. Friend (from another province) in a personal letter	15. Community – village meeting
5. <i>Wantok</i> /relatives	10. Friend (from same province as yours) in a personal letter	16. Church
	11. Friends in Melbourne	

³ The language use situations were retrieved from Devette-Chee (2014), except situations 3, 5 and 11 were added by me.

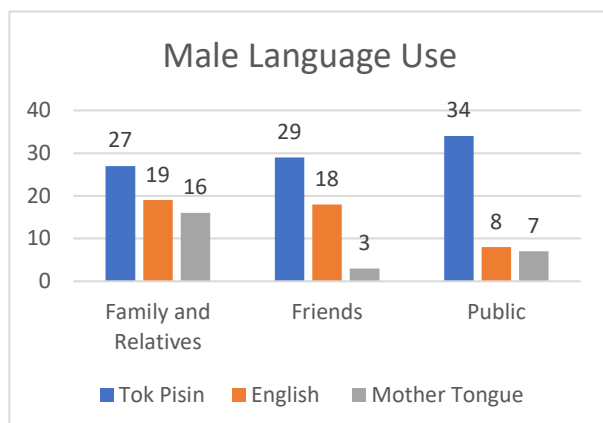


Figure 5. Male Language Use

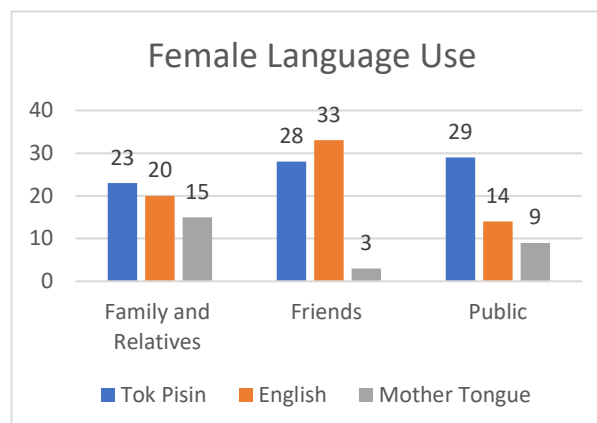


Figure 6. Female Language Use

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate the attitudes of males and females towards Tok Pisin, particularly the vitality of using the creole, their sociolinguistic perception to the language structure, likelihood and beliefs of using Tok Pisin. Participants' remarks on Tok Pisin and language use were also revealed. There was not much differences in attitudes of male and female Papua New Guinean students studying in Melbourne towards Tok Pisin. Generally, most men and women had positive attitudes about TP, this is supported with the positive comments they gave in the previous section, undoubtedly, due to the crucial role of TP, both genders perceived it as an important part of the identity of PNG, and even thought of maintaining the creole. The data suggests the confirmation of Tok Pisin by both genders as an easy language to learn, but they also tend to be ambivalent regarding the clarity. This might be due to their higher levels of education – undergraduate, masters and PhD.

Concerning likelihood of utilizing TP, males and females not only positively view speaking the creole but also hearing it. Despite that, both genders prefer reading news in English than Tok Pisin. As far as beliefs of using Tok Pisin is concerned, men and women disagreed with the statement that they are deemed a lower-class person when speaking Tok Pisin. Additionally, they were against the notion of TP's disappearance if everyone in PNG can speak it, and that Tok Pisin has no place in the modern world.

Language use between males and females has revealed some interesting facts. Tok Pisin and English are the two languages that both genders prefer using due to its effective purpose in communicating. However, the findings of the questionnaires suggest that women used less Tok Pisin than men, this finding is consistent with Swan and Lewis (1990), who found that "female university students use significantly less Tok Pisin than their male counterparts" (p.226). And this also lines up with the general sociolinguistic literature that males tend to maintain the vernacular as a form of covert prestige (H. Manns, personal communication, June 29, 2017).

Finally, it is worth remembering that regardless the crucial role of Tok Pisin today, based on the findings of the questionnaires, a minority of both males and females still has negative perceptions towards Tok Pisin.

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