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CHANGE OF LANGUAGES AS A RESULT OF DECAY AND CHANGE OF CULTURE

In a number of areas, in particular in the Pacific region, it has been observed that languages have undergone simplification processes of their usually very elaborate grammatical structures, and that such elaborate grammatical features have decayed and in some cases entirely disappeared from some languages, hand in hand with the progressing decay, and falling into disuse, of the traditional cultures of the speakers of such languages. Such phenomena of simplification and decay of grammatical complexities are most readily observable in Papuan languages of the New Guinea area and have also been found in Australian Aboriginal languages. Both these languages have very complex grammatical systems, the Papuan languages even more so than the Australian Aboriginal languages, and the multiplicity of grammatical features in them lend themselves more readily to simplification than may be the case with other languages in the Pacific area, such as Austronesian languages, also called Malayo-Polynesian languages, though such phenomena are by no means absent from them.

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Change of Languages and Change of Culture

One area of grammatical complexity in which simplification and decay of systems and forms appear to be most common is that of the classification of nouns into a number of different classes. This feature is comparable to the gender system found in Indo-European languages such as French, German, Russian, Welsh, Hindi and many others, but it is infinitely more complex in Papuan languages for instance than in Indo-European languages, with several Papuan languages showing a great multiplicity of different noun classes. In a number of languages it has been clearly observed that the classification system of nouns has its conceptual base in the traditional culture of their speakers and reflects the categorization of the world surrounding the speakers of such languages into a number of distinct units abstracted from the observable world, such as for instance trees, animals and plants of importance to the traditional native life, things connected with food production such as gardening, the utilization of water, things connected with night-time when feared spirits abound, or matters connected with persons of either sex in childhood, adolescence before initiation to the secret rituals of the tribe, or adult manhood and womanhood. Clearly, what is underlying the classification of observable objects and features, be it of nature or of human beings, reflects features of the original and traditional cultures of people who attributed certain features or values to such objects, with such features and values distinguished in the language by the assignment of separate noun classes to the words denoting them.

Other features of the grammatical structure of languages which are subject to simplification and decay, hand in hand with the gradual disappearance of the traditional cultures of the speakers of such languages, are certain characteristics of the verb structure which express aspectual and temporal relationships which are of importance to the native culture, or very exact references in the verb complex to the precise number of actors and objects acted upon.

It has been noted that the reduction, simplification and decay of the complexities in the grammatical structures, as mentioned above, tend to be increasingly in evidence with decreasing age of the speakers. The younger the speakers of such languages, the more tenuous their links with their traditional culture, and the less knowledge they possess of the cultural significance of the concepts

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on which grammatical complexities such as noun classification and complexities in the verb structure are based. In addition to their limited knowledge and appreciation of features of their traditional cultures, young people in many parts of the New Guinea area tend to be opposed to traditional features of their culture, which in some cases extend to opposition to the use of, or of certain complex features of, their traditional languages.

A few instances, discussed in general terms, of simplification and decay of complex grammatical features in languages of the New Guinea area and Australia may be mentioned as examples. The disappearance of a complex noun classification from a language was first observed by Laycock (1975) who carried out work in northern Papua New Guinea in 1970-71, in the course of which he looked at the Buna language, a Papuan language of the area. For this language, Kirschbaum (1936) had reported the presence of a very highly complex noun class system comprising twelve classes. However, in 1970-71, no trace of this noun class had remained in the language, and even old people who would have been alive at the time of Kirschbaum's work had no recollection of it any more. A similar, even more striking situation was observed by Laycock (1973) with regard to the Murik language, another Papuan language of the same area in Papua New Guinea, for which Schmidt (1953) had reported the presence of a noun class system which however, just twenty years later, had completely disappeared from the language. Another Papuan language of the same general area, Mountain Arapesch, which still showed the presence of an elaborate noun class system reported by earlier observers, was found by Laycock (1975) to be in the process of displaying a gradual breakdown of this elaborate noun class system.

Another example of a very elaborate noun class system, increasingly breaking down and decaying, is offered by the Ayiwo language of the Reef islands of the Santa Cruz Archipelago at the extreme eastern end of the Solomon Islands chain, with the breakdown and decay of the system being in direct proportion to the decreasing age of the speakers. This language, which is a Papuan language heavily influenced by Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) languages, especially in its vocabulary, has a very largely semantically based multiple-class noun classification system in which the noun classes are indicated by prefixes on the

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nouns. With sixteen of the noun classes found in the language, agreement of the noun classes marked with the nouns by prefixes, appears with adjectives, numerals and possessives, and is also found with personal pronouns, with the system of agreement to some extent comparable with that found in French or German, in which for instance adjectives, possessive pronouns and personal pronouns show gender distinction in agreement with the gender of the nouns to which they refer. The extent of this class agreement, often referred to as class concordance in linguistics, of words accompanying nouns with the class of these nouns, varies with the different noun classes, with only five of the noun classes showing full agreement of adjectives, numerals and possessives with the class of the nouns which they accompany, whereas with four further noun classes, the agreement is only observable with adjectives and possessives, but not with numerals. With five further noun classes, agreeement is present only with adjectives, and very rarely with numerals, and with two more noun classes agreement is only found with numerals.

In addition to the sixteen noun classes which show such agreement, over thirty additional noun classes have been found in the language, they are also marked by prefixes to the nouns, but adjectives and possessives are preceded by a prefix which simply indicates that they directly accompany a particular noun, without this prefix having separate forms to indicate different classes of the nouns to which they belong.

It is interesting to note that the younger the speakers, the more they tend to replace the agreement systems mentioned above by the last system in which the class of the nouns is not indicated specially with adjectives and possessives accompanying a noun. Twenty years ago, old speakers were still using agreement systems as mentioned above when speaking the language, but today even some speakers who were observed twenty years ago as using the full agreement systems, show a tendency towards free variation between the systems displaying agreement for the class of the nouns, and the system showing no such agreement.

Some examples may be given here to illustrate what has been said above. For instance, the phrase "my three small white chickens" would, in the traditional form of the language as still spoken by old people, be as follows: *vä-opwa vä-laki vä-yeve*

vä-nungo. The literal translation of the prefixes and words in this phrase would be "chicken class—white chicken class—small chicken class—three chicken class—my."

In the form of the language as used by the young generation today, this phrase would much more commonly appear as follows: *vä-opwa mi-laki eve (mi-)nungo*. A literal translation of this phrase would be "chicken class—white adjective indicator—small three (adjective indicator)—my." The *mi-* preceding *nungo* is in fact often also omitted, so that the phrase appears only as *vä-opwa mi-laki eve nungo* in the speech of members of the young generation.

Another example would be: *bo-va bo-laki bo-nyingi bo-na* "his one small young shark." A literal translation of this phrase would be: "shark class—immature shark class—small shark class—one shark class—his." This example shows how a member of the old generation, using the traditional form of the language, would express himself. In the speech as used by the young generation, this phrase would be much more commonly *bo-va mi-laki nyingi (mi-)na* which could be literally translated as follows: "shark class—immature adjective indicator—small one (adjective indicator)—his." It could also appear as *bo-va mi-laki nyingi na* with the adjective indicator *mi-* omitted before *na* "his."

It seems clear that the system showing no agreement constitutes the end result of the progressing simplification and decay of an elaborate grammatical feature in the language, and it seems likely that a few generations ago the agreement systems were much more complicated than has been described above.

Another instance of the simplification and decay of a very elaborate grammatical system is evidenced by features of the verb structure in the Island Kiwai language of the Fly River delta area of south-western Papua New Guinea, which is another Papuan language. This language distinguishes four numbers in the verb complex, i.e. singular, dual, trial and plural, which are marked by prefixes and suffixes. The number distinction applies equally to the indication of the subject and of the object in verb forms. There are six tenses, two for the past, one for the present, and three for the future, which are indicated by an elaborate system of combination of prefixes, suffixes, special tense forms of the prefixes and the suffixes indicating the number of the subject, and special tense

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forms of subject prefixes, with tense signalled several times in many verb forms. Such repeated signalling of number in verb forms is also frequently found. There are, in addition, elaborate aspects and modes of action systems present in the language, indicating that an action is performed at a certain moment, or is repeated, or continuing, or incompletely performed, etc. Also, there is indication of spontaneity of an action, of reflexivity, of the application of an action to a certain purpose, etc., as well as a complex system of habitual forms, a range of different imperative forms and many other complicated verb forms.

It is interesting to observe that with the descending age of the speakers, a simplification process of the verb morphology of the language is in progress, which means that the simplification is directly proportional to an increasing knowledge of English and increasing modern educational sophistication on the part of its speakers. Much of the simplification manifests itself through the moving of an obligatory marking of grammatical forms into an optional marking sphere. In other words, complex indication of numbers, tenses, etc. may appear sometimes, but the younger the speakers, the more they tend to reduce the number marking to singular and plural only, to use only three tenses, one for the past, one for the present and one for the future, and not to indicate many of the other categories mentioned above, in the verb forms in their speech, though occasionally they may still do so. The categories least affected by this simplification and decay process are the aspects which are usually still fairly fully indicated by young speakers in the verb forms when speaking the language.

An example from an Australian Aboriginal language may be taken from the Kamilaroi language, which formerly used to be spoken in northern Central New South Wales over quite a large area, but is now virtually dead. The language was described by several interested people almost a century ago. One of its very typical features was a highly complex tense system which, amongst others, indicated special times of the day, related to the rising and descending sun, by special forms in the verb. When the last fluent speakers of the language were interviewed and recorded over thirty years ago, it was found that much of this complex tense system, which in earlier times obviously was culturally important in connection with behavioural cycles of animals which the Kamilaroi

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were hunting, had disappeared from the language. These last surviving speakers were very old men who for decades had no longer been hunting animals, and this elaborate tense distinction relating to animal behaviour was no longer culturally significant for them and had vanished from their language as a result of this.

It seems from what has been said above that the simplification and decay of grammatical forms in a number of languages of the New Guinea area and Australia can be explained through changes in the culture of the speakers of these languages. It appears that pressure from the intrusive European culture, which gradually eliminates the traditional cultures of the speakers of such languages and replaces them by an often not fully understood version of the European culture, is primarily responsible for this. Complex traditional native concept systems become superfluous with the decay and disuse of the traditional culture, and they have no equivalents in the version of the intrusive European culture which is replacing the traditional culture.

However, linguists usually argue that changes in the structure of a language are caused by the direct influence of one language upon another in language contact situations. Many of the young speakers whose speech habits reflect the simplification and decay of grammatical complexities as described above do not know English which is the language of the intrusive European culture in that part of the world. There seems to be a contradiction in what has been said above and the usual linguist's view mentioned. However, it appears that the role of Pidgin English is playing a vital part in these developments, as outlined. Most members of the younger generation in the New Guinea area are familiar with Pidgin English. That language reflects, in its structure, native thinking and native categories, but in a very reduced form. For instance, noun class systems are not indicated in it and temporal systems appear only in rudimentary forms, though the language has elaborate aspect systems. It does seem that the change in the native concept systems is in fact due to the intrusion of the thinking-system of an alien culture, with this intrusion being carried by a special linguistic vehicle, Pidgin English, which occupies a transitory position between the two conceptual worlds. While it is essentially a native language, it is simplified in its grammatical structure and tends to indicate particular features in a generalized, often not very

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exact, way, which is in direct contrast to the over exact indication of categories in native languages. It seems therefore that in the New Guinea area there is a language contact influence through Pidgin English which serves to channel an alien concept system into the native cultural concept system while, at the same time, constituting a simplified means of expression which thereby creates pressure for the reduction of grammatical complexities in the native languages, which in the categories which they continue to use tend to select categories present in the alien concept system. This process is aided by the fact that the younger speakers of the native languages are themselves getting increasingly familiar with these alien concept systems.

To continue this argument, it is of interest to look at another typical feature of many Papuan languages, which is the presence of so-called medial verb forms in them. These are forms of verbs which are not the last verb in a sentence, but which are followed by one of several more verbs, the last of which is the final verb of the sentence. While the final verb of the sentence is fully inflected for all indications of person, number, tense, aspect and many other features, the medial forms are not fully inflected, but one or several of the features such as the person of the subject, the number of the subject, etc. have to be deduced from what is indicated in the final verb of the sentence. In many languages, there are special markers in the medial verb forms to indicate whether the subject of the medial form and that of the final verb is the same or is different, and if it is different, it is indicated what the difference is, i.e. that for instance, the subject of the final verb form is the first person, and of the medial form is the third person. There are special ways of indicating in the medial verb form the relation of the two actions, the one indicated by the medial verb form and the one indicated by the final verb form, to each other,—for instance the two actions can follow each other immediately, or they can be carried out simultaneously, or the second action may be a result of the first, etc. The combination of various possibilities of relation between the two actions, as indicated in the medial verbs, can be very complicated, and the various concepts involved in this are sometimes quite different from concepts relating to the relations between actions as expressed in European languages. These concepts in Papuan languages are anchored in the traditional

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culture and reflect the thinking base of that culture.

It has been observed that young speakers of languages containing such complex medial verb form systems tend to simplify the systems quite markedly when speaking the language and especially to discontinue using forms which reflect features of traditional cultural thinking. At the same time, they tend to start using in their speech some methods of indicating conceptual categories concerning the relations between actions which are typical of European languages and to a large extent also of Pidgin English. While Pidgin English, especially in the dialect as originally, over a quarter of a century ago, spoken in the Highlands areas of Papua New Guinea where most of the local Papuan languages have highly complicated medial verbal systems, contains structural features which reflect the thinking underlying medial verb forms in a rudimentary fashion (Wurm, 1966), it is in its basic structure more like European languages in this respect and occupies an intermediary position between the mode of expression of Western languages and Papuan languages of the New Guinea area. Two categories which are particularly affected in the medial verb forms used by young people, and in which the most obvious changes from the traditional ways of expression have taken place, are those of the distinction between identity of the subjects of the two verbs and non-identity of the two subjects, and those forms which indicate the reason of an action. In Papuan languages, the concepts of reason can differ quite radically from the concepts of reason as expressed in European languages. Here again, we clearly observe a situation in which the partial or complete loss of a traditional culture under the influence of the very different intrusive European culture has led to the adoption of concepts and ways of thinking of this culture, with this development increasingly observable with decreasing age of the native speakers of the local languages. This development is carried by the linguistic vehicle of Pidgin English acting as an intermediary linguistic tool aiding concept-transference between the two cultures.

It is particularly interesting to see that what has been said above is substantiated by observations from an entirely different area and language, i.e. modern Turkish. Turkish also has medial verbal forms of some complexity, though they are structurally simpler than those encountered in Papuan languages. Half a century ago,

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in the thirties, these medial verbal forms were used persistently in Turkish and links between verb forms which would be reminiscent of forms used in Western European languages were exceedingly rare, with the exception of some very few cases borrowed from Iranian which is also an Indo-European language and indicates the succession of actions using verb forms and syntactic constructions which are reminiscent of those found in European languages. However, the young generation of Turks today shows a marked tendency to use, in sentences containing two or several verbs, fully inflected verbs in all positions, with "and" and other conjunctions between them. The traditional medial forms also continue to be used, but to a lesser extent, and they seem to be more and more disappearing from the language of the youngest speakers. This phenomenon is particularly observable in the large cities, such as Istanbul, and it seems that what may be responsible for this development is the very strong exposure of a very large number of Turks to Western, especially German, culture, during the last decades when many thousands of Turks went to Western Europe, in particular Germany, but also to other countries, as migrant labourers, with many of them residing in those countries for decades and their children growing up in those countries and becoming very strongly westernized in their thinking and attitudes. At the same time, contact languages constituting pidginized forms of the local languages, such as Pidgin German, developed to be used in communication between Turks and the local people. This was the linguistic vehicle through which many thousands of Turks became familiar, in a rudimentary form, with the concepts underlying the thinking of the local people as they are expressed in the local languages, such as German, and with the structural categories found in those local languages. Seeing that conceptual thinking and expression in Turkish and, for instance, German are radically different, with actions being referred to through a number of successive verbs in a German sentence, with each of these verbs being coordinate with another, whereas in Turkish the last verb occupies a paramount position and the other verbs in a sentence are subordinate to it, even rudimentary attempts on the part of the Turkish speakers to express themselves in German, or another of the local languages in Europe, have had a profound influence upon their own conceptual thinking as expressed in speaking. Decades

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of exposure to this, and the acquisition of complete German by many members of the young generation, left a profound mark upon the thinking and linguistic expression of the Turks living in Europe for a long time. When many thousands of them returned to Turkey in recent years, with this trend still continuing strongly, they brought back to Turkey a new way of linguistic expression. Seeing that they were highly respected people, coming back with money, new experiences and emancipated, their way of talking was respected and imitated, especially by members of the young generation, which appears to have led to the situation as mentioned above with regard to the way in which many young Turks tend to use the language today.

What has been said above may be illustrated by a few simple examples.

In the traditional language as used by many members of the old generation, the short sentence "I entered (into) the room and sat down" is expressed as follows: *oda-ya gir-ip otur-d-um*. A literal translation of this sentence would be: "Room—into enter—medial verb suffix sit—past—I." A member of the young generation would mostly express this as follows: *oda-ya gird-d-im ve otur-d-um*. This is literally "room—into enter—past—I and sit—past—I."

Another example would be *yemek ye-yip içki iç-t-i*. This means "he ate and drank" (literally: "Food eat—medial verb suffix beverage drink—past—he"). This is the manner of expression in the traditional language as used by a member of the old generation. A member of the young generation is much more likely to express this as follows: *yemek ye-d-i ve içki iç-t-i*. In literal translation, this would be "food eat—past—he and beverage drink—past—he."

The medial suffix *-(y)ip* includes in its reference to the final verb also the negation, which in Turkish is expressed by the suffix *-me-*. So for instance in the traditional language, the sentence *yemek ye-yip içki iç-me-d-i* means "he did not eat and did not drink" (in literal translation: "food eat—medial verb suffix beverage drink—not—past—he"). A member of the young generation will tend to express this as follows: *yemek ye-me-d-i ve içki iç-me-d-i*. This would literally be "food eat—not—past—he and beverage drink—not—past—he." To annul the inclusion of a negation in the final verb into a medial verb, the particle *te* is placed after the medial verb in the traditional language. So for instance the

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sentence "he did not eat (but) he drank" would be expressed in the traditional language as follows: *yemek ye-yip te içki iç-me-d-i.* This, in literal translation, is "food eat—medial verb suffix negation annulling particle beverage drink—not—past—he." This particle *te* is only very little used in the speech of the young generation, and a member of that generation is likely to express himself as follows: *yemek ye-d-i (ama) içki iç-me-d-i.* This is, in literal translation, "food eat—past—he (but) beverage drink—not— past—he."

Here again, a situation prevails in which strong influence from a dominant culture upon another, quite different, culture, both of which are reflected in two entirely different ways of linguistic expression and the utilization of quite different structural forms and categories in speech, has produced an approximation of structural categories used in the influenced language to those used in the influencing language, with the process of this influencing carried by a linguistic vehicle intelligible to speakers of both the influenced language and of the influencing language, and which acts as a linguistic intermediary between the two cultures and ways of thinking.

It appears therefore that the reason for the simplification, decay and eventual disappearance of complex structural forms in a language is basically the result of the loss and changing of the traditional culture of the speakers of such a language under the strong influence of a dominant culture in which the conceptual categories underlying thinking are quite different from those found in the culture of the people whose language has thus been influenced. Similarly, the structural categories expressing thinking in the language belonging to the dominant culture are quite different from those expressing thinking in the language of the traditional culture influenced by the dominant culture. The presence of a linguistic vehicle acting as an intermediary between the two cultures is essential for such an influence to take place, and usually such a vehicle is in the form of a pidgin or other language characteristically serving the purpose of intercultural communication. It seems therefore that there is basically no contradiction between the view expressed here, i.e. that changes of language structure are not so much the result of language contact *per se* but mainly the question of the channelling of an alien

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thinking into the culture carried by the speakers of a language thus changed, and the view held by many linguists that changes of language structure are the direct result of language contact. While culture transference leading to the reduction and eventual ousting of a culture is the primary cause of changes of language structure as a result of changes in the conceptual structure underlying the influenced language, the direct mechanical transfer of new cultural concepts into the influenced culture, and the transference of the linguistic structures serving as a means of expression of these conceptual categories, takes place through special contact languages serving the purpose of intercultural communication.

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