

# **THE CHINESE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

**PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**



# THE CHINESE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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## **Trade, mines and language: The Chinese in Papua New Guinea**

Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald

### **Section 1: The many faces of a colonial alien: The Papua New Guinea context**

The island of New Guinea is the locus of extreme linguistic and cultural diversity: about a thousand languages spoken there belong to at least sixty families, in addition to quite a few isolates (linguistic ‘orphans’ with no known relatives). The advent of the European coloniser has added an extra dimension to this diversity. The emergence and spread of Tok Pisin—a national language and a lingua franca of Papua New Guinea (PNG), based on English—has affected the linguistic ecosystem of the country. What about the Chinese, a major group of expatriates?

The growth of Chinese immigration to PNG over the past few decades and the rapid establishment of Chinese-run enterprises are likely precursors to the emergence of special registers and new ways of speaking—a further splash of colour in the patchwork quilt of the diverse linguistic ecosystem in PNG. Two contributions to this volume, by I-Chang Kuo and by Shaun Gessler, focus on newly arising means of communication between Chinese and Papua New Guineans in the Basamuk nickel refinery in Madang Province.

When groups of people speaking different languages interact in a work or trade environment, new codes and ways of talking come about. A brief background on a few recurrent options—pidgins, creoles and foreigner talk—is in Section 2. We then offer a glimpse into Chinese-based pidgins across the Pacific and the Far East of Eurasia in Section 3. The following section addresses the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Chinese in PNG. The Basamuk ‘workplace pidgin’ (addressed in Kuo’s chapter) is the topic of Section 5. In Section 6, we turn to the features of the language of the Marmar market around Basamuk (the topic of Gessler’s chapter). The last section contains a summary.

## Section 2: Pidgins, creoles and foreigner talk: A backdrop

Throughout the process of European colonisation, people from different language groups were forced to work together as slaves or indentured workers. They would communicate with each other and with their masters using a simplified language, for limited purposes—simple commands, questions and statements. Such makeshift means of communication is known as *pidgin language* (ultimately from English *business*). A pidgin will be used in limited circumstances, most frequently for trade, and will never develop first-language learners. It will not be native to anyone (more on the development of pidgins and their linguistic features is in Parkvall & Bakker, 2013a; Winford, 2003, pp. 268–303; Mesthrie, 2008; Smith, 2002; Markussen-Daval & Bakker, 2017; and a summary in Aikhenvald, 2014, pp. 306–8; Parkvall & Bakker, 2013b contains a comprehensive bibliography on the subject).

Numerous pidgins—also referred to as trade jargons—sprang up spontaneously in various parts of the world, following the need for simple, yet efficient, communication. As Stefánsson (1909, p. 217) put it in his discussion of an Eskimo-English trade jargon of Herschel Island in Alaska,

wherever white men have remained for a year or more in definite contact with the Eskimo people there has sprung up a more or less complete system of jargon talk mutually serviceable to both parties ... At the root of many nouns ... lies an English word, but it is usually so metamorphised as to be well-nigh unrecognizable.

The ‘jargon talk’ in question was short-lived. None of the Eskimo-based pidgins (recorded from the seventeenth century until the twentieth century) have survived (van der Voort, 2013; Bakker & Grant, 1996).



A few indigenous pidgins developed outside the European colonial rule, following the need to communicate within the context of trade. These include Pidgin Swahili in Africa and Chinook Jargon in the Pacific Northwest of North America. Trade pidgins used between speakers of neighbouring unrelated languages in New Guinea include Yimas-Arafundi Pidgin (Foley, 2013), Arafundi-Enga Pidgin (Williams, 1995), Pidgin Iatmul in the Middle Sepik region of New Guinea (Foley, 1986) and the putative Kwoma-Manambu Pidgin (Bowden, 1997; Aikhenvald, 2008). These pidgins stand apart from European trade jargons in that they developed between traditional trade partners rather than in the situations of new contacts (Parkvall & Bakker, 2013a, 2013b). The impending spread of Tok Pisin, the ubiquitous lingua franca of the country, as well as English, have taken their toll; the New Guinea pidgins went into decline, and are now only remembered by a few old people.

Once speakers of a pidgin start marrying each other, a pidgin may become the main language spoken by the next generation of children (while their indigenous languages start to wither). It then expands into a fully-fledged language that would be used for all purposes—telling stories, gossiping and talking about all sorts of topics. The pidgin grows into a creole, a language that can fulfil all the functions needed. Much of the vocabulary of European-based creoles comes from a European language (their ‘lexifiers’). They will also bear the mark of those indigenous languages that must have been there in the minds of the earlier speakers of its predecessor, a pidgin. Tok Pisin is an example of a creole with English lexifier. It is believed to have emerged over a hundred years ago, on the plantations of Samoa and other areas of Melanesia, including New Britain. Its vocabulary is mostly English, with a few words from German (who controlled large areas of the New Guinea island until World War I) and Austronesian languages spoken in its birthplace.<sup>1</sup>

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1 More on the evolution of Tok Pisin is in Smith (2002), Winford (2003, pp. 289–97), and Smith and Siegel (2013). An alternative hypothesis regarding the origins of Tok Pisin in Queensland is in Baker (2001). Informal reference to Tok Pisin as ‘Pidgin’ obscures the status of the language as a fully-fledged creole, the first language, and a mark of identity, for many. The same applies to the Solomon Islands Pijin, also a creole. Another creole language, Unserdeutsch (literally, ‘our German’), or Rabaul Creole German (the only attested creole with a German lexifier), evolved in New Britain under a different set of circumstances. Unserdeutsch was developed by children from varied linguistic backgrounds in a boarding school environment as an in-group language. Following the decolonisation of Papua New Guinea, most members of the Unserdeutsch community migrated to various locations to Australia, and the language is severely endangered. A comprehensive analysis of the history and the properties in Unserdeutsch is in Maitz and Volker (2017) and Maitz (2016).

Tok Pisin is estimated to have over a hundred thousand first-language speakers, plus several million who speak it as a second language. Notably, it is the main language for workers at the Basamuk nickel refinery (Kuo, this volume) and for the women at Marmar market (Gessler, this volume)—the focus of Sections 5–6 in this chapter.

Communication between those who speak different languages may take other forms. In Ferguson's (1996, p. 177) words,

many, perhaps all, speech communities have registers of a special kind for use with people who are regarded for one reason or another as unable to readily understand the normal speech of the community (e.g. babies, foreigners, deaf people). These forms of speech are generally felt by their users to be simplified versions of the language, hence easier to understand, and they are often regarded as imitation of the way the person addressed uses the language himself.

A register of simplified speech that 'seems quite widespread and may even be universal is "foreigner talk" which is used by speakers of a language to outsiders who are felt to have very limited command of the language or no knowledge of it at all' (see Ferguson, 1996, 1981; Fedorova, 2015). Several varieties of 'foreigner talk' are in use by native speakers who communicate with immigrant workers in European countries, and in the context of teaching, occasional encounters and tourism (see Fedorova, 2015 and references there).

The mining industry offers a fertile ground for developing new means of multi-ethnic communication. The multi-ethnic composition of the workforce and specific working conditions are conducive to creating special registers and mixed dialects, often akin to 'foreigner talk' (see an overview in Cornips & Muysken, 2019; Knotter, 2015). Different mining settings produce different results. A special mining register, known as *Cité Duits*, was developed as an in-group coalminers' language in the town of Eisden in Belgium (Pecht, 2019). *Cité Duits* combines features of Southern Dutch, German and the Maaslands dialect of Flemish spoken in the area, in addition to traits not found in any of these varieties. The new varieties may serve as in-group identity marks, setting the speakers apart from the mainstream. *Cité Duits* is now moribund, due to the decline of the coalmine, not unlike special mining varieties of Dutch in the south-eastern province of Limburg in the Netherlands, of Swahili in the Katanga Region in the southeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and a mixed language based on

Quechua, Aymara and Spanish in the mines of Potosí in Bolivia (Muysken, 2019). This contrasts with Fanakalo Pidgin, which developed into a creole after being chosen as the main language of the mines (Mesthrie, 2019).

### Section 3: Chinese pidgins and trade languages

The spread of the Chinese diaspora, and the increase in trade and workplace relationships between the Chinese and the local populations, have created propitious conditions for the development of a wide variety of new languages and registers.

The best-known Chinese-based trade language is the China Coast Pidgin, or Chinese Pidgin English, sometimes referred to as ‘the mother of all pidgins’ (Ansaldo, Matthews & Smith, 2012; Matthews & Li, 2013; Mühlhäusler et al., 1996; Li, 2016, on trade pidgins in China). The language was first attested in the early-to-mid eighteenth century. The pidgin evolved as the China trade was developing, ‘with British, other European and later American Ships visiting Macau, Whampoa (now Huangpu) and Canton (now Guangzhou)’ (Matthews & Li, 2013, p. 206). The pidgin was ‘used primarily between European traders and Chinese merchants in the limited settings in which such trade was permitted’, including the treaty ports, which ceased to operate in 1949. Its main substrate language was Cantonese, with a few lexical items from Hindi, Scandinavian languages and Portuguese. World War II and the closure of the treaty ports following the Chinese Civil War:

saw the end of the linguistic ecology which had supported Chinese Pidgin English. In Hong Kong, Chinese Pidgin English continued to be used between Europeans and Chinese servants throughout the 1960s ... but was in effect extinct by the 1990s. (Matthews & Li, 2013, p. 207)

Chinese-Russian Pidgin is another well-documented instance of a simplified language variety spontaneously evolved for the purposes of trade. The pidgin—referred to as *lomanəj jazyk* (‘broken language’) or *lomanəj russkij* (‘broken Russian’) and known as Kyahta language—

was spoken between the last decades of the eighteenth and the middle of the twentieth centuries in the vast territories along the Russian-Chinese border in southern Siberia and the Russian Far East,

northern China in the city of Harbin, and along the Chinese Far East Railway built by Russia in Manchuria in 1903. (Perekhvalskaya, 2013, p. 69)

With the development of trade throughout the nineteenth century, the pidgin spread along the whole extent of the Russian-Chinese border, and was in use by various local indigenous groups, besides Chinese traders and Russian colonial settlers (Shapiro, 2010, p. 9). Inter-ethnic communication on the Russian-Chinese border was ‘abruptly interrupted in the 1930s: the border between China and the USSR was closed, many Chinese were deported from the border regions, and any such trade contacts as had previously existed became impossible’ (Fedorova, 2018, p. 84). This led to the demise of the pidgin—now extinct (with just a few representatives of Siberian minorities in the region remembering a little of it).

Chinese-Russian Pidgin was used exclusively for the purposes of trade between various groups and the collection of fur taxes in the region. As there was ‘no mass resettling of people of different nations who would have to use pidgin as the unique means of communication’, this pidgin never acquired first-language learners and thus never grew into a Creole—in contrast to Tok Pisin in PNG or the many Creoles in the Caribbean (Perekhvalskaya, 2013, p. 69).

Numerous other Chinese-based pidgins have been attested across the world. In the nineteenth century, a series of pidgins emerged in the Philippines because of trade contacts between Spanish, local languages and Chinese dialects spoken by traders and settlers (known as Bamboo-Spanish) (Penny, 2002, pp. 29–30). The status of a Chinese-Spanish pidgin reported to have been spoken in Manila in the early eighteenth century remains a matter of some controversy, centred around whether it did exist as an established or ‘stabilised’ means of communication, or was a mere ‘unstable jargon’ (Fernández, 2018). A pidgin Hawaiian developed because of early contact between Hawaiians and outsiders in the 1790s, based on the Hawaiian language. By the 1880s, it became the primary means of communication with, and for, Chinese, Portuguese and Japanese labourers employed in the sugar industry. The language is currently extinct; its last speaker passed away in the 1980s (Roberts, 2013; see also Mühlhäusler et al., 1996, on Parau Tihito, a Chinese-Tahitian pidgin, also on the verge of extinction; and Mühlhäusler, 1983, on the Pidgin German developed in the former German protectorate of Kiatschou (Jiaozhou) in central eastern China between 1898

and the Japanese occupation of the area in 1914). None of these pidgins evolved into a Creole, in contrast to Tok Pisin in PNG, Solomon Islands Pijin and Bislama in Vanuatu.

The development of pidgins is a common but hardly universal consequence of trade relationships. One prerequisite for a development of a pidgin is verbal communication. No pidgins developed in the situations of ‘silent markets’ where the exchange of products was done without verbal interaction (described for the Sawos and the Chambri peoples in the Middle Sepik: see Gewertz, 1983; Schindlbeck, 1980 and M. Schindlbeck, personal communication, 20 July 2016; Bowden, 1984). Nowadays, communication in the market-place is conducted in Tok Pisin, the language known to all parties (see Aikhenvald, 2018).

Another prerequisite for the development of pidgins by diverse groups of people speaking different languages is the existence of established relationships between them over several years—be it in the context of trade, joint work on plantations, mines or other environments. Occasional trade-based communication may not lead to the development of a pidgin. In the situation of newly emergent contexts of trade and joint employment we may be faced with instances of people spontaneously adapting their language to a foreign partner, creating foreigner talk. This communicative strategy may develop into a stabilised pidgin in the long run.

An instructive example comes from the Russian-Chinese border area in the Zabaikalskii territory of Russia and especially the Chinese border town Manzhouli. The Chinese foreign workers have limited, if any, command of Russian but pick up some words and expressions necessary for day-to-day communication. The emergent ‘Chinese-Russian’ variety is perceived by Russian native speakers as a ‘broken language’ and is the object of derision and mockery (Fedorova, 2015, pp. 144–6; Fedorova, 2011a, 2011b; Yang, 2007; Shapiro, 2010, pp. 11–2). In their interactions with Russians, Chinese speakers are looked down upon and ‘are treated as non-equals to their Russian speaking interlocutors both linguistically and socially: one cannot expect full understanding from them, but, at the same time, they are not “important” enough for the Russian speakers to make serious efforts to be understood’ (Fedorova, 2015, p. 144). This is iconically reflected in the way Russians address the Chinese. The polite form *Vy*, ‘plural second person pronoun’, is a norm in addressing an adult stranger. The Russians of the

region consistently talk to Chinese immigrant workers using the familiar second singular form *ty*—a mark of lack of respect and a ‘linguistic way of domineering’ (Fedorova, 2015, p. 146).

Russians involved in ongoing business or personal relations with the Chinese modify their language by simplifying it and speaking ungrammatically, as if to ‘imitate’ their Chinese partners’ imperfect speech. A first-person singular form may be used in a question to a second person. Second person singular imperative forms are preferred in declarative clauses; for example, *ne rabotaj* (negation work.second.person.imperative)—‘it does not work’. In the normative Russian this can only be understood as a command: ‘you (familiar) don’t work!’ Second person singular imperatives—which consist of the bare root and replace every verb form—are considered the ‘proper way’ to speak to the Chinese. These same forms were typical of the Chinese-Russian Pidgin of the olden days (Fedorova, 2012), and other Russian-based pidgins, including *govorka* (developed in long-term trade communication between Russians and the local Samoyedic-speaking populations on the Taymyr peninsula: Stern, 2005). The current Chinese-Russian emergent pidgin is in flux—its characteristics ‘will be clearer when (and if)’ it ‘stabilises’ (Shapiro, 2010, p. 13).

We now turn to the Chinese diaspora in PNG, and their communicative practices.

## Section 4: In with the new: The Chinese in Papua New Guinea

The presence of the Chinese in PNG has a long history, starting from 1888 when the German New Guinea Company imported hundreds of Chinese indentured workers (most of them men) from Xiamen (formerly Amoy), Singapore, Hong Kong and Sumatra to work on sugar and coconut plantations. The Chinese population kept expanding, with different dynamics in the territory of New Guinea (formerly a German colony) and in Papua (a possession of Australia since 1906: see Wood & Backhaus, this volume, on the ways in which the Chinese were treated by the Australian Government throughout the history of the colonial occupation).

There is one major division among the Chinese in PNG. The PNG-born Chinese who were in PNG at the time of Independence and who had lived in PNG for several generations are known as ‘old’ Chinese’ (Chin 2008

and this volume; Cahill, 2012). As Chin (this volume) puts it, ‘their spiritual “home” was Rabaul, East New Britain’—where the settlers formed a community-based organisation in the early twentieth century (see Inglis, 1972, on the Chinese in PNG before Independence).

In the words of Wood and Backhaus (this volume), ever since the establishment of the Chinese in the region, ‘Chinese life in New Guinea was defined primarily as within an urban enclave linked to systematic exclusions from an economy and social order largely defined by white plantations and a governing bureaucracy’. Almost all the ‘old’ Chinese are Christians, and they use English, even among themselves. They tend to send their children to Australia to study. Many took out Australian citizenship after Independence (Chin, 2008, this volume; see Wood & Backhaus, this volume, on the colonial character of the policies relative to extending Australian citizenship to the New Guinea Chinese).

The ‘old’ Chinese used to be hard-working and industrious. They ran trade-posts and shops, frequented by indigenous people. They have played a substantial role in the economy of the country, but appear to have kept themselves to themselves and presumably used English and Tok Pisin in interacting with their indigenous and expatriate clientele. The trade and employment relationships between the ‘old’ Chinese and the rest of the population did not appear to have resulted in the creation of a pidgin, or of any other specific communicative code.

Why so? We can suggest two possible reasons. If communication between the Chinese and the other groups was only sporadic, no specific register may have arisen, become stabilised or developed into a pidgin.

Alternatively, patterns and forms of communication between the Chinese and other groups in the early colonial periods may have ‘fallen between the cracks’. In other words, nothing is known about them because no one bothered to look or document them. This resonates with the point made by Henry, Vávrová and Bragge (this volume): the ‘old’ Chinese ‘have been largely rendered invisible in colonial and post-colonial histories of PNG’. In Laurie Bragge’s words, during his time as a patrol officer just before Independence, ‘the Chinese were a fact of life but were ignored basically’. The ‘old’ Chinese were disregarded and rendered invisible in archives, historical accounts and traditional lore. This is in stark contrast to the representation of white people across Papua New Guinean traditions. The ‘meaning of a white man’ (along the lines of Bashkow, 2006) is part of traditional lore and representation of histories for many indigenous societies.

A ‘white man’—a European coloniser—can be viewed as an ancestral spirit (as is the case among the Ku Waru: Rumsey, 1999, similar to large portions of Australia: Dixon, 2019, pp. 156–7) or even as a cannibal or a dangerous ghost. So, the early Europeans were referred to by the Kamula of Western Province as ‘aiyaluma men’—a term that means ‘prohibited’, ‘taboo’ and can be used to refer to the evil spirit that inhabits a witch’s heart (Wood, 1995, p. 29; see Rumsey, 1999, on ‘white man’ as a cannibal).

The Kwoma of the Middle Sepik use the term *gaba* ‘ghost, soul of a person who died’, as an alternative to *waitman* ‘European, white man or woman’. As Bowden (1997, p. 42) explains, during the early years of European contact the Kwoma thought white people were ghosts and referred to them as such. They occasionally still refer to Europeans as ghosts, though not normally in their presence. A young child, seeing a European approach, might call to its mother: *Awi, gaba yato!*, ‘Mother, a ghost is coming!’ The Yalaku, a Ndu-speaking group in contact with the Kwoma, employ the term *kaba* ‘ghost’ (a borrowing from Kwoma) to refer to white people and objects associated with them; for example, *kaba takwa* (ghost woman), ‘a white woman’, *kaba yuwa* (ghost brideprice), ‘money’, *kaba nagu* (ghost sago), ‘bread, biscuit’, *kaba mi* (ghost tree/slit.drums), ‘phone, guitar’ (see also Aikhenvald, 2018). The term *kaba* has derogatory overtones: the late Anna Mongowur (my classificatory mother in the Yalaku community and the oldest woman in the village) insisted on referring to me as *wama-sefi* (white-skin) rather than as *kaba takwa* (ghost woman), saying that I was too nice to be called *kaba*.

White people were integrated into the cosmology of some groups. The Manambu refer to white people and objects associated with them as *wali* ‘coming from east’; for example, *wali-du* (east-man), ‘white man’ and *wali-kudi* (east-language), ‘white people’s language (English or Tok Pisin)’. White people are typically adopted into the Wulwi-Ŋawi clan group (whose totems include the eastward wind and direction, and everything bright and of white colour: see Harrison, 1990; Aikhenvald, 2008). This echoes Leavitt (2000, p. 306) on ‘Europeans as relatives’ incorporated into the kinship and exchange system.

In contrast, the Chinese—and Asians in general—are consistently left out. They do not appear to be given any special name, other than descriptive terms; for example, Manambu *Saina-ke-de du* (China-belonging-masculine singular man) or Yalaku *Saina* ‘Chinaman, Asian’. Neither do they appear to be integrated into mythologies or totemic systems.



This is, again, in contrast to Europeans. Wood (1995, p. 23) argues that, through their narratives and attitudes, the indigenous Kamula, the ‘real people’, ‘are capable of transforming the otherness of Europeans into something more like themselves’. The Chinese remain ‘a non-transformable other’—‘the outsiders are not homogenous or interchangeable because “white skins”, most other humans and quasi humans are potentially transformable liminal entities, but the Chinese are not’ (Wood, 1995, p. 41). Do these trends reflect a relatively shallow time–depth of interactions between the Chinese and the indigenous peoples (compared with the time–depth and the intensity of the European contact)? This question remains open.

The Chinese presence across PNG has dramatically increased since the early 2000s, with an influx of many mainland Chinese, especially the Chinese state-owned enterprises, and Chinese traders who ‘started to flood the market with cheap Chinese products’ (Chin, this volume; Connolly, 2020). These ‘new’ Chinese ‘have now cemented their position as the most influential group among the Chinese community in PNG—both in politics and the economy’ (Chin, this volume). A general perception nowadays is that the PNG economy is likely to eventually be overtaken by the mainland Chinese (resonating with the policies of the mainland Chinese government: see Chin, this volume). As employers and as traders, the ‘new’ Chinese are here to stay, and to expand.

The mainland Chinese have gradually become a dominant economic and political force in PNG. Many Chinese-owned enterprises are now major employers for the indigenous people, especially so in and around mining. The Ramu Nickel mine in Madang Province, the largest single outbound direct investment project by a Chinese company in the Pacific with its many locations (Smith, 2013, p. 180), is a case in point.

## **Section 5: A language in the making: Basamuk Pidgin**

New workplace environments provide new requirements for communication. Within the Chinese-run Ramu Nickel mine, different worksites tend to have ‘a distinctive work culture, and a distinctive set of local identities, based on shared work histories, shared cultural preferences, and often a shared local dialect’ (Gessler, this volume). A source of tension in the context of the

Basamuk nickel refinery is a communication barrier between the locals and the ‘new’ Chinese workers and managers, who either do not know enough English or Tok Pisin to communicate, or they pretend they do not (Smith, 2013, p. 185). Papua New Guineans employed at the refinery are aware of the necessity to adapt to the new requirements by learning how Chinese expatriates work and what their work ethics is. The linguistic outcome of this is a new ‘workplace pidgin’ (Kuo, this volume).

This ‘workplace pidgin’ is described as a mixture of Tok Pisin, Chinese and English, with a strong gestural component. Learning takes place on the job. The new employees stay together and try and guess what their Chinese supervisor is saying, in addition to taking advice from other PNG staff. This learning method is described in Tok Pisin—a common language for all PNG employees within the refinery—as *wokim aksen* (make action) and *bihainim aksen* (follow action). When speaking to the Chinese staff, PNG workers state that they speak in simple sentences, and use only very specific nouns and verbs, often repeated.

A short text provided to Kuo by Nathan, a PNG employee, includes adjectives *broken* and *no good* (it is not clear from Kuo’s discussion whether we are dealing with an English *no good* or Tok Pisin *nogut*, as Nathan is competent in both). Adjectives and verbs are repeated, to convey intensive meaning as in *talk talk*, ‘have a discussion’, and joint action as in *wok wok*, ‘work together’. There are no markers of tense or aspect; the English and Tok Pisin verbs are used in their root form. An example is *we talk talk and maintenance, ah, come, ah, fix* meaning ‘Let us have a discussion and inform the maintenance team to come and fix (the valve)’. Locals appear to frequently use the Mandarin Chinese *la* ‘OK’ at the end of a sentence. Other frequently used Mandarin words are *yǒu*, ‘have’, *méi yǒu*, ‘not have’, *hǎo*, ‘good’ and *huài le*, ‘broken’.

A close set of frequently used Chinese words include a demonstrative *nà gè*, ‘that one’ (pronounced without tones, as [na ge]). In Mandarin Chinese, this form is composed of *nà*, ‘that (distal demonstrative)’ and *gè*, ‘generic classifier’. In Mandarin, the distal demonstrative *nà* can be considered functionally unmarked, especially in combination with the generic form *gè*, in that most of its uses ‘pertain to the more semantically neutral’ domain. This form is used if the distance or proximity of the object is irrelevant or unknown, and as a hesitation mark (Saillard, 2014; Tseng, 2017; see Dixon, 2010, pp. 223–57 on functional markedness in demonstrative systems).

Across the world, pidgin and creole languages tend not to have classifiers or grammatical gender (see Aikhenvald, 2016, p. 71, 75; Baker, 2001; Parkvall, 2017, and references there).<sup>2</sup>

The Chinese ‘workplace pidgin’ preserves just one Mandarin classifier form—the most neutral and the most frequent one, *gè*, which is extended to all the referents. This is reminiscent of the Ethiopian–Chinese Pidgin (Driessen, 2020, p. 7) where the verb forms of Amharic origin occur in the formally and functionally less marked masculine singular form. Alternatively, the exclusive use of masculine singular forms in Ethiopian Pidgin may be the artefact of an all-male environment in which the pidgin is currently used. Synchronically, the form *ge* in the Chinese ‘workplace pidgin’ of Basamuk cannot be considered a classifier, since this form occurs with any referent independently of its properties.

Specialised terms—different for different departments of the refinery—come from Chinese. Examples include *chái yóu*, ‘diesel fuel’, in the limestone mill, or *pí dài*, ‘conveyor belt’, *bāng pǔ*, ‘pump’ and *qiú mó jī*, ‘ball mill’ in the limestone processing plant (Kuo, personal communication, December 1, 2020). To remember the Chinese terms, Nathan writes them down as he hears them (without paying attention to tones, e.g., /pidai/ for *pí dài*, ‘conveyor belt’). Lack of tones is a typical feature of all pidgins including the Chinese-based pidgins (Perekhvalskaya, 2013; Driessen, 2020, p. 12). So is the absence of various morphological markers.

The resulting blend of English, Tok Pisin and toneless Mandarin Chinese forms in the workplace pidgin of Basamuk is different from each of the component languages. As Kuo puts it, ‘It is hard to say whether an employee speaks English or Mandarin Chinese when using this workplace pidgin’. This resonates with Stefánsson’s (1909) observation (Section 2), that English words within the Eskimo jargon are ‘usually so metamorphised as to be well-nigh unrecognizable’. The new code with its limited vocabulary and grammar is taking on a life of its own. The workplace pidgin at Basamuk differs from codes of communication described for the languages of the mines: users of the Basamuk Pidgin do not involve actual miners and underground communication (where gestures are of limited use: Cornips & Muysken, 2019).

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2 I am grateful to Chris Holz for bringing this to my attention and sharing the references with me.

The pidgin of Basamuk is referred to as a ‘workplace language’. Attitudes to it are somewhat ambiguous. Some locals see it as a part of a pathway to get a chance to learn technical skills that would allow them to get better jobs, and to obtain a promotion within the Ramu mining network. Others—especially those with a more advanced level of education—voice a negative attitude to it: they feel as if they were ‘talking down’ to the interlocutors, as they must speak slowly and simplify their language.

It is instructive to compare the pidgin of Basamuk with another workplace pidgin used on Chinese-run construction sites in Ethiopia (Driessen, 2020). A Chinese-Ethiopian pidgin has gradually evolved in a variety of Chinese-run building sites in Ethiopia (including Addis Ababa, Raya, the Lower Omo River, Afar and Amhara) since the mid-2000s. The pidgin is based on three languages—Amharic, Chinese and English (with some influence from Oromo and Tigrinya: Driessen, 2020). Similar to Basamuk Pidgin, names for construction machinery come from Chinese. The terms for construction material and building tools are Amharic, and denominations of professionals are of English origin. The Chinese-Ethiopian pidgin has time words, from Amharic, and number words from English, in addition to Mandarin sentence particles such as *ma* for questions and *a* as a discourse marker and attention getter (see Li, 2006, pp. 28, 37, 50–7 on their functions in Chinese). Similar to Basamuk Pidgin, gestures are central to supplementing communication (Driessen, 2020, p. 9). Both pidgins share a few grammatical features, typical of pidgins in general—including reduplication and lack of person marking on verbs.

A common Mandarin Chinese term shared by both pidgins is ‘stealing, thief’. Driessen (2020, p. 14) indicates a similarity between this word and the Amharic *léba*, ‘thief’. According to her results, ‘Most Ethiopians insisted the term comes from Chinese, whereas most Chinese asserted that it must be an Amharic word’, with only two people pointing out its Arabic origin. In all likelihood, the term *alibaba* made its way to Basamuk through the intermediary of the Chinese.<sup>3</sup>

3 It remains unclear how this usage could be related to the name of the woodcutter, *Ali Baba*, in the folktale *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, part of *One Thousand and One Nights*. In all likelihood, the use of *alibaba* in a derogatory way meaning ‘thief’ is associated with a mock-‘Uyghur’ comic and somewhat crooked character, Uncle Alibaba, a lamb kebab peddler (Chen, 2020, pp. 8–9). The name *Alibaba* must have come to be associated with Uyghurs and cultural misappropriation of their practices by the Han Chinese (see also Section 6, on ‘Mock-Uyghur’). An association between *Ali Baba* and stealth may have been influenced by the title of the folk tale itself where the name *Ali Baba* appears in the context of ‘thieves’ (Peter Bakker, personal communication, December 3, 2021). Along similar lines, Driessen (2020, p. 14) reports that ‘the Han Chinese used the concept of *alibaba* to address Uyghurs in western China’ in Xinjiang in the early 2000s.

In contrast to Basamuk Pidgin, whose use is limited to the Ramu Nickel mining area,<sup>4</sup> Chinese-Ethiopian Pidgin is used across various locations in the country. When construction work finishes in one place, the workers—both the Chinese and the locals—move to another one, taking the pidgin with them. Consequently, the Ethiopian pidgin is richer in its lexical stock and ways of saying things than Basamuk Pidgin, a language in the initial stages of its making.

Basamuk Pidgin and Chinese-Ethiopian Pidgin are unlike most pidgin languages. Both are based on three lexifier languages, rather than just two as is typical (see Daval-Markussen & Bakker, 2017, on the linguistic composition of pidgins and creoles).<sup>5</sup> Words and grammatical forms from Mandarin, Amharic and English form Chinese-Ethiopian Pidgin. Basamuk Pidgin combines Mandarin, English and Tok Pisin as its lexifiers. This is a rare pidgin, which includes a creole language (Tok Pisin) as one of its lexifiers (the other known example is the Ndyuka-Trio Pidgin in Surinam).

Both Chinese-Ethiopian Pidgin and Basamuk Pidgin are used in a predominantly male environment—a feature shared with the emerging Chinese-Russian Pidgin. In contrast to Chinese-Ethiopian Pidgin and Basamuk Pidgin, Chinese-Russian Pidgin is predominantly used in the context of trade. The longevity of each of the pidgins is contingent on the external conditions—the activities of the Chinese construction companies in Ethiopia, the continuity of Chinese-Russian trade in the border regions, and Chinese expansion in the PNG mining industry. As mainland Chinese investment in PNG economy shows no sign of abating (Chin, this volume, and Hayes, this volume), a Chinese-based workplace pidgin may be here to stay. Its durability is enhanced by the development of positive attitudes to the Chinese as employers and as work colleagues, and the necessity to acquire it to further one's career in the mining industry is felt and voiced by local employees (as pointed out by Kuo, this volume).

A rather different communicative code is being developed outside the refinery—the Marmar market run by women sellers.

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4 This pidgin appears to be in use at the Kurumbukari mining site, also within the Ramu Nickel mine (Kuo, personal communication, December 1, 2020).

5 A new incipient pidgin is in the process of developing in Guangzhou, as a consequence of recent interactions between African traders and the local Chinese (Liu, 2013). The pidgin appears to be based upon a number of varieties of African English and West African Pidgin English, alongside French, Mandarin and Cantonese. If this pidgin stabilises, its comparison with Basamuk Pidgin will be instructive.

## Section 6: The language of Marmar market: A gendered foreigner talk

Trade relations and markets are fertile ground for developing a common way of speaking. We can recall that many pidgins, including the Chinese-Russian varieties, have evolved in the context of trade. A further aspect of communication around the Chinese-run Ramu Nickel Cobalt refinery in Basamuk involves trade between Chinese workers and local women—fish and vegetable sellers. In contrast to Basamuk Pidgin and Chinese-Russian Pidgin—both used in an all-male environment—trade between Chinese and locals in the *Marmar* market around Basamuk involves local women interacting with Chinese men.

As Gessler (this volume) points out, markets are ‘critical to the livelihoods of rural Papua New Guineans’, especially women. Women are excluded from employment in what Gessler refers to as ‘the highly masculinised refinery workforce’. They rely on the success of their market produce to cover their expenses, especially school fees for children. The interaction between Chinese male buyers and local female sellers takes place within a limited time-frame, each day, during the refinery’s shift rotation time between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. After that, Chinese workers go back to the refinery, and Marmar continues as a typical PNG market selling betelnut to Papua New Guinean nationals.

The way in which women sellers talk to their Chinese customers contains several features of ‘foreigner talk’ (in the sense of Ferguson, 1996; Fedorova, 2015; see Section 2). Typical features of ‘foreigner talk’ across the world include simplified grammatical forms, loud speech and overuse of gestures. In their interactions with the Chinese buyers, women—all with native proficiency in Tok Pisin—use short sentences, accompanied by gestures, with a prevalence of short verbless commands that are supposed to be understood contextually.<sup>6</sup> An example is *faiv kina moa*, ‘(Add) five kina more!’—a command hard to understand outside the context in which it was used. Some further sentences quoted by Gessler are short and ungrammatical in Tok Pisin; for example, *no wasi wasi, nogat*, ‘no soap, no!’ Women employ a substantial amount of repetition, ostensibly to make themselves understood. Many use the term *okela*, imitating the way in which the Chinese use this word, their adaptation of Tok Pisin *olgeta*,

<sup>6</sup> As reflected in the transcripts of marketplace interactions, in Gessler (this volume).

‘all, every’. *Okela*—which is neither Tok Pisin nor Mandarin—is a salient feature of the Marmar foreigner talk. Some of the women employ terms for Chinese currency adapted to Tok Pisin phonology, to negotiate prices more efficiently and thus empower themselves against aggressive bargaining; for example, Mandarin *yī máo*, pronounced by the local women as [ee-mo] ‘ten cents’, Mandarin *liǎng máo*, pronounced by the local women as [lay-mo] ‘twenty cents’. Whether or not the women-only foreigner talk will ever develop into a more conventionalised, pidgin-like variety is contingent on the stability of trade relations with the Chinese in the Marmar context. So far, Marmar foreigner talk appears to be the only instance of such a register based on a creole language (Tok Pisin).

The female-only foreigner talk by local women reflects a strong cultural friction and gendered tension between the sellers and the buyers. Following their own cultural practices, the expatriate Chinese men try and engage in haggling and bartering (see Orr, 2007)—a practice considered unacceptable and offensive by women sellers. As Gessler puts it, ‘developing social relations and mutual obligations is central to the Melanesian marketplace’. In contrast, Chinese expatriate workers aim to seek the best price for a commodity they are after, not to build social relationships. In Tok Pisin, this attitude and emphasis on gain by the Chinese is referred to, rather derogatorily, as *mani pes* (money face). Some women are quite direct in audibly scolding the Chinese as being *bargain lain* (haggler) and even *idiot* (all produced in the presence of Gessler, an Australian researcher). The gendered attitude towards the Chinese at the Marmar market is strikingly different from the Russians’ attitude to the Chinese they are in contact with, in the context of the newly emerging Chinese-Russian Pidgin: Russian women, especially middle-aged ones, appear to be more patronising and forgiving of the Chinese than Russian men, who are overly negative (Fedorova, 2013).

The clash of values at the Marmar market highlights a further aspect of language use. Women sellers imitate—and mock—the Chinese and their ways of speaking. The Chinese rendering of Tok Pisin *no gut*, ‘no good, bad’, as *nogudi* or *no guda* is parodied by a seller (Transcripts 1 and 3, Gessler, this volume). A Chinese buyer was explicitly addressed as ‘*No cheapey-cheapey!*’, as a mock imitation of how a Chinese person would pronounce the English word *cheap*. In another instance, a woman seller addressed a buyer as *Yu cheapa-cheapa man kam yu noken toktok!*, meaning either ‘You cheap cheap man come, you cannot speak’, or ‘You cheap cheap man come, don’t you speak!’, to the delight of other women sellers. This sentence is ambiguous: it can be understood either as a criticism of the Chinese man for his lack

of proficiency in Tok Pisin, or as a command not to talk; that is, not to haggle. Another seller openly mocked Chinese pronunciation of a PNG brand of soap ‘Was Was’ (lit. washing) offered in exchange for her goods, as ‘*no wasi wasi, nogat!*’. The way Chinese-like pronunciation of the Tok Pisin or English words is parodied by the woman, and the repetition of the form *okela* overused by the Chinese, are reminiscent of the phenomenon known as a ‘mock language’.

‘Mock languages’ involve ‘linguistic appropriation’ of somewhat skewed forms in the other’s language forms, to further emphasise the abyss between the superior ‘us’ and the inferior ‘them’ (cf. Hill, 2008, pp. 158–9; Rosa & Flores, 2017). ‘Mock language’ consists of purposeful mispronunciation of the ‘other’ language forms, to create a comic effect or, less overtly, as a means of perpetuating negative linguistic and racial attitudes. For instance, mock Spanish is a comic device that involves deliberate linguistic modification aimed at transmitting a negative ethnic stereotype, relegating Spanish speakers ‘to a zone of foreignness and disorder’ (Hill, 2008, pp. 128–9, 133, 146–7). Numerous Chinese TV shows imitate and mock the imperfect ways the Uyghur speak Mandarin, with a Uyghur accent. Deliberate mispronunciation and outré quasi-Uyghur features reinforce ethnic stereotyping of a hapless minority as incapable and inferior to the mainstream population (Chen, 2020, pp. 8–11).

‘Mock Asian’ (including ‘Ching-Chong English’, discussed by Chun 2004, 2009, 2016)—used in comedies and in day-to-day racist discourse—has several specific features, including neutralisation of the phonemic distinction between /r/ and // and the insertion of an epenthetic vowel at the end of a word ending in a consonant. This has been documented for the female foreigner talk in Marmar: *guda, nogudi, wasi wasi* and *cheapey* and *cheapa*.

The growing presence of the Chinese in the DRC has seen the development of mock Chinese in Lingala, the main language of the capital Kinshasa (Nassenstein, 2020, pp. 197–203). Parodies of the Chinese ways of speaking Lingala (often exaggerated) appear to be a direct reflection of a generally hostile attitude towards the Chinese and their presence within the context of the region.

‘Mock Chinese’ is reflected in several Russian set expressions that parody foreigners (Shapiro, 2012, pp. 17–8; many of those appear in the literature ‘quoting’ Chinese-Russian pidgin forms or representing Chinese speech). Among Russian speakers on the China–Russia border, jocular imitations of



the Chinese-Russian pidgin are a popular form of ‘language play’, used when talking about contacts with Chinese while shopping at Chinese markets or about border crossing practices (Fedorova, 2015, pp. 144–5; see also examples in Fedorova, 2018). ‘Mock Chinese’—or mock Chinese-Russian Pidgin—is essentially a racist device aimed at demeaning the Chinese, who are considered inferior by the domineering Russians (see Fedorova 2011a, 2011b, 2015, and Section 3).

Joking behaviour and derision on Chinese-run construction sites across Ethiopia (referred to as ‘pidgin play’ by Driessen, 2020) point in a similar direction. The pidgin term *alibaba*, ‘thief’—extended to refer to any morally suspicious person—is applied to the Chinese by Ethiopian workers (even within their hearing). Chinese words in the pidgin itself acquire derogatory and offensive meanings. The habits of the Chinese are parodied by using intonational or pitch contours: for instance, a worker said to his Chinese foreman, with his voice rising in pitch, so as ‘to jest with the supposedly formal and respectful form of address’, ‘Mrrr Li, no lunch go?!’. This is a way of ‘ridiculing Chinese punctuality when it came to lunch time’ (Driessen, 2020, p. 16). Mocking the Chinese employers and foremen in the Ethiopian context can be seen as a means of subverting power relations in the workplace. This is comparable to the functions of ‘mock Portuguese’ forms inserted into the discourse of the Tariana of northwest Amazonia in a derisory fashion. Such insertions function as a semiotic index employed to reproduce ‘a negative stereotype of a white person and of an Indian who wants to be like a hated white person and shows off his or her superiority’ by overusing the white man’s language, Portuguese, and thus tacitly subverting the dominance of the colonial invader (Aikhenvald, 2003, p. 16).

‘Foreigner talk’ and ‘mock language’ have different functions. Foreigner talk can be considered a specific form of convergent accommodation between two parties: a native speaker will adjust their speech in ways that make it more easily understood by a non-native interlocutor: the use of foreigner talk generally ‘conveys a native speaker’s willingness to engage in a successful communication’ (Chun, 2009, p. 20). In the context of a market, this successful communication is a prerequisite to a successful business transaction. Mocking the interlocutor and the use of ‘mock language’ in the sense of Hill (2008) produces the opposite effect. It attributes negative value to a mocked target, often through outré mimicry of what is perceived as typical features of the way the interlocutor speaks.

In Marmar we find both. On the one hand, women are trying to learn the terms for Chinese currency to facilitate business transactions. On the other hand, there is overt mockery of Chinese ways of pronouncing Tok Pisin and English words, in rendering *gut* as *gudi*, *nogut* as *nogud*, or *was was* as *wasi wasi*. We hypothesise that the prevalence of the mock Chinese in Marmar is a direct consequence of a cultural clash between different market-place behaviours and expectations of the sellers and the buyers. So far, no such conflict has been described for the male-only environment at the Basamuk nickel refinery, and no mock Chinese has been documented.

The degree of awareness of the importance of Basamuk Pidgin (referred to as a ‘workplace language’), as reflected in self-reports by its speakers to Kuo, appears to be higher than that of the Marmar foreigner talk, for which no term exists. The materials available so far are useful but far from comprehensive. More studies are needed on further features of and aspects of use for Basamuk Pidgin and Marmar foreigner talk (including the role of expatriate researchers) and their place within the context of linguistic ideologies—‘an essential aspect of how people recognise their own “identity” revealed through language’ (Silverstein, 1999, p. 101)—before we get a complete picture.

## Section 7: Conclusion

The spread of the Chinese diaspora and Chinese workers across the world has resulted in the emergence of numerous pidgins—simplified communication codes used in trade and workplace environments. The Chinese presence in PNG goes back to the late nineteenth century, yet no Chinese-based pidgins have been documented. This is what makes Kuo’s account of a male-only workplace pidgin based on Mandarin Chinese, Tok Pisin and English so significant. Basamuk Pidgin is unique in that one of its lexifiers is a creole language. The expansion of Chinese-run enterprises may well see the emergence of similar workplace pidgins. Consistent interaction in workplaces and growing trade have provided a ready setting for a new means of communication—Basamuk Pidgin.

An unusual gender-based register, a foreigner talk, is in use in the Marmar market outside the refinery. Used by women sellers to communicate with their Chinese customers (employees of the refinery), this register combines elements of simplified Tok Pisin, English and Mandarin. Cultural tensions and differences in market practices between the Chinese and the Melanesian

women introduce another dimension to this foreigner talk. It has features of a ‘mock language’, whose function is to ridicule and belittle the aggressive and haggling business partners by mimicking their language practices.

The exact role and distribution of newly emergent Chinese-based pidgin(s) and foreigner talk registers—and their stability—within the linguistic ecology of multi-lingual and multi-cultural PNG are a matter for further studies. The investigations by Kuo and Gessler are part of discovering and disclosing the ‘meaning of Chinese’ in PNG, along the lines of Bashkow (2006). With its linguistic diversity in terms of genetic groupings and areal clusters of varied extent and antiquity, the island of New Guinea remains the most challenging testing ground. The newly documented varieties—each unique in their own way—add a further linguistic dimension to the ‘land of the unexpected’. Gessler’s and Kuo’s materials open possibilities for the emergence of a new wave of studies on Chinese linguistic communication in PNG within the context of increasing global interest in new forms of Chinese-based pidgins and other codes across the world. We are off to a good start.

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