PROSODY AND CREOLIZATION IN TOK PISIN

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ABSTRACT

The results of this sociophonetic study of stress and intonation in Tok Pisin suggest that a new conception of creolization, pidginization, and decreolization as stages on a single continuum, rather than as distinct processes is in order.

INTRODUCTION

Sample

One hour of spontaneous speech was collected from each of 30 members of the Boiken and Olo ethnolinguistic groups living in Wewak town, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea. The speakers were chosen by age, sex, years of formal schooling, and whether Tok Pisin was learned as a first or second language to represent a balanced sample of Tok Pisin speakers in the Sepik area. Every rise in pitch was counted over the first 2,000 words transcribed for each speaker, after eliminating the first 500 words of each taping session. High and low pass filters and an oscilloscope were used to measure pitch levels, where necessary.

Pitch Patterns in Tok Pisin

Wurm /1/ observes that for speakers of Tok Pisin from the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea: a) stress and intonation account for all pitch patterns; b) affirmative declarative statements normally bear an intonation contour beginning at mid-low pitch, rising to high, then falling slightly over each stressed syllable, falling to a low pitch at the end; and c) stress is signalled mainly by high pitch and is not reduced under declarative intonation contours.

Affirmative declarative statements in the Sepik data collected for this study often bear similar intonation contours to those described by Wurm for the Eastern Highlands, except that most words lose their stress in connected Sepik speech, with a flat intonation contour, beginning at mid-low and gradually falling to low resulting when all of the word stresses are reduced.

ANALYSIS

The total number of pitch rises for each speaker was divided into four environments: a) rises over objects of prepositions (calculated as the percent of the total number of prepositional objects in the sample for each speaker); b) rises over di- and polysyllabic words (calculated as the percent of the total number of di- and polysyllabic words in the sample for each speaker); c) rises over monosyllabic words (calculated as the percent of total declarative intonation contours in the sample for each speaker, since monosyllabic words were present in nearly every phrase); and d) high or rising pitch at the beginning of a contour (calculated as the percent of total declarative contours in the sample for each speaker). Prepositions and other words which are normally not stressed in any of the lects of Tok Pisin were not counted. Special nonfinal intonation contours were excluded and only emotionally neutral statements were considered.

RESULTS

Pidginization and Creolization

The results in Table 1 show that: a) words are stressed substantially less often in Sepik speech than in Eastern Highlands speech (Wurm would have predicted 100 percent or more in each environment); b) ethnolinguistic background is the social factor which best predicts stress reduction rates (the Olo group consistently reduces stress more often than the Boiken group); and c) the differences in the stress retention rates between first language (L1) speakers of Tok Pisin and those who speak Tok Pisin

as a second language (L2) are not significant. Given the fact that in many Sepik languages (Boiken and Olo included) stress is not phonemic and can be reduced by intonation phenomena, while most Eastern Highlands languages have phonemic word stress or word tone which is not normally reduced, substrate language influence appears to be the most reasonable explanation for the differences between Sepik and Eastern Highlands pitch patterns. These substrate language influences, moreover, persist from second language (pidginized) to first language (creolized) speech, as well as to the speech of children of Olo-Boiken mixed marriages, who have spent all of their lives in Wewak and who know no other language except Tok Pisin (represented by a cross x on Table 1).

Creolization and Decreolization

The evidence in Table 2 indicates that rates of stress retention can be predicted to some extent by the sex of the speaker, especially contour initially. In Tables 3a and 3b, the stress retention rates for individual speakers are plotted on separate curves for each sex, first by age and secondly by years of formal schooling completed. From the results shown in these tables, it would not be unreasonable to postulate that: a) a tendency for males to reduce stress more often than females has become more pronounced and has spread to new environments over the last 20 years or so; and b) this tendency is exaggerated among speakers with the most exposure to Standard English in school (who can be assumed to speak decreolized varieties of Tok Pisin), with female speakers moving closer to Standard English word stress patterns and male speakers distancing themselves from these same patterns.

CONCLUSIONS

The data presented here can only be accounted for by a theory that views pidginization, creolization, and decreolization as parts of a single continuum, with no clear break between one process and another. Substrate language patterns can play an important role in determining not only the varieties of Tok Pisin used by second language speakers but also the creolized varieties used by first language speakers. Rather than introducing new patterns, decreolization (in this case, at least) merely accentuates tendencies already present in the speech patterns of first language and even second language speakers. There is no need to invoke a theory of linguistic universals or some 'bioprogram' to account for some hypothetical disruption in communication here. All that is necessary is to study the speech patterns which typify the other languages with which speakers of Tok Pisin are or have been familiar and to trace the natural and gradual modification of these patterns in different lects of Tok Pisin.

REFERENCE

S.A. Wurm, 1984, "Phonology: Intonation in Tok Pisin. In S.A. Wurm and P. Mühlhäusler, eds., 1984, Hanbook of Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin). Canberra, Australian National University, 309-344.

TABLES

Abbreviations: L1- first language speaker of Tok Pisin; L2- second language speaker of Tok Pisin; B- Boiken speakers: O- Olo speakers; M- male speakers; F- female speakers.

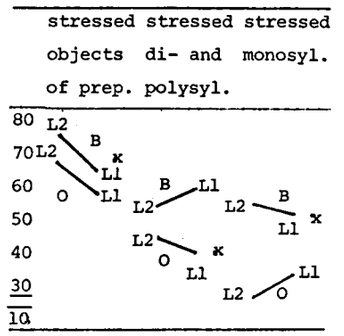

Table 1. Stress by substrate for L2 and L1 speakers

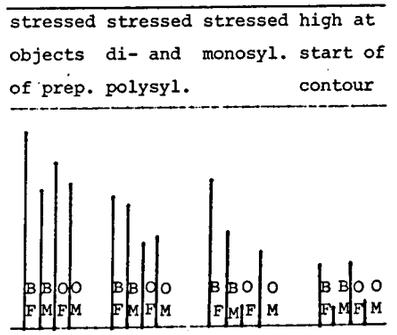

Table 2. Stress by substrate for male and female speakers

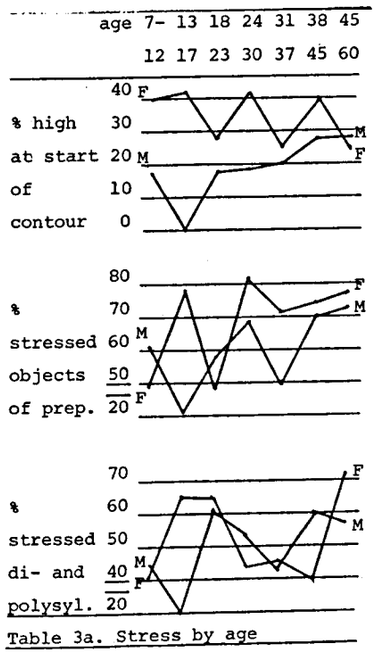

Table 3a. Stress by age

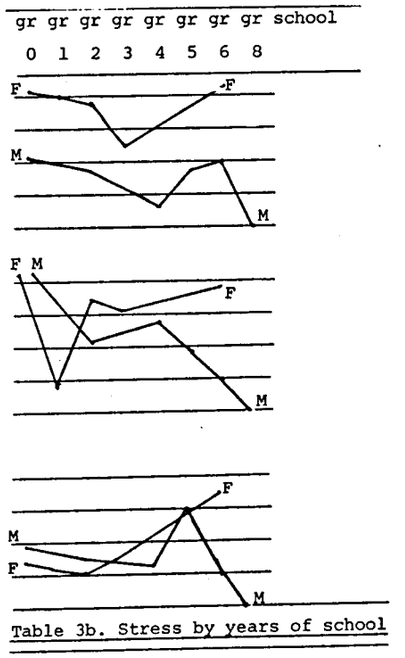

Table 3b. Stress by years of school