Creole Spatiality and Pitcairn Island: A Comment on Feinberg and Mawyer's *Ethos* Special Issue "Senses of Space"

Joshua Nash

> The beach at Tahiti had a grammar. Its meaning came out of the paradoxes of violence and quiet, sea and land, stranger and native, politics and cosmology. No one met on the beach at Tahiti without bending to that grammar. (Dening 1992:179)

Introducing Creole Spatiality

I read with interest Mawyer and Feinberg's (2014) editorial introduction and the articles in their edited issue of *Ethos* (42:3). It is heartening to learn discussions about frames of reference and the spatialization of cognition, thought, languages, and cultures across and within the varied contexts and contacts of sea and islands are not passé. Their "multiple-models" approach to space-in-culture and culture-in-spatial cognition is pertinent; considering "multiple models within the lives of members of particular communities [means] that different actors may have differential commitments to and experiences of those models" (Mawyer and Feinberg 2014:244 referring to D'Andrade and Strauss 1992). As a comment on and an addendum to the Feinberg and Mawyer work, I speculate about the role of individual actors and small groups in creating spatial mixings. I consider how such multiplicities may become represented as amalgams in the spatial language of a small island. My case study is Pitcairn Island. The expression I explicate is *creole spatiality*.[1]

Creole spatiality refers to how spatial language develops as a result of language contact. Pitcairn Island offers the possibility that the linguistic dimension in general may well be an overlay or act-interaction of differing cognitive and spatial models.[2] These representations derive from multiple sources: in this study from the interaction of the English, Polynesian, and St. Kitts dimensions in the Pitcairn language. My proposal argues that assessing the development and role of language mixing and cultural contact is key in understanding cognitive spatiality in confined situations. Furthermore, the linguistics of space could be used to evaluate the extent to which the retention of such cultural and grammatical features has taken place. As Mawyer and Feinberg contend:

> the multiplicity of mental models and the ambiguity resulting from their complex points of intersection can be understood less as a problem than an enhancement of affordances for robust engagement with the world. (2014:245)

ETHOS, Vol. 44, Issue 1, pp. 3–8, ISSN 0091-2131 online ISSN 1548-1352. © 2016 by the American Anthropological Association All rights reserved. DOI: 10.1111/etho.12112

Because of its small size and complex social and linguistic history, the spatial language of Pitcairn offers a perspective from which to observe the multiplicity of interaction of and between possible linguistic and nonlinguistic models of spatial orientation.

I have recently begun working with and interviewing Pitcairn speakers in the Australian and New Zealand Pitcairn Islander diaspora about language and space and Pitcairn grammar. I will travel to Pitcairn in 2016. Despite the interest and opportunity Pitcairn has offered and continues to offer language contact scholars, little primary field research has ever been conducted on the Pitcairn language. This work extends my more than eight years of engagement with the Pitcairn descendants on Norfolk Island.

I define creole spatiality as *the theoretical idea and linguistic reality that social spaces are formed around and exist within the resultant contact language artefacts in specifically determined yet fluid locations*. While many authors in Oceania who deal with space have focused intently on describing ways, means, and uses of spatial language, cognitive spacing, and mental spatializing in nonmixed languages, there appears a large gap in the study of the spatial language in Oceanic contact languages. I posit the study of Pitcairn Island and the Pitcairn language as a pilot contact culture and language for future empirical and philosophical sojourns into creole spatiality in other contact languages.

I use the term *creole* and its application to languages of space and spatiality as an analogue implying mixture, contact, and a blend of disciplines. Pitcairn has received sparse attention from anthropologists and linguists for its exceptionality as an exploratory tool for defining and understanding language contact issues and spatial language. At least three languages—varieties of English, varieties of Polynesian including Tahitian, Tubuaian, and Raiatean, and the St. Kitts Creole spoken by *Bounty* midshipman Edward Young, a mulatto with Caribbean ancestry—with different methods of talking about space, that is, spatial grammars, were transplanted to Pitcairn Island in 1790 after the mutiny. The topography of Pitcairn was unfamiliar to all arrivals. One of the requirements the Pitcairn language had to meet during its development in the initial years of settlement was that of enabling its users to orient themselves in the new social and topographical space.

Place-knowledge, place-naming, spatial knowledge, and cognition were all crucial to establishing new patterns of orientation. Young, who died in 1800, and his Caribbean linguistic influence is presumably more significant than that of all the Polynesian men combined because he outlived all of the males bar John Adams, the sole surviving male when the Pitcairn community was discovered in 1808. Young was one of the most linguistically influential speakers of the language during its formative years, being a significant linguistic socializer and the island's first schoolteacher.

Pitcairn did not have any significant and overt linguistic role models during its developmental stage, but it eventually did in Young. The arrivals on *Bounty* needed to establish long-lasting and functional connections to their new environment. I speculate this requirement had marked effects on the spatial language of and in place-names and the pragmatics of

describing space and location in other domains of Pitcairn grammar. Being able to talk about space is paramount in a fledgling language where livelihood is sought and is dependent and contingent on the ability to manage, know, and work with the environment.

It is important to be aware that the Pitcairn language, its spatial reference system, and its toponymic methods and techniques were transplanted to Norfolk Island in 1856 when the entire population of the island was resettled. This Norfolk system and how it functions in toponyms has been detailed in Nash (2013:74–82). Norfolk, which had already had two settlement periods and an established history of primarily colonial English place-naming, was a much larger island than Pitcairn. Norfolk had a dissimilar network of linguistic processes to that which was instituted on Pitcairn through the Pitcairn language. While Pitcairn social structures remained largely unchanged on Norfolk, the new island space was significantly different, and the grammar of spatial frames of reference had to be adapted to the new circumstances.

The development of a later absolute radial frame of reference on Norfolk shows that Norfolk language toponyms can take the form of prepositional phrases usually encoding these frames of reference, for example, *out ar station* (out at the cable station) or *up in a stick* (up in the forested areas in Norfolk's hilly north). This fact suggests such a radial system which uses prepositions in Norfolk possibly developed out of a similar and conceivably less developed system on Pitcairn Island and in the Pitcairn language. If so, the system employed on Norfolk Island constitutes a metaphorical and cognitive transplanting of the spatial world of one small, known island onto the physical space of a new and foreign environment. As a result, elements of Pitcairn, including the spatial grammar of place-names, locationals, and directionals, exist attached and affixed to Pitcairn's linguistic landscape. Creole spatiality then drives how spatialized place-names like Up Tibi, Up in Ha Coc'nut, Down Isaac's, and O'er [Over] Side Lucas Fall come into being and describe the ecological space where they are found.

Pitcairn Islanders talk about locations off-island using spatial prepositions. In a recent interview with a 67-year-old Pitcairner in Sydney, I elicited the following data regarding the fact that the person had been to Oeno and Henderson but not Ducie, outlying islands in the Pitcairn Islands:

(1) I bin [*down*] Oeno (I've been to Oeno).
(2) I bin [*up*] Henderson (I've been to Henderson).
(3) I nor bin Ducie/I naewa bin Ducie (i.e., no preposition) (*I naewa bin *out/down/up* Ducie (I've never been to Ducie), is not grammatical).

I use square brackets in §1 and §2 because the use of a preposition is not obligatory. That is, "I bin down Oeno" and "I bin Oeno" are synonymic. I collected similar data in 2009 with a Pitcairner on Norfolk Island where I queried how one speaks about travelling to areas outside the Pitcairn Islands:

(4) I gwen *cross* Norfolk (I'm going across to Norfolk).
(5) I gwen *down* New Zealand (I'm going down to New Zealand).
(6) We gwen *up* America (I'm going up to America).

Regarding travelling to Pitcairn from Norfolk, the sentences "I gwen *o'er/cross/up* Pitcairn" or simply "I gwen Pitcairn" (no preposition) are synonymic and are both grammatical.

There is a radial system which exists with diverging directional lines originating from a common center, namely Pitcairn. This radial organization of spatial orientation is sufficient and necessary in Pitcairn to describe spatial movements within and beyond the Pitcairn Islands. With Pitcairn as the reference point of the system, other islands and locations are described spatially by either relative means (e.g., locations to the north are *up*, to the south *down*, and those to the east and west are *out*) and absolute frame of reference manner. Although Oeno Island is north of Pitcairn, it is *down*; Henderson is also north, but it is marked *up*; it is not clear why Ducie does not take a spatial preposition in a construction involving negation.

It is important to note all descriptions of spatial relationships in English about island spaces within and outside the Pitcairn Islands can use "in," "at," or "to." Like Norfolk, Pitcairn does not have a single term for "at" but must employ other prepositions obligatorily, which on first analysis appear to adhere to the absolute radial frame of reference on Norfolk (see Nash 2013:74–82). There appears to be a discrepancy in talking about space in Pitcairn and Norfolk; where "I gwen Norfolk" in Pitcairn is grammatical without a preposition, "*I gwen Pitcairn" in Norfolk is not. The creole spatiality as regards the use of Pitcairn and Norfolk spatial prepositions appears to be different.

The Caribbean and Polynesian Spatial Influence on Pitcairn: Future Concerns for Creole Spatiality

I suspect the hitherto unexplored examination of St. Kitts Creole and the several other possible language influences on the language(s) of space and their influence of and on toponymy will reveal more the effect Edward Young and the (female) Polynesian population have had on Pitcairn. In the absence of any fluent Tahitian and St. Kitts Creole speakers on contemporary Pitcairn Island, and the dearth of data indicating any specific non-English elements which might have influenced Pitcairn spatial language influence, I am left to speculate about the crossover of Caribbean (St. Kitts Creole) and Polynesian ways of talking about space.

Considering the postulated lasting effects of a single individual like Edward Young from the Caribbean on the spatial languages of Pitcairn and Norfolk, it is perceiveable that such effects have been expanded in these different environments because of differing social needs. Observing the development of small (island) languages within confined geographical spaces may lead to fruitful results for further enquiries into the nature and validity of creole spatiality

for both anthropology and linguistics. Future research should assess how similar Pitcairn and Norfolk are and whether they are the same language or not. Comparing spatial frames of reference and other elements of the grammars of space in Pitcairn and Norfolk are vital to this effort.

Regarding a social typology of Pitcairn and Norfolk, Laycock has put forward an enticing proposal regarding the languages' cant-like nature:

> [M]embership of the in-group is not defined by competence in the language variety, but by nonlinguistic factors such as descent, marriage, residence, etc. The group exists before the cant, and independently of the cant. Members of the group are expected to be speakers of the cant (in spite of evidence of the contrary), but are accepted without competence; outsiders, on the other hand, are not usually permitted to speak the cant, even if they should happen to master it. (1990:623)

Mastery here must imply linguistic dexterity in spatial language; appreciating the social status of both Pitcairn and Norfolk involves acknowledging not only how the languages function in their descriptions of space but how their social and ecological existence can be discerned in terms of their creole spatiality. Time, space, language, culture, and memory converge and culiminate somewhere and somehow on Pitcairn. Whatever is the case with the resultant spatial frame of reference which came about from language and cultural mixing, Tahiti made it to small Pitcairn. Although distant from Tahiti, on Pitcairn there is an almost otherworldly connection to Polynesia, one which implies the stretching of the bounds of time-space-culture and language contact:

> When the mutineers landed on the beach at Matavai [Tahiti] in September 1789, there had already been twenty-two years of meetings between the islanders and European voyagers. The meetings had been cosmological: the grammar of the beach had always been brought into play. . . . So the beach that the mutineers landed on had its history as well as its cosmology. (Dening 1992:179–180)

DR JOSHUA NASH, Discipline of Linguistics, University of New England, Armidale NSW 2351, Australia.

Notes

Acknowledgment. I thank Richard Feinberg, Alexander Mawyer, and the editor of *Ethos* Edward Lowe for their input and engaged intellectual discussion during the formulation of many of the ideas presented in this piece. Stephan Riedel offered proofreading assistance.

1. While the linguistic status of Pitcairn remains a matter of debate, it is a contact language which has received attention from language contact scholars and creolists. Because the language is not linguistically a pidgin or a creole, it may seem a misnomer to apply the expression *creole spatiality* when describing spatial relationships in Pitcairn and within and outside of the Pitcairn Islands. I use *creole spatiality* in a more general sense and as a matter of convenience. My intention is that the expression can subsequently be applied to other contact languages more generally, languages which may not necessarily be classified as creoles.

2. I distinguish between "Pitcairn Island, Pitcairn" and "the Pitcairn Islands." The latter refers to the four-island archipelago of the Pitcairn Islands, which comprise Pitcairn, Henderson, Oeno, and Ducie. The Pitcairn Islands are administered by the United Kingdom as a British overseas territory. The former refers to the single island of Pitcairn, the only inhabited island within the archipelago. Most of the literature about the Pitcairn Islands is about Pitcairn.

References Cited

D'Andrade, Roy, and Claudia Strauss, eds.
1992 Human Motives and Cultural Models. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Dening, Greg
1992 Mr. Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Laycock, Donald
1990 The Interpretation of Variation in Pitcairn-Norfolk. In Development and Diversity: Language Variation across Time and Space. Jerold Edmonson, Crawford Feagin, Peter Mühlhäusler, eds. Pp. 621–627. Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics/University of Texas, Arlington.
Mawyer, Alexander, and Richard Feinberg
2014 Senses of Space: Multiplying Models of Spatial Cognition in Oceania. Ethos 42(3): 243–252.
Nash, Joshua
2013 Insular Toponymies: Place-Naming on Norfolk Island, South Pacific and Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.