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On the Possibility of Pidgin English Toponyms in Pacific Missions*

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1. *Missions and toponymy*

I revisit my own study of toponyms (placenames) associated with the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island, an Australian external territory in the South Pacific 1700 kilometres east of Sydney. This previous work (Nash 2012, 2013: 50–54) was primarily descriptive. I presented a list of toponyms in English and Mota, the Mission's lingua franca, and their related histories relevant to the place and personages of the Mission.¹ I highlighted the possibility of the existence of Pidgin English toponyms and signposted this possibility as being of theoretical interest to historical linguists and Pacific historians.² I proposed this possibility because, to the disapproval of the Mission administration and clergy, the use of this unwanted and marginalised language became prevalent in the Norfolk Mission school and boarding house (Mühlhäusler 2002a).³ The plausible

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1. Throughout this paper I make the distinction between the proper noun 'Mission' and common noun 'mission'. The former is an abbreviation and synonym of 'Melanesian Mission', while the latter refers to any number of missions which have existed and still exist in the Pacific, e.g. the South Seas Evangelical Mission, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), and the Queensland Kanaka Mission, which although based in Queensland, engaged in missionary work in the Solomon Islands.

2. I distinguish between the proper compound noun 'Pidgin English', which refers to the variety of Melanesian Pidgin English spoken on the Mission and the common noun 'pidgin', which refers to any pidgin or pidginised language.

3. It is essential to define 'marginalised language'. This descriptor refers to ridiculed languages, languages with few speakers, and unwanted and unintended languages, which do not enjoy

influence of Norf'k on the toponymy of the Mission and the impact of the interaction between Norf'k speakers and the Mission population were outlined.⁴

I was not able to document any Pidgin English names. This may be the result of at least three possible scenarios: (1) Although there is a corpus of English and Mota toponyms on the Mission grounds, no Pidgin names were ever given by either Mission clergy or Mission inmates; it is impossible to document something which does not exist; (2) Pidgin names were given but they were never documented by the Mission clergy and Mission inmates in published and unpublished sources (books, articles, diaries, and letters); (3) Pidgin names were given and recorded but the unpublished and possibly published documentation was not readily available during field and archival research. Despite the fact I was unsuccessful in recording any Pidgin names, I am inclined toward possibility (2) as the chief explanation, with the remote likelihood of possibility (3) having occurred.

I speculate as to the reasons toponyms in Pidgin English were not documented by missionaries of the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk. I consider why modern historians and linguists studying the social and linguistic history and works of the Melanesian Mission missionaries and why missionaries from earlier periods who were documenting and studying all local Melanesian languages spoken within the Mission's activities have not prioritised the importance of locating and describing possible available information on Pidgin English toponyms. I base this critique on the speculation that the possible existence and current absence of such names, if they ever existed and were documented, could have both contributed to a more detailed description of the historical linguistic landscape of the Mission. Although my focus is the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island, what I say may likely apply to understanding the toponymies and linguistic connections pertaining to people, language, and place in other pidgin and marginalised languages in other mission situations in the Pacific, which to the best of my knowledge, remain undocumented.⁵

a high social status. Some of these languages may have come about as the result of language contact and may be pidginised languages. All of these factors can be ascribed to the variety of Pidgin English spoken on the Norfolk Mission.

4. Norf'k, the Norfolk Island language, is spoken by the Norfolk Islanders, the descendants of the Pitcairn Islanders who live on Norfolk Island.

5. As far as I am aware, no scholar has commented on the toponymy of Pidgin English toponyms in any Pacific missions, nor have scholars written on Pidgin English placenames elsewhere in the Pacific. The only mention of pidgin and creole toponymy in the literature is Bright's (2004) recording of some derived pidgin forms in Amerindian-based pidgin languages in the Pacific Northwest and Berleant-Schiller's (1991) suggestion of creole toponymy in Barbuda in the Caribbean. I developed the idea of 'creole toponymy' in Nash (2014).

Basing my work on a study of all collected Melanesian Mission placenames, I surmise that a study of Mission toponymy, i.e. the names given by clergy, other missionaries, and possibly Mission inmates and local Norfolk Islanders to specific places on the Mission area, and the illustrative absence of a corpus of Pidgin English names may be relevant to other mission language environments in the Pacific: it “may provide impetus for scholars interested in linguistic history to assess the role of Christian missions in place-naming elsewhere in the Pacific” (Nash 2012: 489). Although my study is restricted to a study of the toponymy on the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island, and while I use this example to identify a deficit in documenting the place-naming of marginalised languages in Pacific missions by missionaries, and the omission by modern linguists and historians of the significance of theorising about these placenames, I wish to broaden the scope of applicability of the possibility of this toponymy existing beyond the Norfolk Mission. I speculate about the efficacy of toponymy to the study of such languages spoken on missions elsewhere in the Pacific, and encourage scholars working within the discipline of Missionary Linguistics⁶ to consider seriously the importance of marginalised language placenames in their historiographical work.⁷

2. *The Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island*

This is not the place to provide details of the history of the Mission’s presence on Norfolk Island nor its language situation. The interested reader is referred to pertinent material dealing with the history and the linguistics of the Mission.⁸

6. I follow the convention of using the proper noun ‘Missionary Linguistics’ when referring to historical linguistic research relating to missionary languages.

7. There is a clear connection between the focus of this paper to other Missionary Linguistics work. As has been observed by Zwartjes (2011: 13), Portuguese and Spanish missionaries never compiled grammars or dictionaries of the varieties such as pidgins and creoles that resulted from contact with European languages. These missionaries were interested in independent ‘natural languages’, which had not been corrupted by linguistic contact. This position must be qualified: in some Náhuatl grammars, there is attention to the language called ‘mera Mexicana’ and another corrupted form dubbed ‘adulterado’. On the other hand, the Moravians did describe creoles, such as ‘Negerhollands’, and others, such as the ex-Jesuit Ducoerjoli, described ‘Negerfranzösisch’ (Zwartjes 2011: 13, footnote 27), which was different from the Spanish and Portuguese missionary traditions. This could explain why such grammatical and toponymic data are or may have become ‘marginalised’.

8. The major works dealing with the history of the Mission in Melanesia, New Zealand and on Norfolk Island include Artless (1936), Fox (1958, 1962), Hilliard (1978), Hoare (1999), Montgomery (1904), and Wilson (1932). For an account of missionary language policy and language planning on Norfolk Island, see Mühlhäusler (2010). Much of this literature as it pertains to toponymy is summarised in Nash (2012).

However, it is necessary to provide adequate historical background upon which to establish a more reflective argument about the nature of language — specifically toponyms — and place relations apropos of the Mission setting in general.

The Melanesian Mission, founded by the Anglican Church in New Zealand to evangelise the peoples of Island Melanesia, was headquartered in the south-western region of Norfolk Island from 1867 to 1920. Students came to this 35 km² island from various language groups in what are now the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The Mission's evangelical strategy was "to educate a small number of Melanesians away from their homeland and thus build a nucleus of indigenous clergy who would spread Christianity in their own islands" (Mühlhäusler 2002a: 238). Its missionising can be considered 'extractionist'.

The Mission School was originally located in Kohimarama, New Zealand, but the climate there proved too cold and harsh for the Melanesian students. The Anglican Bishop of New Zealand, George Augustus Selwyn, nevertheless remained ambitious for the Mission's work in Christianising the southwest Pacific, and several attempts were made in the 1860s to acquire land on Norfolk Island, where the climate would be gentler for the scholars. Although centuries earlier Norfolk Island had been visited and even settled for short periods by East Polynesians, it was uninhabited when the colony of New South Wales established a penal settlement there from 1788 to 1814 and again from 1825 to 1855. Queen Victoria then awarded the island to some two hundred descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers, men and women of mixed British and Polynesian ancestry who, in 1856, relocated to Norfolk Island from Pitcairn Island over eight thousand kilometres away. John Coleridge Patteson, the Melanesian Mission's first bishop, was offered land by Sir John Young, governor of New South Wales, and he accepted. He saw the opportunity for the mission simultaneously to improve the Pitcairners' condition (Hilliard 1978). In choosing Norfolk Island, the Mission added to its primary goal of training Melanesians, so that they could return to their native places and spread Christianity, the secondary goal of dealing with the Pitcairners in order to inculcate "moral influence and good example" (Hilliard 1978: 6).

Up to two hundred Melanesians were educated at the boarding school at any one time. From the start, their diverse linguistic backgrounds raised the problem of deciding on a language of instruction. Coombe (1909: 16) describes the problem as follows:

Every island, no matter how small, speaks a language of its own. Indeed, the larger islands have two or three languages a-piece, so those living on one side cannot always understand their opposite neighbours. In the old days, when the two sides were hardly ever at peace, this didn't matter so much. But how are boys and girls speaking, say, thirty different languages to be taught in one school?

A reason why Mota came to be selected — although it was only one of many possibilities and was originally spoken only by the inhabitants of Mota, a small island in the Banks Group — was that a significant number of the first scholars came from Mota Island. This was compounded by the fact that the Mission headmaster, Mr Lonsdale Pritt, was unable to master more than one Melanesian language, namely Mota (Hilliard 1978: 34). Although the language served as the Mission's official *lingua franca* for half a century, the policy was effectively abandoned when the Mission shifted from Norfolk Island to the Solomon Islands in 1920 (Mühlhäusler 2010). Although Mota was not an unwanted language on the Mission, it is worth presenting the documented Mota placenames (Table 1) as evidence that the documentation of Mission placenames in languages other than standard English had taken place.

Name	History
1. Alalang Paen	Meaning 'under the pines' in Mota, this name is derived from the fact that a clump of Norfolk Island pines overshadows the mission quarters where the married couples lived (Farr 1894: 87). ⁹
2. Geare Pere	'Geare' means 'bottom' or 'under the valley' in Mota. In this context 'pere' means 'place of big or scarred rocks.'
3. Kerapai, The	According to a local unpublished map (Buffett n.d.), this place is located in the same area as Mission Pool on the mission property, just near Anson Bay Road. It means 'big tree' or 'valley' in Mota.
4. Novo Kailana	Norfolk Island was called 'Novo Kailana' by the Melanesians (Brooke 1872: 13). This name conforms to Mota phonotactics.
5. Palpaltate Vat	In Julia Farr's diaries (Farr 1898: 93), these descriptions refer to a beautiful place in the shape of a horseshoe with a little creek running to the dam with lots of rocks around. Based on this description, it appears this is the Mota name for either Cockpit, on the island's north coast, or Ball Bay, the low-lying area in Norfolk Island's southeast.
6. Sul	The area on the mission land where the small children lived. The name means 'people' in Mota.

9. Missionary historian Tom Sapienza (personal communication, January 2015) suggested 'Alalang Paen' could mean 'all along the pines' or 'along the pines', with the possibility it is a Pidgin English placename. /alalang/ is not a loan from English or Pidgin; it is a native Mota preposition meaning 'under', which is often used with tree names in toponymy (e.g. under the casuarina). Codrington and Palmer's *A Dictionary of the Language of Mota, Sugarloaf Island, Banks' Islands* (1896: 2), an excellent source, which describes well elements of Mota lexicon and grammar, gives *alalane* 'under', with italic *n* representing the velar nasal. Combining 'alalang' and 'paen' forms the acceptable Mota toponym 'Alalang Paen'. I thank Alex François, Bob Blust, John Lynch, and Jeff Siegel for comments.

Name	History
7. Valis we Poa	“Big Grass” is the name of our grand old meadow, dotted with pines and lemons, and white-oaks, and stretching right away to the cliff. (Coombe 1909:45)
8. Vanua	This area was designated the central meeting area on the mission. It means ‘land’ or ‘living area’ in Mota and occurs in many Austronesian languages.

Table 1: *Mota placenames associated with the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island*

My research into Mission place-naming indicates there was a small amount of shared place-knowledge between the Mission clergy, Mission inmates, and the Norfolk Islanders, which is witnessed through several Mota names known in the contemporary Norfolk community and have been documented in several sources, e.g., The Kerapai, Valis we Poa, and Vanua. Aside from these documented Mota names, there is still the uncertainty as to what extent Pidgin English was used in Mission toponymy. If Pidgin were used, where could we learn about the extent of this place-naming?

Melanesian Islanders involved in the initial establishment of the Mission had interacted with seafarers and sandalwood traders in the Pacific and most likely spoke or, to a greater or lesser extent, were familiar with one or more varieties of Melanesian Pidgin English common in trade and navigation at that time.¹⁰ The Mission’s resident linguist, Robert Henry Codrington (1830–1922) — Oxford-educated, the acknowledged expert on Melanesian languages and grammar at the time, and a fine philologist and lover of languages — remarked:

The English now introduced and used by traders in these [Melanesian] islands is something curious. A native who knows it cannot understand real English at all, and I on the other hand can’t understand him to speak the jargon [sic]. It is a wretched childish stuff, and degrading to people who have a real language. (Codrington n.d., Letter from Robert Henry Codrington to Tom Codrington)

Elsewhere Codrington wrote:

I have heard it commonly called Pigeon [sic] English after the jargon spoken in China. I don’t understand how anyone can deny that there is such a language, but it seems to me that Mr Layward [in a letter to Schuchardt] in Nouméa has much exaggerated the importance of it. While he appears to limit it far too closely, I have never had any occasion for using this jargon myself, in fact I always discourage it; but I have not been indifferent to it, and I have endeavoured to get pure specimens from Queensland without success. (Codrington 1884, letter to Hugo Schuchardt)

10. For contemporary descriptions of trading behaviour and language use in Melanesian trade, see Cheyne (1852).

This familiarity with Pidgin contributed to the use of English and Pidgin among the students. Although Codrington never made a study of the Mission Pidgin or of Norf'k, the language spoken by the recently arrived Pitcairners, he noted:

On Norfolk Island boys say they have heard five kinds of English, 1 what we [the clergymen] speak, 2, the Carpenter's, a North Country man whose accent they perceive to be different, 3 the Norfolk Islander's [*sic*], 4 the language of the sea i.e. whaler's talk and sailors jargon words towards natives, 5 The Sydney Language which is now brought here, that originated in relations between colonists and Australian blacks. (Codrington n.d., letter from Robert Henry Codrington to Tom Codrington)

At this point I can offer some speculative answers as to whether Pidgin English toponyms were used and if so, where we can derive any recorded information. It appears Codrington and other Mission writers of the past did not document Pidgin English toponyms, most likely because documenting or using the language itself, even less the toponyms, was not a concern. Although the Mission students may have given Pidgin names, there appears to be no record of these names. Regarding possible sources of more data, apart from a search for data such as Mission inmates' diaries and any unpublished maps in the Melanesian Mission's archives in New Zealand, I believe it is unlikely much else will ever be located.¹¹

Other placenames and house names were identified and verified from documentary sources at the Norfolk Island Museum including a map compiled by local Norfolk Islanders in the 1980s (Buffett n.d.),¹² which was compared to Farr's data, and a compilation of island placenames published previously by Mühlhäusler (2002b). Some of these names are Big House, a descriptive name for the boys' boarding house; Codrington, an eponymous name for a boys' boarding-house named after the resident linguist; Cornish's, referring to a house named after Harry 'Cornish' Quintal, either on or near the Mission grounds; and St Barnabas

11. Analysis of the diaries dated 1894–1899 of Julia Farr, a missionary from South Australia who worked on the Mission in the 1890s, produced no Pidgin English placenames. Hard copies of Julia Farr's diaries of her time on Norfolk Island are kept at the Norfolk Island Museum, Guard House, bay 2.2. The museum also keeps electronic file transcripts of 13 volumes of her diary. Both sources were consulted.

12. This map was compiled by the well-respected Norfolk Islander Moresby Buffett. His daughter, Shirley Harrison, a Norfolk Islander but not a Norf'k speaker, studied the Norf'k language and presented some of the earliest grammatical descriptions and typological work on the language. The 'Buffett n.d.' map was most likely compiled ca. 1980. Copies of this hand-drawn map and several others are in the possession of the Buffett family on Norfolk Island and the author.

Chapel, the Mission chapel built as a memorial to Bishop Patteson, who was killed in what are now the Solomon Islands in 1871.¹³ During my work on Mission toponymy in general, I documented only 15 names, of which eight are Mota and seven are English. Considering the more than 50 years of presence of the Mission on Norfolk, I discovered how few Mission toponyms in any language had ever been documented by both Mission historians and the Norfolk community, let alone Pidgin names. It is this ‘non-discovery’ and ‘non-research’ which I deal with in the remainder of my argument.

3. *Why are there no documented Pidgin English toponyms on the Mission?*

With the Mission headquartered on Norfolk Island for more than five decades, it would be expected a more detailed and significant representation of place-specific relationships observable through toponymy might have evolved, something more than the 15 recorded names given to locations on a large 400 hectare tract of fertile land in the south-west of the island. As part of a historiography of the linguistics of these place-specific relationships, toponyms are one of the most explicit and available linguistic markers which could be recorded to ascertain the extent of such relationships. The circumstances at the Norfolk Mission highlight several issues of theoretical interest to the toponymy and historical linguistics of Pidgin English and other marginalised language situations in missions in the Pacific and possibly any mission elsewhere. In the absence of more data, I am left with no choice but to speculate.

I do not believe the absence of a significant number of documented toponyms — over and above the already recorded names — means connection to place in Mota, English, and Pidgin English never developed. It is more the case that this dearth of data might reveal the priorities of historians and linguists working on (marginalised) languages in the Mission and possibly in other Pacific missions at the time, and the majority of linguists who have subsequently undertaken research on these historical linguistic sources: they generally have not worked on such languages, and have even avoided them. I claim during the Mission’s time on Norfolk that Pidgin English *was* used in place-naming. Scholars writing about the linguistics of the Mission, myself included, and early Mission writers themselves have not prioritised writing about Pidgin toponyms. Pidgin-directed language and place relationships observable through documentable toponyms were never chronicled.

13. The name of the chapel commemorates St Barnabas on whose feast day (11 June) the chapel was consecrated.

Not having a crystal ball and a time machine, I posit there must have existed a corpus, however small, of documentable Pidgin English placenames on Norfolk's Mission area. Although I have not recorded a single Pidgin toponym, I believe it must have been the shunning and existence of Pidgin English at the lower end of the Mission's linguistic hierarchy which would have led to Pidgin toponyms not being documented, and their existence even ridiculed, rather than the possibility these names never existed. Language documentation priorities are pushed by theoretical priorities, biases, foci, available linguistic apparatus, time and money. I presume Codrington and any other number of Mission writers of the past, did have the necessary resources to conduct an adequate toponymic analysis relevant to the Mission's language history in both unmarginalised and marginalised languages. This would have provided historians of the Melanesian Mission such as Hilliard, Fox, Montgomery, Norfolk Islander historian Nobbs, and the most recent linguist who has worked on the language history of the Mission, namely Mühlhäusler, with enough data upon which such a larger language history of the Mission vis-à-vis Pidgin English and other language toponymy could have been based.¹⁴

I believe these omissions are significant and revealing; they propose to contemporary linguists working with historical sources the methodological possibility and need to document and summarise pidgin and marginalised language placenames in their archival work, as well as providing present-day missionaries working on functioning missions in the Pacific and elsewhere the possibility of querying whether marginalised language toponyms exist and are documentable. I believe this would be valuable work which could be taken up in future by missionary linguists. Those Mission scholars who had the opportunity to engage in documenting the Pidgin English toponymy of the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk, but did not, have neglected in part a key aspect in the Mission's linguistic and cultural history.

Returning to the summation of my 2012 paper, I claimed (p. 489):

In the light of findings, the influence of Melanesian Mission placenames seems modest. Yet what has been presented may provide impetus for scholars interested in linguistic history to assess the role of Christian missions in place-naming elsewhere in the Pacific.

The toponymic research which did not take place emphasises the priorities of missionaries and linguists.

14. In his 2002a (pp. 75–78) paper on Norfolk toponymy, Mühlhäusler did document several Mission names but did not analyse their implications in any significant detail.

4. *A future for Pidgin English and marginalised language toponymy?*

The focus of much linguistic work conducted by linguists and missionaries in the past, and that of modern linguists looking at historical linguistic records today, has been socio-historical detail and linguistic form rather than content, meaning, and application. This seems reasonable considering the field of Missionary Linguistics is a relatively new venture. As Koerner (2009: 485) observes, “The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed a veritable explosion of research activities and publications in Missionary Linguistics”. As a result, very little work in Missionary Linguistics has been concerned with marginalised languages spoken on missions anywhere. Most past and modern linguistic work on the Melanesian Mission has been concerned with grammar writing and language description. My position has asserted the importance and use of documenting and analysing Pidgin English and any other marginalised language toponyms within the research directives of place semantics, the value of the onomasticon of linguistic minorities in mission environments for understanding place context, and lexical studies of sense and reference to place on mission environments.

From a non-formalist perspective, it is not surprising the majority of missionary and colonial linguists have not been overly concerned with the role of denotation in contextualising the languages on which they have worked. Because historical and grammatical description has been the overwhelming concern of most (Western and European educated) linguists writing about and describing languages spoken on missions, often to the detriment of sense driven aspects of language in context and ecological considerations of language, a gap appears in their approach to documenting or theorising about the languages of the missions in which they worked and still work. This lack of action is an evident prioritisation and metalinguistic concern: denotation is not as crucial as description in linguistic analysis, and toponyms are not of great consequence to formal documentation and analysis of marginalised languages spoken on missions.

What this omission reveals is not only the priorities of linguists in their documentation, analysis, and description of any languages, not just languages like Pidgin English, but how ‘non-research’ affects how languages associated with missions as idealised entities are treated in the real and scholarly world. The absence of an explicit focus on the Pidgin English and other marginalised language toponyms by past and present scholars working on missionary linguistic records highlights certain metalinguistic and social priorities held by linguists. These concerns have driven a large amount of linguistic documentation and description and these actions have occurred in parallel with specific trends in the history of linguistic analysis. These trends have had and continue to have an influence on

how such languages in mission situations are conceived, how priorities in linguistic analysis change across time, space, and culture, and how metalinguistic apparatus are applied to these languages.

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SUMMARY

This paper speculates about the possible existence of Pidgin English toponyms on the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island. The argument considers why modern historians and linguists studying the social and linguistic history of the Melanesian Mission missionaries, and why missionaries from earlier periods, who were documenting and studying local Melanesian languages spoken within the Mission's activities, did not provide possible available information on Pidgin English toponyms. This noted absence of an explicit focus on the toponymic lexicon of Pidgin English and other marginalised languages highlights certain metalinguistic and social priorities held by linguists.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article réfléchit sur la possible existence de toponymes en pidgin anglais dans la Mission mélanésienne sur l'île de Norfolk. La discussion porte sur la question de savoir pourquoi les historiens modernes et les linguistes étudiant l'histoire sociale et linguistique des missionnaires de la Mission mélanésienne, d'une part, les missionnaires des périodes antérieures, en documentant et en étudiant les langues mélanésiennes locales parlées dans le cadre des activités de la Mission, d'autre part, n'ont pas donné une information, potentiellement disponible, sur les toponymes en pidgin anglais. Cette absence notable d'un focus explicite sur le lexique toponymique du pidgin anglais met l'accent sur certaines priorités métalinguistiques et sociales des linguistes.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Beitrag erörtert die Möglichkeit eines Vorkommens von pidginenglischen Ortsnamen im Gebiet der melanesischen Mission auf der Norfolkinsel im Pazifischen Ozean. Dabei geht es um die Frage, warum nicht nur heutige Historiker und Sprachwissenschaftler, die sich mit der Geschichte melanesischer Missionen befassen, sondern auch Missionare früherer Zeiten, die melanesische Sprachen dokumentierten und studierten, keinerlei Informationen über pidginenglische Ortsnamen bieten. Dieses erkennbare Fehlen von Hinweisen auf ein toponomastisches Vokabular im Pidginenglischen und in anderen Randsprachen illustriert gewisse metalinguistische und soziale Prioritäten der Sprachwissenschaftler.

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