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Tok Pisin as both an Asset and a Liability for Papua New Guinea

Central to any discussion of any language of Papua New Guinea (PNG), we need to understand some features of the linguistic landscape of PNG: the number and variety of the local languages (Tokples), the position of the two lingua francas (Tok Pisin), and the use and status of English. The basic linguistic division of PNG languages is between those belonging to the Austronesian and Papuan or non-Austronesian. The two lingua francas Hiri Motu or Police Motu, is spoken in the southern and southeastern part of the country while Tok Pisin, is found in the Highlands and the northern regions of the country. Since the 1800s the recruitment of the indentured labourers on commercial plantations, resulted in the acquisition of this code. Its importance in crossing linguistic boundaries was recognized and both the colonial administration and the Christian missionaries. Tok Pisin is the principal franca of PNG and the main language of communication in most speech situation and it the fastest growing language in PNG today. While Tok Pisin serves an advantage uniting all Papua New Guineans despite different language background, it is one of the most influential form of creole in PNG. The focus of this paper will try to address the influences of Tok Pisin and at the expense of other official languages and local languages. With the onslaught of modern technology, global changes and English, young people are coining new words and and creating “short cuts” which drastically affect their English proficiency skills. It is difficult to stop these influences that Tok Pisin has upon English and local vernacular as Tok Pisin is here to stay.

- Lack of language planning and policy in PNG
- In translation and interpretation workshops to be conducted
- Need to standardize Tok Pisin (vocabulary, spelling, grammar, etc.)
- The innovative and creative use of Tok Pisin is more luring or attractive and it is easy to use.
- The need to document the constant linguistic changes like all the other Papua New Guinean Languages.