

South Pacific Englishes – the influence of New Zealand English and the Oceanic substrate languages

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1. Introduction

For a number of reasons the newly emerging varieties of English that can be found in Samoa, Fiji and the Cook Islands are likely to develop common traits. They are all non-native varieties of English used in everyday life in a postcolonial society. The local native languages Samoan, Fijian and Cook Island Maori are genetically related as they all belong to the Oceanic language family. In addition, the geographical closeness of New Zealand as well as its impact on politics, education and the economy in the three countries makes it possible that New Zealand English (NZE) will become the new model for a national standard for these new varieties instead of American or British English.

A closer look at Samoan English (SamE), Fiji English (FijE) and Cook Island English (CookE) may also reveal differences in the influence of the local substrate and NZE. Although all three substrate languages are isolating languages to some degree, Fijian as a Melanesian language uses more bound morphemes than Samoan and Cook Islands Maori, which are Polynesian languages (Campbell 1995: 437; Dixon 1988: 69f). This may lead to interesting differences in the verb morphology of the three Englishes. On the other hand, in terms of the influence of New Zealand English, the relationship of New Zealand and the Cook Islands is particularly strong. The Cook Islands are politically associated with New Zealand, which among other things means that Cook Islands Maori hold a New Zealand passport (Campbell 1989: 198).

As a result of this more than twice as many Cook Islands Maori live in New Zealand as in their home country (Statistics New Zealand 2002: 9). Samoa in comparison was occupied by New Zealand after the First World War and kept as a trust territory for the United Nations until 1962 but is now independent, whereas Fiji was never occupied by New Zealand (Campbell 1989: 190f; Fischer 2002: 185, 239). These differences may be mirrored in a different impact of NZE on these newly emerging varieties.

2. The project

The aim of this project is to describe the common and distinct features of the three non-native varieties in the South Pacific to find out to what extent they should be seen as three different varieties of English or whether we should unite them as a group under the term 'South Pacific Englishes'. The focus is on substrate influence and the possibility of a NZE influence. The features that will be described and categorized are grammatical features such as subject-verb agreement and the usage of the present perfect.

To study the impact of NZE on these South Pacific varieties the theoretical approach of Leitner (1992) and Clyne (1992) is significant. In this approach, English is seen as a pluricentric language, a language in which several national standards can emerge and influence each other. New national standards in this model are perceived as varieties which finally develop their own endocentric norm instead of continuously imitating American (AmE) or British English (BE) as an exocentric norm. When they reach that stage those new varieties could themselves become a prestigious model for other varieties of English that newly emerge. NZE is a codified new variety that has reached, according to Schneider, the stage of 'endonormative stabilization' (Schneider 2003: 249, 269). In that respect NZE could well become a new model to influence other varieties of English, for instance the varieties in the South Pacific.

3. Methodology

Two different approaches have been chosen for this project, a corpus linguistic one and a sociolinguistic one. As a first step a corpus of newspaper articles was created containing leading articles, editorials and letters to the editor from *The Samoa Observer*, *The Fiji Times*, *The Cook Islands Herald* and *The Cook Island News*. The data was downloaded from the Internet between autumn 2004 and spring 2007. The corpus, which is called SaFiRa (after the initials of the varieties it contains), consists of around 800,000 words and will be expanded to 1,000,000 words over the next few months.¹ Biewer and Hundt also compiled another corpus in 2004 (SPEAC- the *South Pacific and East Asian Corpus*), which contains data from *The New York Times*, *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Guardian* (cf. Hundt and Biewer 2007). With these two corpora it becomes possible to study grammatical patterns of South Pacific Englishes (SPE) in comparison to the grammar of NZE, BE and AmE.

Using the internet as a source for corpus compilation has its advantages and its drawbacks (cf. Hundt et al. 2007). The internet gives a vast amount of data but this data was not put online with the linguist's need in mind. A major issue is the lack of biographical data of the authors. It is very difficult to find out whether the author of a text belongs to the target group even if the name is given. A European name could lead to a Pacific Islander, a European ex-patriate, a part-European who grew up in the islands, or a European tourist. Moreover, it is difficult to find out whether the author has been living in the islands or has emigrated (cf. Biewer 2007). To be able to use data from the internet it is advisable to try to find out more about the authors of the articles. Pilot studies on smaller amount of data are helpful too to exclude skewing effects and to see whether the data is reliable. Above all it is necessary to be strict about what data to include in the corpus. Furthermore, the study cannot be

¹ I originally called CookE 'Rarotongan English' as the major data comes from the island of Rarotonga.

based on the internet alone. Occurrences of the found patterns need to be tested in other printed or spoken media. This makes it necessary to add written material not from the WWW. Also other text types have to be considered if a statement on South Pacific Englishes is the goal rather than a statement on South Pacific newspaper English.

To gain a maximum amount of biographical background data, a different level of language use and further information on the connection between New Zealand and the South Pacific Islands, a sociolinguistic approach was also decided on. Spoken data has been collected in interviews with Samoans, Fijians and Cook Islands Maori who either live in their home countries or have immigrated to New Zealand. The participants come from different age groups and a gender balance is attempted. After a 15 to 20-minute interview participants are asked to fill in a questionnaire on their biographical background, for instance, how long they have been living in New Zealand if they are immigrants. During the interview the immigrants were asked questions as to how many family members are living in New Zealand, how often they travel to their home country and so on. Around 40 interviews have been made with immigrants of the three countries to New Zealand.

4. Relevance and benefits

SaFiRa is a unique source for studying SPE. It is the first corpus which contains Samoan English and Cook Islands English. It contains the two sections of the ICE-Fiji that have been completed so far,² the press news reports section and the persuasive writing section (editorials). Added to these two sections are a range of other newspaper articles in Fiji English. Special features of SamE and CookeE have not been studied yet. There exist first studies on FijiE by Siegel (1991) and Mugler and Tent

² The ICE-Fiji is being compiled at the University of Heidelberg by Hundt and Biewer.

(2004), but their focus is on pronunciation or vocabulary and mostly part-Europeans have been recorded not Fijians. Lynch and Mugler (1999) are the first to mention a few common features of the Englishes in the South Pacific, but they do not attempt a comprehensive and quantitative study of these features or a discussion of the reason for their existence. Further there is no comprehensive study on the influence of NZE on English in the South Pacific. It is interesting to combine a corpus linguistic analysis with sociolinguistic interviews and to collect comparable spoken data from immigrant communities and communities in the home countries. This all makes it worthwhile to pursue the current approach.

5. First results and outlook

The corpus linguistic approach has shown first results in a study on the usage of the present perfect (cf. Biewer 2007). For the most frequently used verbs in all three components of SaFiRa, *come*, *go* and *see*, the number of present perfect forms was counted in relation to the number of past tense forms. The result was compared to the outcome for AmE, BE and NZE in SPEAC. All three South Pacific varieties showed a similar relation in the number of present perfect forms versus past tense forms. The SPE also revealed themselves as being closest to NZE in the usage of the present perfect. That indicates that NZE might indeed be a new model for the national standard in Samoa, Fiji and the Cook Islands and that the usage of the term 'South Pacific Englishes' may be appropriate in this case (cf. Biewer 2007).

The chosen SPE also showed common traits in the occurrence of constructions like "I **frequent** the tax department to try and meet payments for my delinquent taxes **since** 1997." [SaFiRa, SamE component]. The verb remains uninflected, the time adverbial alone marks the aspect (cf. Biewer 2007). Another common trait was the creation of present perfect constructions such as *have get* or *have been give* in which the auxiliary indicates present perfect but the past participle remains unmarked. The

native languages in Samoa, Fiji and the Cook Islands show no inflection on the verb but operate with tense and aspect markers as free morphemes and avoid a double indication of a grammatical feature; tense and aspect is usually marked only once in the sentence, namely with the tense and aspect marker (Lynch 1998: 130f; Lynch and Ross et al. 2002: 45). The influence of the native languages could therefore play a role here. However, these two mentioned patterns also occur in varieties of English which are not related to the South Pacific varieties but are also varieties of English spoken as a second language (cf. Sand 2005). Second language acquisition therefore has to be considered as well (cf. Biewer 2007). The interviews made so far show that the uninflected past participle forms in present perfect constructions are relatively frequent in spoken data and definitely a feature of SPE even though not restricted to them.

The corpus will be further enlarged to include other text types. Other grammatical constructions will be looked at, such as concord patterns, the use of the subjunctive and *will*-future. The interviews that have already been recorded have revealed that there is a strong connection between the countries. The immigrants travel a lot between the countries and try to bring the extended family members to New Zealand. The situation in the home countries, including attitudes to New Zealand and NZE, is being investigated at the moment. The recording of people in Fiji, Samoa and the Cook Islands has just started.

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