

Linguistic characteristics of multilinguals in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract: Multilingualism is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that arises in societies that have people who speak more than one language. Most groups have a mother tongue which they use with their family and clan members. The acquisition of other languages may occur at different times of their lives or simultaneously. Papua New Guinea (PNG) has records of over 800 languages, making it a truly multilingual state. These languages are usually used for different purposes: one language may be used at home; another outside the home, and maybe another language with communicating with 'outsiders'. The change of language code depends on the situation and who are the other respondents in the conversation. Sometimes there is a plateauing of one language proficiency because effective communication is achieved. Multilinguals do not disturb the flow of communication when one encounters a word or structure that deviates from one's norms or turns out to be unintelligible, instead they may manipulate two or more languages in a very intricate patterns of linguistic swopping as a means of achieving effective communication. It must be remembered that multilinguals are not trying to mimic the native speakers but are appropriating their language use to suit their own values, interests and purpose. In PNG, most people first acquire their local language, their Tok Ples language from their family, relatives (wantoks), and village community, they quickly learn to communicate with others through either the use of Tok Pisin or Hiri Motu, as their common 'market place' language PNG needs to take full advantage of its multilingual state as multilinguals have cognitive and social advantages. They are able to create language bridges where monolinguals cannot. Most importantly, a multilingual workforce that can be employed in a great variety of opportunities.

Key words: English, Tok Pisin, multilinguals, code switch, language competence

1. Introduction

Multilingualism is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that arises in societies that have people who speak more than one language and is a result of language contact among these various language speakers. People usually use more than one language on regular basis, to varying degrees of proficiency. Multilingualism usually arises in a community where different language groups reside. Most groups have a mother tongue which they use with their family and clan members. This language has evolved over many years to satisfy specific cultural

aspirations and social needs.

The acquisition of other languages may occur at different times of their lives or simultaneously. Even though multilinguals usually function better in one language, they can effectively communicate in other languages at their disposal.

2. Most of the world's population is multilingual

Contrary to what is believed, most of the world's population is multilingual. Scholars estimate that there are over 5000 distinct languages in the world spoken. Many of these languages are spoken in a same small number of nation states. For example, there were originally fourteen hundred distinct languages spoken in the Pacific. This was about a quarter of the worlds' languages (Lynch, 1998, p. 25). This makes the Pacific one of the most linguistically complex regions of the world. In this regions is Papua New Guinea (PNG). In PNG there are records of over 800 languages, making PNG a truly multilingual state.

In PNG, these different communication situations are often labelled as tiers (Thiele, 2013). The bottom tier, is at the village situation revolving around clan life. These local languages, called Tok Ples languages, are connected to various clans and tribes throughout the country, uniquely containing the full cultural and social knowledge of a certain area.

The middle tier relates to two official national languages, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu. Tok Pisin, an English-based creole, is the most widely spoken, serving as the country's lingua franca. Tok Pisin originated as a trade language. The original basic trade jargon spread across the Pacific by English speakers, European traders, plantation owners and ships' crews as they traded with the local Pacific Island residents. Gradually, this new hybrid of a language became accepted as the common language of communication between all the diverse languages represented in the sugar, pineapple, coconut and cocoa plantations of Queensland, Samoa, New Guinea and Fiji. This original trade language eventually emerged as a language called Tok Pisin. This language with many words and expressions originating from many English words, gradually became very popular common language and spread from the New Guinea islands, to the highlands and now to the coastal areas of PNG.

Hiri Motu originated around the Port Moresby district and expanded along the Papuan Coast with the Motuan people as they embarked on *hiri* trading expeditions. Police Motu, was a simplified version of the language used by the colonial police force. Hiri Motu has incorporated some sound systems from the Polynesians working as London Missionary Society missionaries.

The top tier is English. This is the official international language of government,

overseas politics, education, business and the legal system. When PNG became an independent state in 1975, the administrators struggled to unify and amalgamate the diverse mixture of hundreds of diverse cultural, ethnic groups and their related Tok Ples languages. Since independence, English has made trade, international commerce, improved job opportunities, expansion of business and political power possible.

English may be necessary to the advancement of PNG, but using English as the medium of education is very confronting to students. It means that most students arriving at schools, are confronted with a totally unfamiliar language; the language of the 'white people'. Education in English becomes a 'sink or swim' experience for most children. The result is that after 12 years of education in the medium of English, many PNG students can pass the local English exams, communicate well with other PNG multilinguals but often have difficulty in communicating with English speakers from overseas. Many of these grade 12 leavers achieve low scores on the international English exams and struggle at university.

3. Multilinguals use their languages for effective communication

The languages in each society are usually used for different purposes: one language may be used at home; another outside the home, and maybe another language with communicating with 'outsiders'. The change of language code depends on the situation and who are the other respondents in the conversation. Multilinguals are people who are familiar with members of these language groups and need to enjoy and participate in satisfactory communication with these people. Being a multilingual in areas where there are more than one language groups is necessary for an enjoyable and productive life. Some language are used in informal oral settings while another more formal language could be used for the workplace setting or in communication with international speakers.

Multilinguals share the same lingual and geographical space. It is assumed that each speaker, in a specific space, will have access to a different set of languages. Negotiation, during a discourse, happens as the speakers negotiate for effective words and expressions. Negotiation strategies begin immediately with each conversation. These negotiation strategies are not in a form of knowledge or based on cognitive competence, but a form of available resourcefulness. Cowley (2011) argues that language is both collective and individual but not localised within a person or within an environment. Language use changes as react to words, feeling, senses and experiences. There is a criss-crossing of senses and words that all become part of real-time understanding (Cowley, 2011, p. 3, 5). Effective language is the ability to link people with each other Khubchandani (1997, p. 94) argues that this negotiation involves a range of communicative strategies including

the process of ‘serendipity’ and ‘synergy’. ‘Serendipity’ occurs when speakers are aware of speech variations and adjust their speech patterns accordingly. ‘Synergy’ is achieved when the speakers seek some form of co-construction to find common understanding. This multilingual interaction becomes a hybrid, dependent upon the negotiation, adjustment and appropriateness, between the speakers. Speakers tend to be consensus-oriented as they wish to achieve mutual communication. Multilinguals do not let language differences hinder this process, instead they work around the differences with great equanimity.

Effective communication is not totally dependent on the verbal medium but involves the setting, the communicative context, and the paralinguistic cues. Khubchandani (1997, p. 40) says effective communication is a symphony of non-linguistic devices, intuition, extra-sensory perception and language knowledge. Therefore, communication is not purely a cerebral or rational activity but a complicated multisensory process. Effective communication can be described as an open system that is fluid, evolving, and a hybrid of available languages. It is not a closed system, made up purely of grammatical elements.

4. Multilinguals have an integrated language competence

In the past, it was assumed that multilingual speakers were competent in all their languages (Chomsky, 1966) but in reality, this is not true (Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011). Most multilinguals do not have separate competences of each language but have an integrated language competence, where each language complements and modifies another language, all for the purpose of effective communication. Multilinguals tend to regard their use of each of the available language codes as important, not separated from each other but each language having a role to play in the communication process (Garcia, 2009; Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011). The accepted norm of language communication is not usually found in books or grammars, but is an ever evolving process, continually adapting to achieve satisfactory communication. Therefore, competence in a language is an “adaptive response in finding equilibrium between one’s resources and the factors in the context, rather than a cognitive mastery of rational control” (Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011, p. 11).

5. Multilinguals interlanguage can plateau

A plateau of one language proficiency sometimes occurs when communication is effective without learning new structures of a target language (Selinker, & Lakshman, 1992, p. 197). As a person is becoming familiar with a new language, their interlanguage changes and improves usually derived from interactions with other people. Corder (1992, p. 20) describes this a discovery process as the learner integrated available linguistic data into

some form of internalised representation. Language learning is therefore more than a cumulative process discovering who pieces of a language are structured as a whole (p. 22). Language learning is therefore, a complex set of interrelated abilities, commonly called ‘priming’. Learning a new language is the ability to translate ideas into words and sentences; the ability to employ abstract rules to generate grammatical sentences and lastly, the ability to use available languages to communicate and influence other people (Harris, 1990, p. x). This learning process is influenced by prior exposure, amount of previous practice with the new language, and explicit or implicit negative or positive attitude to the new target language (Marsden, 2009, p. 10). Therefore, language proficiency is not only the applying of taught rules but aligning one’s languages resources to situational demands. In other words, structure and expressions of one language are intermeshed with available languages all for the purpose of communication (Corder, 1992, p. 24). Language competence is therefore, the ability to collaborate and negotiate with others to produce a discourse that is understood as the speakers’ attempts to balance the issues of power, diversity, access and design (Janks, 2013, p. 225). Effective multilingualism is a fact of life, “a circumstance arising at the simplest level, from the need to communicate across speech communities” (Edwards, 1994, p. 1). Being a successful multilingual, is the ability to find one’s own self in a different geographic, political and social positions.

In PNG, many speakers attempt to communicate in English but their interlanguage many not have developed sufficiently to be aware of some of the ‘error’ they are making. For example, of pronunciation of English may be affected by the different phonological features of Tok Ples and Tok Pisin that may have a different sound system including individual vowels and consonant sounds and their combinations, as well as suprasegmental aspects, such as rhythm and intonation (Thiele, 2013, p. 28) that complicate the learning process. According to Pal (2013, p. 1), “an error may occur to a transfer from the native language”, leading to confusion. Miglio (2005) agrees that the phonetic language of the mother tongue interferes with the pronunciation of learning a new language. This is illustrated with the common replacement of f for p. For example, *fish* is often pronounced *pish* and yet *father* is pronounced *fada*. This same process happens with the ‘th’ sound. *Thumb* is often pronounced as *tumb* or *dumb*. Pronunciation errors may be heard as people attempt to speak in English. The reasons are logical. The pronunciation of Tok Ples and Tok Pisin often influences their pronunciation of English, their target language.

6. Multilinguals learn language either simultaneously or consecutively

Many people learn several languages, either simultaneously or consecutively. The better

learners are able to utilize their knowledge of these languages in a coordinated way; the better they will succeed in making full use of the relationships between the languages, the more effective is the learning process of a new language. This means that learning a new language is basically the learners' ability to build bridges between the languages and to develop integrative skills (Bono & Stratilaki, 2008).

People learn an additional language as they experiment and use the new language. As language learners attempt to decode the grammar of new language, they make inferences about their own languages and take that knowledge into account as they formulate their own utterances. House (2003, p. 559) argues that most language users are "competent enough to monitor their language aware process as they embark on the communication process". It is interesting to note, that most multilinguals do not aim to master all the facets of a new language but to master sufficient codes to achieve effective communication. The objective of their acquisition is "repertoire building rather than total competence" in individual languages (Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011, p. 3).

In PNG, various language groups share the same physical and cultural space. This proximately encourages continual linguistics accommodation. Even though most people first acquire their local language, their Tok Ples language from their family, relatives (wantoks), and village community, they quickly learn to communicate with others through either the use of Tok Pisin or Hiri Motu, as their common 'market place' language. These common lingua franca become the communication bridge between people not sharing a mother tongue.

With this communicative bridge, common language errors are displayed as people attempt to negotiate a discourse. Confusion is evidence as many Tok Pisin words, originally has borrowed from English, now have different semantic meaning. Other language errors arise as speakers try to construct a conversation, especially with English speakers, as the grammatical structure of English is quite different from the structure of Tok Pisin which often mimics the language structures of some of the Tok Ples languages.

7. Multilinguals code switch with other multilinguals

Firth (1996) documented that multilinguals do not disturb the flow of communication when one encounters a word or structure that deviates from one's norms or turns out to be unintelligible. Instead, the person waits patiently for further occurrences of the item, so that with more clues or additional opportunities to renegotiate it, he or she constructs meaning. Seidlhofer (2004, p. 218) found that misunderstanding was not frequent because overt negotiation including rephrasing and repetition. Meierkord (2004) elaborated this concept,

by saying multilinguals use facilitate additional strategies. He found that multilinguals use segmentation, where an utterances is shortened into clausal or phrasal segments as a summary of the informational unit. He also found that multilinguals regularise the perceived important information necessary for communication. It seems as though the speakers monitor their syntax and vocabulary to facilitate intelligibility and communication. The conversation may not be uniform or grammatically correct but there is some form of alignment enabling satisfactory communication.

Often this ability to manipulate two or more languages can lead to very intricate patterns of linguistic swopping. This code switching is defined as the productive communication switch or swap between available languages in the course of a discourse; all part of the negotiation process between the speakers. Terms such as ‘Translanguaging’ or ‘polylanguaging’ also describe this phenomenon when speakers use all their communicative skills and some parts associated with different “languages” to enhance communication (Moller 2008, Jorgensen 2010). Sometimes, specific words or phrases alternate in the same sentence, all done to improve communication.

There may occasions when it is necessary to express solidarity, sympathy, to express loyalty to more than one cultural group, or seek some form of agreed behaviour. Pennycook (2010) say this is ideological act of claiming ownership over certain codes in order to identify one’s community and identity. It is interesting to note that the reverse is true. If speakers wish to express distance towards or even dislike of the person they are speaking to, language differences are sought.

This code-switching appears in many forms. If a speaker has a positive attitude towards both languages and towards code-switching, many switches can be found, even within the same sentence (Poplack, 1980). A speaker infers from previous knowledge for a possible solution and then samples this hypothesis by an available word or expression (Schachter, 1992, p. 38). If there is lack of comprehension, then the process of finding the correct expression, starts again. In the case of lack of proficiency, commonly referred to a lack of person’s interlanguage, a speaker may attempt to camouflage his effort by converting elements of one language into elements of the other language through calquing.

I am studying for my carer. (*career*)

It is good to see you *twos* today.

Often, this code switching demonstrates cultural loyalty (Baker, 1992, p. 77). Code switching may occur when the speaker cannot remember the correct word to use so uses a word from the language both people understand, just to keep the conversation progressing.

John is *aftering* you.
Stop *finishing* the coffee.
The faculty *have* to stop the students from *oralling*.
The *replyment* for the invitation is on your desk.
Please give me *liklik tuol*.

Sometimes word use assumes cultural knowledge to a specific referent.

Is it *pay fortnight* this week?
The *sick* is bad.

In PNG, some common idiomatic expressions have arisen that are commonly understood.

The *blue flies* are on campus.
That car is *bagarap*.
The *raskols* robbed my house last night.
I had many *wantoks* visit during the funeral.
So many people came the *house cry*.
That man has *six months weight*. Meaning, he looks like a women who is six months pregnant.

8. Multilinguals are not trying to mimic native speakers

It must be remembered that multilinguals are not trying to mimic the native speakers but are appropriating their language use to suit their own values, interests and purpose. All available languages are just part of an integrated language continuum; each language used for a specific purpose. This is demonstrated in PNG as speakers use their own form of English.

Even though the learning of English is necessary in PNG, the sociolinguistic environment does not always support standard forms of English (Thiele, 2013). In PNG, many displayed written form of English are non-standard. This means the continually people attempting to learning English are exposed to incorrect forms of English which gradually become embedded in the subconscious, encouraging ‘these forms to be accepted as correct. Often the English syntax has been simplified and applied generally. For PNG speakers, the goal is effective communication, not necessary the ability to mimic an English native speaker. As a result, some of these forms become entrenched into the linguistic framework.

The Staff of our company wish you a Mery Christmas.

Do not park in the lawn.
Pig on sale (pig for sale)
All the *youths* came to church.
Significant for significance
Object for objectives

Most people living in rural areas of PNG, lack opportunities to see or hear correct forms of English. Therefore, some non-standard forms have become accepted as correct.

I ain't done nothing.
I done it yesterday.
It weren't me that done it
I argue for our own betterment.
My sermon is about Divorcement.

Even in daily interactions, there are many examples of embedded incorrect English. For example, *toos* and *yous*. These forms are throughout the country. As in most multilingual societies, such as PNG, the goal is effective communication. If communication is successful, then there is confirmation that the form used is satisfactory. This the attitude tends to foster a 'near enough' language focus.

9. Some multilinguals seek formal instruction in the new target language

Some multilinguals use formal language to overcome the uneven levels of competence in learning the next target language (Baker, 2006). It is hoped that this formal instruction in the language learning may lead to more balanced plurilingualism. Some scholars believed that the lack of this lack of competence is due to the influence of academic skills developed from the mother tongue transferred to the new target language (Hakuta & Mostafapou, 1996, p. 45) but the success of the formal instruction is far more complicated.

Much of the success of the formal instruction rests upon the affirmation of both the indigenous languages and the target language and respect of cultures from which the students come from (de Oliveira, 2014). Kessing (1994, p, 3) implies that each culture has a language that matches the needs of that culture. Lacking any form of cultural understanding, just add a levels of complication in learning the connected language.

10. Perceived value of English in PNG

The government and the citizens, as a whole in PNG, recognise English as a necessary

international language; a language necessary for the country's advancement. Even though the most citizens of the country are multilingual, English has a prestigious status. Parents tend to want their children to speak and learn English as means of obtain successful employment. Many business need workers who can speak English. Politicians need English to discover issues with politicians of other countries. As a result, English has emerged as a language that PNG speakers aim to use effectively. Most people in PNG recognise that English is the language necessary for the country to become a viable and competitive nation.

As multilinguals in PNG, recognise the need to use English, they use negotiation strategies to achieve intelligibility. The level of language negotiation depends in part, to local cultural loyalties. Most times, they are not concerned with the learning of a standard form of English, such as standard British or American English, but being able to communicate effectively. Language use is not just an instrument of communication but a tool to demonstrate social and group identity, membership and solidarity.

In PNG, English is the medium of education at most schools. In PNG, parents, educators and politicians all encourage the learning of English, but after 12 years of education, many students are illiterate in English. The Papua New Guinea 2050 Vision Statement says PNG's youth literacy rate is less than 64%. Maybe the causes are multifaceted.

1: It could be that much of the English learning practices ignore best language teaching practices.

2: Most formal language instruction methods in PNG fail to use the knowledge of the child's mother tongue to compare and contrast with English. Very little consideration is given to how the phonetic language of the student's mother tongue affects the structure, word meaning and pronunciation of English. Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood and Jeong-Bae Son (2007) argued that the low level of literacy in the mother tongue has a direct impact on the literacy levels of English.

3: It was discovered that many language teachers reinforce language rules, a very prescriptive method of teaching (Thiele, 2013). This approach to language learning has resulted in students feeling threatened, confused and demoralised.

4: The lack of low English literacy rates may arise from the lack of adequately trained language teachers. Research has shown that effective language learning recognise that excellent teacher trainers are the keys to successful language education programs (Lopez, 2005, p. 40). Maybe the substandard English instruction is due to the insufficient language training of teachers.

5: The low literacy rates may be due to the lack of linguistic bridge between the two worlds and cultures the children live in and the English language and related culture. In summary, effective language teaching is being aware that linguistic competence and communication is a mixture of factors; situational issues, language input, learner differences, learner learning processes and opportunities for linguistic output (Ellis 1985). The lack of any one of these factors can lead to language confusion. Successful language programs incorporate appropriate pedagogical and theoretical aspects of language acquisition, are taught by teachers who share the same language identity (Carrier & Cohen, 2003) and there are no without any power issues (Pennycook, 2001). There is sufficient research showing that the best way to be literate is by use of the mother tongue and that high quality additive bilingualism have positive effects not only on children's academic achievement, but also on identity development and family relationships.

In PNG, the lack of effective English language learning is obvious with the following examples.

Living for Leaving

Live for life

Coffee for copy

Retort for report

Fliers for pliers

Zebra for gerbera

Respond for response

Builed for built

Civilised for symbolised

11. Multilinguals have many benefits

From a pedagogical point of view the learning of an additional language has many benefits. Several research studies suggesting the positive aspect of multilingual acquisition and pedagogy in terms of additive multilingualism (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Cook, 1999; Monolingual and bilingual nations, societies and communities, retrieved 19 Feb, 2016). Multilinguals display an increase in cognitive flexibility as the language learner understand the universals of language (Bialystok, 1991; Cummins, 1976, 1984). Dewaele (2007, 2012) discovered that multilinguals demonstrated a great empathy, were more open-minded and engaged in more in social initiative than many monolinguals. People who are aware of more than one language tend to have less emotional discussion regarding language use as they understand all languages have a purpose.

Multilinguals tend to be valued for their leadership while others are regarded as more creative than monolinguals, as this group “generates a higher number of neuronal connections”, as language plurality “stimulates multiple neuronal webs, both intra- and inter-hemispheric, which would lead to a higher capacity for generating new processes” (Compendium 2009, p. 19). For both individuals and societies as a whole, there are considerable benefits to be gained from being plurilingual. These are listed below.

Individual plurilingualism:

1. For the individual, plurilingualism is known to produce cognitive advantage (Bialystok, 2001)
2. It improves performance on a range of tasks related to educational attainment (Ricciardelli, 1992)
3. It facilitates the acquisition of literacy (Kenner, 2004)
4. It makes the learning of additional languages easier (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994)
5. It delays the effects of ageing on the brain (Bialystok, Craik, & Ryan, 2006).

Societal plurilingualism

1. There are economic advantages for societies in which adults can use more than one language in commercial contexts (CILT/ InterAct International, 2007)
2. Ensuring that public services are linguistically accessible to all produces a more informed and democratic society (Corsellis, 2005)
3. People who grow up speaking more than one language in their daily lives have the potential to gain personally but also to constitute a valuable resource for wider society.

12. Conclusion

Multilingualism is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that arises in societies that have people who speak more than one language and is a result of language contact among these various language speakers. This is a natural state in PNG. Most people speak at least three or four languages, ranging from a local Tok Ples language, to a national language, Tok Pisin and or Hiri Motu, and if opportunity arises, an international language, English. Each of these languages fulfils a different language function. Communicating in these languages involves constant negotiating with the other participants in the conversation. There is a sense that additional knowledge of each of the languages emerges from each of these dialogues. Maybe, the language used to foster this communication may not be grammatically correct or pronounced accurately, but the purpose of the dialogue is share information.

The speakers are not trying to mimic native speakers; they are trying to be as effective as possible in communicating.

PNG needs to take full advantage of this multilingual state. Multilinguals themselves have cognitive and social advantages. They are able to create language bridges where monolinguals cannot. Most importantly, PNG has a multilingual workforce that can be employed in a great variety of opportunities. As a result of globalization, and the increase of technology, there is a great need for multilinguals. Therefore, multilinguals should be viewed as an asset to a country.

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