

*“Mi no whiteman, I mean”*: Language Ideologies and Attitudes toward English and Pijin  
among Solomon Students, between Social Mobility and National Consciousness

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## ABSTRACT

*“Mi no whiteman, I mean”*: Language Ideologies and Attitudes toward English and Pijin among Solomon Students, between Social Mobility and National Consciousness

Johanne Angeli

This thesis explores the attitudes of university students toward Pijin, a Melanesian Creole that is the *de facto* national language, and English, the official language of the country, in Honiara, the capital city of Solomon Islands. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2007 on the Solomon Island Campus of the University of the South Pacific (USP), it draws on the concepts of language ideologies and creolization to show that students’ linguistic attitudes and behaviours are informed by different ideological influences, which coexist, compete and combine in complex ways.

The research argues that, in a post-colonial context where national consciousness is growing, the residual but pervasive effect of the colonial ideology which disparages Pijin as “broken English” is in fact detrimental to the practice of English, a language of high instrumental value for social mobility in Solomon Islands. The tensions that students experience in classrooms with regard to their language practices reveal larger contradictions, related to current processes of nation building and class differentiation, in which Solomon students, as the future elite of a young nation-state, are enmeshed.

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### Conventions: Note on Pijin spelling and brief lexicon

Virtually all the interviews which provided the data for this thesis were conducted in Pijin. An English version of the students' verbatim quotes is provided at the end of each chapter, but I made the decision to quote my informants in the original language. This choice requires a few explanations regarding the spelling conventions that will be adopted. Although Pijin orthography has not yet received official sanction, it has been codified through the works of the SICA (Solomon Islands Christian Association) and Jourdan's recent trilingual Pijin-English-French dictionary (2002). In this thesis, I largely follow the standards provided by these sources. However, in many cases, the pronunciation of my (young and educated) informants did not match the conventional spelling of Pijin words: Frequently, during interviews, they resorted to English phonology and inserted English phrases within their speech.

In order to account for the variability of their linguistic choices, in my transcriptions I attempt to stick as closely as possible to their actual pronunciation. Pijin spelling is thus applied to Pijin words (e.g. "*stretim*"), but English spelling is applied when the informant switches to English or when a word/phrase is clearly conceived as a borrowing from English (e.g. "have to"). A third, intermediary, case is more problematic (as will be discussed in Chapter 1): Certain recent neologisms, which display Pijin morphology, were pronounced in a way which follows English phonology. In order to render faithfully the way my informants pronounced these words, I will use English spelling for the morphemes pronounced following English phonology. This is for example the case for "*introducim*", "*explainim*" or "*learnim*". In a number of cases, this entails that a single word may be transcribed in two different ways: e.g. "to learn" is transcribed sometimes as "*lanem*" (the standard Pijin word) or as "*learnim*" (the anglicized version often privileged by my informants), depending on the way it was actually pronounced by the speaker. Another example of such variability is "just", which I transcribe either as "*jes*" or as "*just*" depending on the utterance.

There is one important exception, though. The word "*langgus*", which is conventionally used to refer to vernaculars in Solomon Pijin, was pronounced virtually as "language" by most informants. Nonetheless, I stick to the conventional spelling "*langgus*" when the word refers to vernaculars, in order to help the reader distinguish between the two distinct meanings of the word "*language*".

Pijin terms throughout the thesis are indicated in italics. In verbatim quotes, the respondent's speech is in italics, while my questions are not. When a word was especially stressed by the informant, this is indicated by underlining the word. Students' quotes are preceded by a number, which refers to the English translation provided at the end of the chapter. They are followed by the speaker's name (in fact pseudonym). When a quote includes speech from several informants (i.e. in double interviews and focus groups), I use the initial letter of the speaker's name before his/her utterance, so as to make clear who says what.

When the context of the utterance seems relevant to the interpretation of the quote, I specify it after the informant's name: 'FG' for participants of a focus group (as opposed to an interview), 'Suva' for students interviewed in Suva (as opposed to Honiara).



Other conventional symbols appearing in the quotes are:

... = pause, hesitant or suspended speech

(...) = section of speech elided

() = paralinguistic information (e.g. laughter, tone of voice) placed in parentheses

[ ] = contextual or implicit information provided in square brackets

For non-Solomon readers already familiar with Solomon Pijin and who may want to stick to the original version of the quotes, this is a list of the Pijin terms most commonly used by my informants:

*Wanfala* = one (numbers and adjectives are usually marked by the suffix in *-fala*, which is often skipped in my informants' speech)

*Mifala* / *iumifala* (inclusive) = we, us

*Iufala* / *iumifala* (inclusive) = you (plural)

*Hem* = he/she/it, him/her/it

*Oketa* / *otta* (shortened from "*olketa*") = they, them

*Staka* = many

*Samfala* = some, a few

*Nara* = other

*Lo* (shortened from "*long*") = at, in, to

*Blo* (shortened from "*bilang*") = marker of possession (e.g. "*fren blo mi*" = "my friend")

*Gogo* = then, eventually

*Nomoa* = only; no (meaning depending on intonation)

*Barava* / *bara* = really, much

*Ating* = maybe

*Wetem* = with

*Kasem* = until

*Olsem* = like, such as

*Taem* = when

*Sapos* = if

*Dastawae* = that's the reason why

*Nao* = marker of topical emphasis ("*naia*" is an elliptic version of "*nao ia*", which has the same function)

*Bae* = marker of future tense

*Save* = to know; can; to be used to doing something

*Talem* = to tell (transitive verbs include the suffix *-im* or *-em* marking transitivity)

*Garem* = to have

*Minim* = to understand; to mean

*Lanem* = to learn

*Spoelem* = to spoil

*Tingting* = opinion, thought

*Kaekae* = to eat; food

*Pikinini* = child, children

## PROLOGUE

In the urban centers of post-colonial countries, emergent middle-class identities vie with traditional affiliations in the construction of local, non-Western modernities (Liechty 2003:28; Hau'ofa 1987; Jourdan and Philibert 1994). Cultural influences, stemming from the former colonial power and from local cultures, have met and “creolized” in these cities. So have languages, and *social perceptions of* languages. Following Independence, the hegemonic role of the previous colonial language has undergone serious renegotiation - at both the social and institutional level. Language planning decisions, of paramount importance for the future of these post-colonial countries, are being made accordingly.

I was fortunate enough to be offered the opportunity to conduct fieldwork for my Master's thesis in social anthropology in one of the settings where such processes are currently taking place: Honiara, the capital-city of Solomon Islands - a luxuriant place to explore social change, hybridity, and the negotiation of differences. As a student, I had developed a marked interest for the field of ethno-linguistics. Due to an on-and-off presence in academia over the last ten years of my life, I had also developed an interest in the academic world itself as a peculiar universe to be investigated. I thus decided to combine these themes and explore the linguistic attitudes of Solomon university students. During the summer 2007, I spent three and half months in Honiara, then one month in Suva where many Solomon students further their university training at the University of the South Pacific (USP).

My aim was to explore the ideologies *about* languages that prevail in the Solomon university context, and how ideologies expressed *through* language practices are related to larger social issues – in particular the emergence of national and class consciousness. I thus contend that attitudes toward languages can provide an enlightening window from which class differentiation and nationalism may be examined. Higher education institutions, which are key actors in both of these processes, are important settings where language ideologies can be consolidated or renegotiated, and thus are ideal fieldsites to explore them.

This thesis progresses in a relatively straightforward manner, from a focus on the specific setting where my fieldwork took place – the Solomon Island Campus of the University of the South Pacific – to a discussion of broader issues relevant to Solomon society at large. Concurrently, it moves from linguistic practices, to language attitudes, to language ideologies and social values - while attempting to illustrate the complex ways in which these different domains interact.

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter. It offers a brief historical sketch of the city where my research was undertaken, Honiara, and of the language which dominates urban life, Solomon Pijin. It also introduces the conceptual framework which informs this dissertation. It is therefore a largely theoretical chapter, intended to set the background of my research and contextualise its relevance.

Chapter 2 presents the specific setting of my research, the university campus of the Solomon Island branch of the University of the South Pacific, and accounts for the methodology which was adopted for this research. It raises a number of methodological and ethical issues that I faced during my fieldwork, in particular with regard to my dual position as student and researcher.

Chapter 3 focuses on the linguistic practices within the university campus. It examines the dynamics of language choice between tutors and students in the classroom, and exposes the students' perceptions of their professors' linguistic choices.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of students' attitudes toward Pijin, the daily language in the campus, and English, the official language of the university. It examines how the prejudices against Pijin and the concurrent valuing of English, legacy of the colonial period, are maintained, reinterpreted or contested in their discourses. It also shows how the class connotations with which the English language remains loaded compel students to privilege Pijin at the university, in stark contradiction with their declared preference.

Finally, Chapter 5 takes the analysis one step further and broadens the discussion to larger issues which shape and are reflected by students' linguistic attitudes and behaviours. It attempts to sketch the complex way in which divergent language ideologies, related to nationalism, class differentiation and cosmopolitanism, vie with each other in students' discourses - and in their minds.

Looking back at the structure of this thesis, I realize that it was also informed by a different logic, of which I was largely unaware until the end of the writing process. Chapter 3 was written firstly with the USP staff and faculty in mind, with the implicit intent to contribute to their understanding of the dynamics and consequences of their language choices in the classrooms. It has a professional (non-academic) flavour, and I had sometimes to resist the temptation of making direct recommendations. Chapter 4 was written somehow *for* the Solomon students who participated in my research, my fellow classmates and friends, so that they can recognize their voice in my work and reflect on the

linguistic tensions that they experience in the classrooms. It is replete with verbatim quotes, associated with fond memories, which I could not bring myself to edit (despite my revisers' advice). Chapter 5 was written, finally, primarily with an academic audience in mind. It has an analytical, at times critical, outlook directly influenced by anthropological and sociolinguistic theories.

These three distinct perspectives actually reflect three different facets of my identity: the analyst who has been working in largely business-oriented applied research for several years; the student who until recently shared the anxieties of peer-pressure in academic settings; and the debutant anthropologist who is required to assert the legitimacy of her work in the academic arena by demonstrating broad theoretical knowledge and analytical aptitudes. These three voices – the applied researcher, the fellow student, the theory-driven apprenticing anthropologist – are audible in every single chapter; they are often intertwined, but at times clearly recognizable, and in each chapter one of them has surreptitiously taken the lead, and set the tone.

## CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH BACKGROUND

This first chapter aims at providing background information, socio-historical and theoretical, useful to understand the content of this dissertation. I will first briefly introduce the general setting of my research, Honiara, capital-city of Solomon Islands, with a particular focus on the socio-historical context from which the Solomon middle-class has emerged. I will then present the theoretical insights, taken from the academic fields of anthropology, sociology and linguistics, which, together, constitute the conceptual framework of this thesis. This theoretical lens will be applied to the history of Pijin in Solomon Islands in a way which, hopefully, will shed light on the major issues that the current situation of Pijin raises. Finally, I will highlight the importance of higher education institutions as settings where social differentiation, national consciousness and the status of languages are negotiated, consolidated or contested.

### **1.1. Situating Honiara**

Solomon Islands are a group of islands located in Melanesia, between Papua-New-Guinea (PNG) to its north-west and Vanuatu to its south-east. The country, which was a British Protectorate since 1893, became officially independent in 1978. The population was estimated at 533,672 inhabitants in 2006<sup>1</sup> and is quickly rising. It is composed of an impressive number of different ethno-linguistic groups: Over sixty-four distinct vernacular languages are spoken across the territory (Jourdan 2004[1995]:109). The large majority of the inhabitants are Melanesians (94% of the population), with a sizeable Polynesian

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<sup>1</sup> Estimation for 2005/2006. Source: Solomon Islands National Statistics Office  
<http://www.spc.int/prism/country/sb/stats/Publication/Annual/HIES-Report.htm>

minority (4%). At the political level, the country is divided into nine provinces (Choiseul, Western, Central, Rennel and Bellona, Isabel, Guadalcanal, Makira, Malaita and Temotu), to which is added the capital city Honiara, located in Guadalcanal but run as a separate province. The independence process took place relatively peacefully, after the British rule had been first weakened by World War II and, in its aftermath, *Maasina Rule*, the first locally organised resistance movement<sup>2</sup>. Today, Solomon Islands retain important ties with its former colonial power: The country is part of the Commonwealth, has a Parliamentary system with legal, political and judiciary institutions inherited from the colonial period, and English is still the official language. The population is overwhelmingly Christian: In the 1986 census, 96% of the national population claimed to belong to one of the seven Christian denominations present in the country. Mission activity since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century has had significant impacts on local domestic lives; long involved in education and literacy, the different churches still play a major role in most Solomon Islanders' lives (Gooberman-Hill 1999:8-9).

While the country remains largely rural, with over 80% of Solomon Islanders still living from subsistence economic activities, the urban population of Honiara has been rapidly growing over the last three decades. The city has a short history: It was created in 1946 (after the previous capital city Tulagi had been bombed by the Japanese army in 1942) on the site of the American military base on Guadalcanal, and served as the administrative center of the British Protectorate. It was built along a road parallel to the seashore, Mendana Avenue, on which most shops and Government buildings are still located. Until the 70's, Honiara functioned as a typical colonial town: The flux of labour

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed and lively account of the historical events related to World War II and *Maasina Rule*, see in particular Fifi'i (1989). On the general history of Solomon Islands, see also Bennett (1987), Keesing (1992) and Burt (1994).

migration transited through it (from island to island, villages to plantations), but few native people permanently inhabited it. Those who did were most often manual labourers or domestic servants, while the most rewarded jobs were occupied by expatriates. It is only recently - mainly since Independence - that Honiara has become a Melanesian city and that Solomon Islanders have gained a significant influence on the social and cultural life of the town (Jourdan 1995:206, 1996:41; Jourdan and Philibert 1996:57).

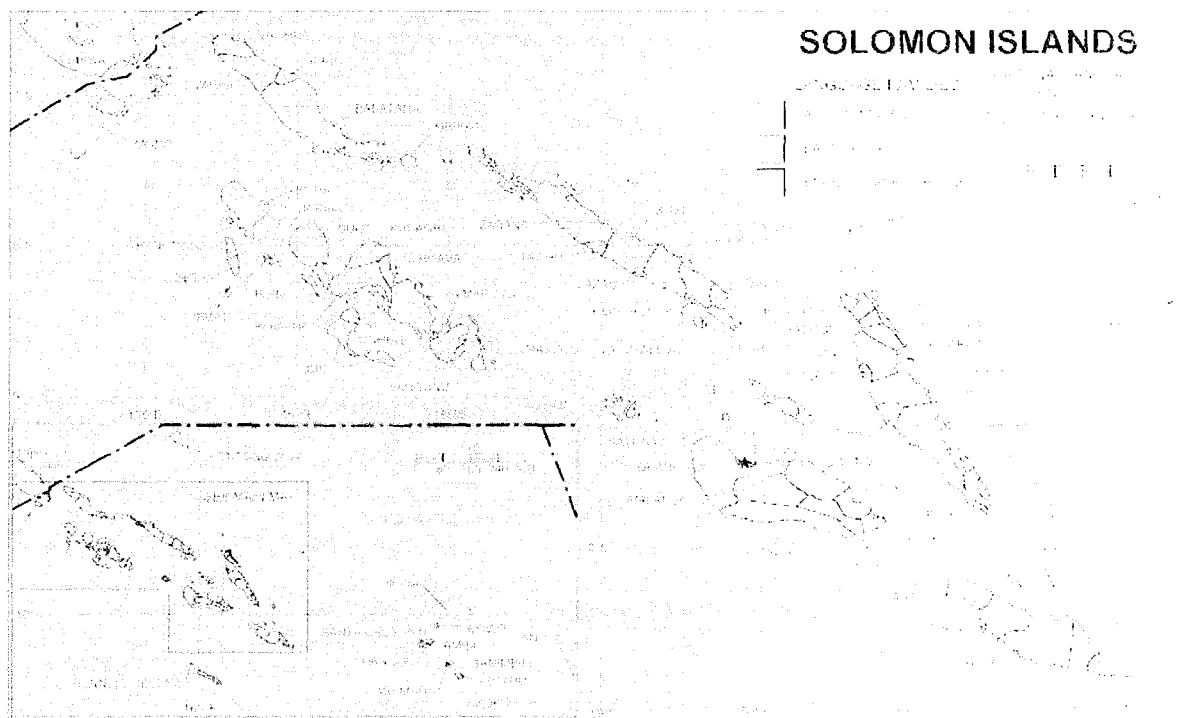


Figure 1.1: Ethno-linguistic map of Solomon Islands  
(Source: SIL International, <http://www.ethnologue.com>)

As early as the 60's, long-term residence in Honiara was associated with upward social mobility. Yet, the decisive impulse for the creation of a Honiaran middle-class was the indigenisation of the Public Service after Independence. The process, relatively rapid, was virtually completed within twenty years (Jourdan and Keesing 1997:410-411). In Papua New Guinea, a similar shift of the civil service jobs from expatriates to native people



around Independence (granted in 1975) took place (Errington and Gewertz 1999:4-5): In 1972, almost 8,000 expatriates worked as civil servants in PNG, but this number had fallen to under 1,800 in 1988. In both cases, this process had been supported by an improvement of the educational system, initiated before Independence was reached.

Since Independence, Honiara has been rapidly changing. While the city used to exemplify urban segregation, with the best locations on hills for expatriates and the valleys without breeze for locals, its urban landscape has become more intricate, many neighbourhoods being now ethnically, and partially socially, mixed (Jourdan 1985; Gooberman-Hill 1999:16; Berg 2000:193). The city population (estimated at 85,498 inhabitants in 2006)<sup>3</sup> currently accounts for 16% of the total population, and is rapidly growing (Jourdan 2007a:35). It is characterised by a high level of ethnic and linguistic diversity, as the city, the only urban center of the Solomon Islands, attracts people from all parts of the archipelago for the employment and higher education opportunities that it offers. Difference is therefore constantly confronted and negotiated in a relatively small geographical area, and this constant negotiation of “otherness” shapes to a large extent the identity of urbanites (Jourdan 1996:39-40). Honiara, as a capital city attracting transnational cultural influx and having a strong colonial heritage, is also the setting where the coexistence of diverse systems of meanings and values - not least *kastom*<sup>4</sup> vs. “modern” - is most visible (Jourdan 1996:46, 2007a:31). Since there was no tradition of urbanization in Solomon Islands, people living in Honiara are currently creating the first local urban culture in the country. In a city where over 70% of the inhabitants are under the age of 29,

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<sup>3</sup> Estimation for 2005/2006. Source: Solomon Islands National Statistics Office  
<http://www.spc.int/prism/country/sb/stats/Publication/Annual/HIES-Report.htm>

<sup>4</sup> *Kastom* is the Pijin term used to denote the set of traditional values and practices prior to Christianization.

the youth<sup>5</sup>, which include a first generation of born-and-bred Honiarans, play a major role in this creative endeavour (Jourdan 1995:212). The cultural context in which middle-class develops in Honiara is thus a particularly complex and open-ended one.



*Figure 1.2: Aerial view of Honiara*

This brief sketch of the Honiara context could not be ended without mentioning an important event in Solomon Islands' recent history: the “ethnic” crisis which occurred from 1998 to 2001, opposing militants from the Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces. It has been argued that the conflict was primarily related to regional disparities, economic difficulties and political mismanagement, and had been endowed with “ethnic” meaning largely for instrumental (by militias and politicians) and practical (by media discourses) reasons (Tara

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<sup>5</sup> In Solomon Islands, the term “youth” usually refers to unmarried young people (in Pijin, the terms *iang gele* and *iang boe* are most often used). It carries the idea of absence of responsibilities, and for this reason unemployed young people are more likely to be called “youth” than students, regardless of age. However, following the Western usage which considers chronological rather than social criteria in this regard, I will occasionally employ the term “youth” for USP students.

2001; Bennett 2002:11; Dinnen 2002:286). Although it was not the focus of my research and was never spontaneously mentioned by my informants<sup>6</sup>, the ‘*Tenson*’, as it is usually called in Pijin, is now part of the Honiaran background<sup>7</sup>. This crisis had significant consequences for middle-class Honiarans. Due to the financial cost of the conflict for the Government, many educational institutions suffered from financial constraints and had to close their doors for a long period (e.g. the Solomon Island College of Higher Education (SICHE), closed in 2001). Scholarship for high school graduates was suspended<sup>8</sup>, and the State found itself unable to pay its civil servants (Dinnen 2002:289-290), putting a strain on many students’ parents. Political stability and social harmony have been recovered since 2003, but they are still fragile, and the national economy greatly suffered from these unproductive years (Jourdan 2007b:60).

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<sup>6</sup> Many Honiarans seem to have recovered relatively rapidly from the trauma of the “ethnic tension” and the forced displacement that it brought about. During USP classes, tutors referred to the event as if it was a turned page of Solomon history, while it happened only 7 years ago. During interviews, Malaitan students mentioned their temporary forced relocation with very little emotion - as if it was simply holidays.

<sup>7</sup> See Moore 2005 for a detailed analysis of the crisis.

<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://www.apdip.net/projects/ictnd/2002/pfnet>.

Noticeably, the author of this text was Glynn Galo, currently director of the USP Solomon Island Campus.

## **1.2. Theoretical framework**

At the theoretical level, my analysis will be informed by three main sources. The first one is the theory of creolization, as developed in particular by Hannerz (1992) and Jourdan (1996), which will help to make sense of the seemingly unmanageable cultural complexity of the Honiarian universe. My second theoretical tool, directly related to my research topic, is the concept of language ideologies; its exposition will allow me to present the linguistic situation in Honiara, which is at the heart of this thesis. A last important inspiration, which will frame my analysis of class differentiation in relation to languages, is a “Weberian” approach to the concept of middle-class.

### **1.2.1. Creolization in process**

The concept of creolization was first elaborated by Hannerz in the context of his study of popular culture in contemporary Nigeria. It is concerned with the transnational flows of people, images and ideologies. Hannerz used it to argue that there is a creative interplay between local culture (from the periphery) and foreign influences (from the center), the outcome of which is impossible to predict – as with Creole languages (1992:264-266). This unpredictability is due to the fact that there are two contradictory tendencies at work: saturation and maturation. While saturation (when the peripheral culture assimilates more and more foreign forms and meanings and becomes similar to that of the center) is often emphasized as the effect of cultural imports, Hannerz stresses the second process, maturation, in which the periphery progressively reshapes the metropolitan culture according to its own local specifications. Thus, with time, foreign influences are absorbed, digested and transformed into local products (1992:238).

Hannerz makes a second important point: In situations of creolization, not only do local and foreign cultural sources mix and combine in unexpected ways, but their contact also generates a high level of reflexivity at the local level. These various sources observe each other and comment on each other. In the case of Nigeria, this is often done through the “*bush*”/“*been-to*” dichotomy: The “*been-to*” had gone overseas (usually England) and returned to Nigeria after having acquired cultural capital (advanced education and “sophistication”) from the metropolis; “*bush*” depicts by contrast “ignorant” and “rustic” behaviours (1992:228-229). Entangled with local considerations of class and status, local responses to metropolitan culture are more ambivalent than is usually assumed. Thus, the “*been-to*” is sometimes described as arrogant and unfriendly, while “*bush*” people may embody qualities of sincerity (1992:242-243). Local humour also largely plays on local responses to metropolitan influences and on the exaggerated display of metropolitan-derived culture – e.g. Nigerian people making themselves ridiculous as they embrace uncritically metropolitan styles or make an inept use of foreign objects (1992:244). As we shall see, the Nigerian “*bush*”/“*been-to*” dichotomy strongly resonates with the “*lokol*”/“*moden*” dichotomy exposed by Gooberman-Hill in her analysis of the Honiarian middle-class (1999). A similar ambivalence and playfulness is also to be found in the syncretic culture which develops in Honiara (Jourdan 1996:62).

While Hannerz acknowledges that he may use the linguistic metaphor relatively loosely (1992:264), Jourdan, as a linguist, employs the concept of creolization in a way which is closer to its linguistic meaning as she applies it to the case of the Solomon Islands. In this analogy, vernacular cultures would constitute the substrate (the underlying structure) and foreign influences the superstrate (the lexifier) (1996:46). She points to the selection

and creative appropriation of discrete foreign forms (discourses, ideologies and practices), which come to interact with pre-existing meaning systems (1996:34-37). The result of this interaction is new cultural forms, which seem very different from their local source, but are in fact mostly “*new shells filled (...) with old meanings*”: new activities which become endowed with traditional meanings (1996:46-47). In any event, both Hannerz (1992:262) and Jourdan (1996:45) stress the fact that the influx of foreign cultural influences does not enter into a “cultural vacuum” but interacts with previous cultural sources, and that peripheral people do not absorb them passively but impose their own local interpretation on them. In Honiara, as competing ideologies enter into contact and give rise, through a complex process of selection and appropriation, to new cultural practices, a new urban culture is created *in vivo* (Jourdan 1996:46-47). Creolization, both linguistic and cultural, is there the “*normal state of affairs*” according to Jourdan.

A few words are in order concerning ethnicity, which is the type of social categorization most salient in Honiara. Berg (2000) demonstrates at length that ethnicity, and the management of ethnic differences, are at the heart of urban life in Honiara. Gooberman-Hill (1999) argues in particular that the negotiation of inter-ethnic relations is at the core of the definition of a middle-class identity.

It is important to distinguish between two different ways in which the concept of ethnicity is used in the Honiaran context. The first one refers to fictive kin based on a common vernacular language – called *wantok* in Pijin (from the English “one talk”, a notion which makes sense only in contexts of ethno-linguistic diversity, i.e. plantations and urban centers) (Jourdan 2007b:98). It is the traditional form of social affiliation in the Solomon Islands (Jourdan and Keesing 1997:411; Tara 2001). In practice, the term *wantok*

may be used to designate a fellow member of one's ethno-linguistic group, even if he/she is not a known relative; it can also, in mixed families, be applied to a relative regardless of his/her mother tongue, and is sometimes employed jokingly to address friends. However, in all cases, the use of this term suggests the existence of a relationship of expected solidarity and reciprocity.

The second meaning of "ethnicity", as a broader affiliation to an island or province (e.g. Malaita, Guadalcanal, Isabel), appeared more recently – and most critically in the context of the 1998-2001 "ethnic crisis". It does not entail a similar bond of solidarity. For example, the Malaitan "ethnic" identity encompasses several linguistic groups, who traditionally have often considered each other as rivals (Tara 2001). In fact, Solomon Islanders hardly ever use the term "ethnic"; rather, they would mention that a person is "from the same island" or from "a different island". It is interesting to note that currently, people tend to define themselves first by giving exclusively the name of their province (e.g. Western or Guadalcanal; or *part* Malaita *part* Isabel if they are from a mixed family), not of their specific linguistic group<sup>9</sup>. If one wants to know from which ethno-linguistic unit the person belongs, a second question (e.g. "*Which part lo Malaita?*") is often necessary. At the university, during the first class, tutors generally ask students to introduce themselves by giving their name and province of origin. At SICHE<sup>10</sup>, this information is even mentioned on registration lists posted at the door of administrative offices.

According to Tara, this broader notion of ethnicity (vs. *wantok*) is largely a construction stemming from Western discourses. Indeed, Linnekin and Poyer (1990:7-8)

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<sup>9</sup> This practice of "provincially-constructed" ethnicity, which prevails in all official contexts and occasions, is arguably promoted by the national elite (see in particular Gooberman-Hill 1999:224 on the case of the country's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence).

<sup>10</sup> Solomon Island College of Higher Education

claim that the whole concept of ethnicity as biological inheritance, with hardened boundaries, belongs to a Western ideology and has been only recently “imported” by Oceanic peoples. By contrast, according to these authors, indigenous conceptions of cultural identity traditionally privilege the influence of the environment, social interaction and criteria of behaviours – a flexible paradigm entailing porous boundaries. Yet, the sharp distinction that they propose between an “imported” model of bounded ethnicity and an original local fluidity has been contested in the light of recent studies on the Honiaran context. Berg (2000) overtly criticizes Linnekin and Poyer’s conceptual framework for overlooking local models of group differentiation. Drawing on Keesing’s analysis of linguistic diversity in Melanesia, he points out: “*People are continually creating micro-variances through practices to separate themselves from an ascribed ‘other’*” (2000:18-19). Also *contra* Linnekin and Poyer, Gooberman-Hill notes that, for Honiaran middle-class people, ethnic identity (unlike class identity) is not primarily constructed through performance and practice, but appears much as a given based on descent, often recognizable in physical appearance (1999:36-37). Finally, Jourdan observes that the “*Tenson*” prompted a renewed interest in vernacular languages and cultures among young Honiarans (2007a:38); this fact suggests that the two levels of “ethnicity” (province vs. ethno-linguistic group) cannot be treated as totally disconnected.

### **1.2.2. Languages and ideology in Solomon Islands**

As indicated by the term ‘*wantok*’, in Solomon Islands ethnic boundaries are primarily defined through linguistic differences. Several authors have suggested that, in Melanesia, extreme linguistic differentiation may be fostered by Melanesians’ attitudes to language - an ideology which construes language as a “*highly salient marker of group*



*identity*” (Kulick 1992:2), and a desire to differentiate themselves from neighbouring groups through micro-variances (also Laycock 1982; Jourdan 1996:38). Even in Pijin, phonological differences (depending on which vernacular served as substrate language) are used by Honiarans to determine the geographic and ethno-linguistic origin of their interlocutor (Jourdan 2007a:37). Language has thus always been at the heart of Solomon Islanders’ social organization: It is a salient element in urban life and generates countless comments. This makes Honiara an ideal setting to explore ideologies *about* language.

### *Language ideologies as a theoretical field*

Before setting out the theoretical approach named “language ideology”, I should make explicit the general assumptions about language upon which it is based. This approach is part of the academic field of ethno-linguistics, which regards language primarily as a *social* phenomenon. It assumes that linguistic practices not only reflect, but also index and shape culture - i.e. that there is a dialectical relationship between language and culture. Furthermore, following an increasing number of scholars (Heller 2006:166-167), I conceive of language as a set of socially distributed *resources*. This entails an interest in the questions of *who controls* access to linguistic resources and defines their respective value, *in the interest of whom* and *with what consequences* for people - issues particularly salient in educational and state institutions. Social actors deal, consciously or not, with socio-historical constraints which affect their language behaviours, and use their linguistic resources in a way which may contribute to perpetuate - or resist - existing power relations.

The field of language ideology has been recently revisited by a group of American scholars (cf. Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998;

Kroskrity 2000; Makihara and Schieffelin 2007a) – although it draws on a diversity of previous works which regarded language as social practice (e.g. Labov 1966; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Bourdieu 1977, 1982, 1991) and parallels other analyses influenced by Marxist theories (in particular Calvet 1979, 1987 in France). Language ideologies can be defined as cultural conceptions of languages (Makihara 2004). They are culturally shaped attitudes about the *nature* of language, the way it should be *used* (i.e. when, where, and by whom), the *value* of particular languages and linguistic varieties, their *origins* and their *future* (Kroskrity 2000:5). Their study encompasses the examination of attitudes and practices, as well as the discursive ways in which these ideologies are produced, reproduced and implemented. Most importantly, then, language ideologies are not *only* about language: They constitute “*a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk*” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:55-56). Their interest lies in the way they articulate with other social phenomena (in the case of my topic, with the emergence of national consciousness and social stratification), since commonsense ideas about language are always *also* ideas about categories of people (also Calvet 1979). Linguistic performance is indeed often perceived as indexing *non*-linguistic competence such as intelligence and personality.

Linking language practice to structural processes of social categorization and issues of power, the study of language ideology is largely - albeit not always - a critical approach which aims at unravelling the functioning of social domination (1994:57). Language ideologies *naturalize* a linguistic status quo and its corresponding power inequalities; while presented as *commonsense* (e.g. about what is morally good or aesthetical), they are usually the constructions of a specific group who attempts to legitimate, protect and promote its

own interests (Kroskrity 2000:8). Language regimentation, i.e. action taken on language and on linguistic practices by the group in power, is the product of these ideologies. At the same time, it also helps to reassert and reproduce them - or may conversely attempt to reverse them, especially in post-colonial contexts when a political U-turn to cut off colonial ties is undertaken.

This does not entail, of course, that language ideologies are the preserve of national leaders or are not contested by citizens. More often than not, there are several competing ideologies at work in a society, which can be mobilized and used strategically by social actors (Schieffelin and Woolard 1994:71). Language constitutes indeed a rich site to explore competitive political and ideological stances: It provides likely places to find “us”/“them” distinctions (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998:286). Furthermore, it should be stressed that several ideologies may coexist and compete *within* the mind of each individual member of this society - as we shall see in the case of Solomon students. People may thus hold several ideologies, and privilege one or another depending on context (Makihara 2007:63).

Language ideologies not only reflect socio-cultural values but act as an “*interpretive filter in the relationship of language and society*” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:62). They affect linguistic behaviors; for this reason, language ideologies are expressed in discourses (i.e. what people say about languages), but also in practices (i.e. how people speak). As noted by Simpson (1997:39), “*ideology not only consists of the abstract ideas or representations of reality but is embodied in everyday practices*”. Indeed, because ideologies are not always articulated, but are partly pre-reflective, it is important to examine both their discursive and their behavioral components (Schieffelin and Woolard

1994:58). Ochs and Schieffelin (2006:188) assert in particular the impossibility to rely exclusively on peoples' declarations on their code-switching behaviour in formal interviews, since it is often below their level of awareness and discursively reconstructed. To explore linguistic ideologies, it is thus capital to observe actual *practices*, and potentially contrast them with *discourses* (as ideological *content* of speech).

Nonetheless, the language ideology approach stands out in the linguistic academic field in the attention it pays to speakers' linguistic awareness, expressed through metalinguistic comments (Kroskrity 2000:5). There is a long tradition of assuming that native speakers have little awareness of the ways they use their language (e.g. Boas 1911:69), and that the few ideas they may have about it are flawed. Yet, the fact that certain linguistic elements are socially salient and widely discussed is in itself significant, and metalinguistic comments have proved very useful to identify social ideologies, perpetuated or resisted through language. For example, metalinguistic terms designating varieties of Creole in Haiti carry significant cultural meanings and express obvious - if contradictory - social evaluation (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998:289-290). Attitudes toward linguistic syncretism or purism can also be explored by paying attention to the way people label the mixed language variety that they use (i.e. "corrupted", "broken"; as opposed to "pure", "real") (Swigart 1994; Spitulnik 1998; Riley 2007). Another fruitful use of metapragmatic comments, related to gender ideologies, is provided by Simpson's analysis of the use of impolite pronouns in Thailand (1997): In this interesting case, young female students, while using these pronouns with friends on a daily basis, tend to condemn their usage as crude and uneducated – revealing a striking difference between a subversive daily

practice and a metapragmatic discourse nonetheless submissive to the dominant ideology on language and gender (Simpson 1997:59)<sup>11</sup>.

Other insightful applications of the language ideology approach have, by contrast, focused on practices rather than metapragmatics, notably on the unintended impact of adults' behaviours on the language socialization of children, and its implications for language shift or maintenance (Ochs and Schieffelin 2006). Particularly relevant to the present thesis are Kulick's works (1992, 1998) on the shift in PNG from vernacular to Tok Pisin as positively associated with modernity, Christianity and education; Garrett (2005) on language shift in St. Lucia; and Paugh (2005) on the maintenance of Patwa among Dominican children. The case studied by Paugh highlights that, although children partly replicate and perpetuate social ideologies through the linguistic practices they are taught, they also, by appropriating and using this language on their own, have the opportunity to display agency, exploring and challenging dominant social norms (2005:66).

Before moving to the particular context of Solomon Islands, a last concept which is at the heart of this dissertation should be clarified: that of "attitude". The term comes from the field of social psychology; it is widely used in psycho- and sociolinguistics and is generally defined as a tendency to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects (e.g. Edwards 1994). Language attitudes are therefore evaluative reactions based on what one knows, or *thinks* to know (i.e. one's beliefs), about a language. The difference between language *attitudes* and *ideologies* is that the former constitute a surface ("sayable", semi-conscious) layer, while ideologies are the underlying logic, which requires analysis to be

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<sup>11</sup> I hope to make clear at this point, especially for my Solomon readers, that the phenomena that I will point out throughout this thesis – in particular the fact of making assertions about language which are demonstrably untrue or contradictory, and of behaving in a way which is clearly inconsistent with one's discourse – are common in many (not to say all) populations over the world and are *by no means* the reflection of some peculiar inadequacy among Solomon Islanders.

brought out (Kathleen Riley, personal communication). That ideology is at work is signalled by the presence of recurrent patterns across individual discourses – of “cultural tapes”, as Ortner (2003:7) wittily put it.

Now that the main theoretical framework has been presented, we can start to consider how it applies to the specific case of Solomon Islands. In the next section, I will outline how the particular history of this country has produced a multiplicity of linguistic ideologies, which compete and “creolize” today in Honiara, and how these ideologies articulate with the emergence of national consciousness and class differentiation.

### *Languages in the Solomon Islands: an historical sketch*

In Honiara, several language ideologies currently coexist, due to the superposition of the colonial ideology on previous local ones, and more recently to the influence of “nationalist” language policies, intended to revitalize indigenous languages, in neighbouring countries.

As noted by Schieffelin and Woolard (1994:68), while the colonizer’s language ideologies are often well documented, relatively little is known about pre-colonization language ideologies, for lack of written sources. Nevertheless, in the case of the Solomon Islands, it has been convincingly argued that the pre-colonial linguistic situation consisted in one of reciprocal multilingualism, in which all vernacular languages occupied an equal position and were mastered by neighbouring groups. According to Jourdan (2007a:32), this practice can be viewed as the linguistic counterpart of a concern for balanced reciprocity between ethno-linguistic groups.

A profoundly different linguistic order was brought about by colonialism (Jourdan 2007a:33; also Sankoff 1980; Calvet 1979). Contrary to the previous situation, this new

order was hierarchical, and placed (quite expectedly) English at the top. Colonial labels imposed on local languages – “dialects” for vernaculars, “broken English” for Pijin – contributed to express and reinforce this hierarchy, and the concurrent social and intellectual hierarchy the colonials attempted to establish between local populations and themselves<sup>12</sup>. The colonial ideology on which such order was built was informed by an evolutionist view of languages, in which assumingly “universal” criteria (i.e. “logic”, in fact based on the structures of European languages) were imposed to local languages to judge what stage of development/complexity they had reached (Calvet 1979:27-28). It was based on European assumptions on what a “real” language is (with a strong bias in favour of literacy and a focus on the existence of a “grammar” easily identifiable by Western linguists), and on the idea that a language reveals a certain level of intelligence and civility in a people (Schieffelin and Woolard 1994:63).

The colonial ideology was also informed by European tenets of linguistic purism, which depreciate syncretic linguistic practices and equate language change with decay, in a way which assumes that “real” languages are not human artefacts but are “natural”, immutable products (1994:64). A language which has a retraceable recent history can in this view not aspire to the status of “real” language – although, from a long-term historical perspective, most languages (and English most conspicuously) were in fact born from contact between different linguistic groups<sup>13</sup>. For this reason, Creole languages such as

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<sup>12</sup> In his critical reflection on colonial linguistics, Calvet (1979:52-53) notes that, in colonial situations, the term “language” is always reserved to the European language, whereas all local languages are labelled “dialects”. This term, value-free when it is used *diachronically* (e.g. French, Italian and Spanish are all dialects of Latin), was then used *synchronically* in a pejorative way by colonials - based on the opposition civilised/language vs. uncivilised/dialect - to establish a racist social hierarchy between local and colonial languages (and people).

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the idea that *all* languages could be considered creoles has been advanced in the linguistic academic field (see Jourdan 1991:190), and was most notoriously debated in the case of Middle English, which would have emerged from Saxon and French in the fourteenth century (see also Calvet 1979).

Pijin, which emerged from contact between English and Melanesian languages, ranked even lower than local vernaculars in the colonial hierarchy. Pijin had originally stabilized in the plantations of Queensland prior to British colonisation, but was later revived in colonial plantations as a communication medium between Solomon Islanders from diverse ethno-linguistic groups, and between local workers and European planters (Jourdan 2007b:75-76). Pijin was thus a Melanesian creation prior to colonization, with a strong substrate influence and fluently spoken almost exclusively by Melanesians (Keesing 1988, 1990); however, in the planters' view, it was a childlike form of English suitable to communicate with "simple-minded" Natives. For lack of "better option" (due to the high level of linguistic diversity in Solomon Islands), Pijin was pragmatically used by colonials as an effective ("*excellent if revolting*") communication medium, but suffered from strong prejudices (Keesing 1990:154-155). While the unintelligible vernaculars were less easy to ridicule, Pijin, due to its superficial lexical resemblance with English, was viewed by British colonials as a bastardized form of English without internal structure. Consequently, they did not feel that it was necessary to learn it in order to speak it correctly. It was in fact assumed and hoped that Melanesian Pidgin was "*a temporary interlanguage on the way to full competence to English*" (Smith 2002:199), which would be quickly replaced by "proper" English after a transitional stage through "simple" English (Keesing 1990:159; Jourdan 1990:167)<sup>14</sup>.

As in many colonized countries, a situation of "colonial diglossia" was imposed in Solomon Islands. Makihara (2004:529) coined this phrase to describe the functional

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<sup>14</sup> Following Keesing (1990) and others, I use the term "Pijin" to refer to the Solomon version of Melanesian Pidgin; "Pidgin-English" is used exclusively in reference to the colonial ideology that disparages it. On the other hand, I use the term Pidgin to refer to the other dialects of Melanesian Pidgin - i.e. Tok Pisin in PNG ("PNG Pidgin") and Bislama in Vanuatu ("Vanuatu Pidgin").



compartmentalization of languages in colonial situations, and the hierarchical system of sociolinguistic distinctions that such compartmentalization produces. It draws on Ferguson's concept of "diglossia" (1964; extended in Fishman 1967), in which a High code (here the colonizers' language) is used for written and formal purposes while a Low code (the local language) is used for informal, ordinary verbal interaction. Importantly, diglossia is the product of power relations, but is also productive of linguistic change (Calvet 1979:72-74). Through legislation on the language to be used in administration, education, media and courts, linguistic domination pervades the whole society. According to Calvet, in the typical colonial scenario local elites move from bilingualism (colonial/local codes) to monolingualism in the dominant language, while lower-class urbanites become bilingual and the rural areas remain largely monolingual in the dominated language.

#### *The paradoxical situation of Pijin*

Yet, the case of Solomon Islands has not followed the "typical" scenario described by Calvet. Whereas the colonial linguistic ideology had placed it at the very bottom of its pyramid, Pijin has become the *de facto* national language of Solomon Islands, and in particular the "natural" language of the Honiaran urban world where interethnic contacts - and marriages - are widespread (Jourdan 1996; Jourdan and Keesing 1997:410-411). A new popular culture has developed under the impulsion of the urban youth, in this language which, belonging to no specific group, can be appropriated by everyone (Jourdan 2007a:34). For the first time, Pijin has become the main language of a large number of permanent urban dwellers, and the mother tongue of a new generation of young urbanites (Jourdan 2007b:88). As these children grow up in town with Pijin as mother tongue, they participate in the production of a homogenous urban standard (Jourdan 1991:195).

Conversely, with 80% of Solomon Islanders still living in rural areas, vernaculars remain strong at the national level (Jourdan 2007a:34). They are viewed as “real” languages, all of equal worth between them, and are imbued with the aura of *kastom*<sup>15</sup>. Even in the eyes of young urbanites who are not proficient in them, they retain symbolic value as languages of their “true” identity: Most young urban people still define themselves based on their parents’ linguistic group (Jourdan 2007b:99), and some of them may use punctual words picked up for their parents’ vernacular, in a reified way, to assert their ethnic identity (Jourdan 2007a:39).

Jourdan (2007a) argues that, although the current hierarchy between languages differs from the colonial one – due to the superposition of competing, contextual language ideologies - the idea of *hierarchy* remains and partly shapes language attitudes. This is most obvious in the negative attitudes that Pijin still faces in post-Independence Solomon Islands, and its concurrent lack of official recognition in spite of its widespread use. In 1990, Keesing pointed out that, a decade after Independence, the ideology inherited from the colonial rule, which presents Pijin as a form of bastardized English, is still endorsed by large segments of the population - and in particular the local elite, who had been schooled in institutions where speaking Pijin was forbidden and punished, and later in foreign universities. He asserted that many educated Solomon Islanders still think that Pijin has “no grammar”, failing to recognize a Melanesian syntax behind it. Yet, in spite of negative attitudes and numerous predictions of its forthcoming death, Pijin is currently widely used, even by fully university-educated people in most of their interactions, including sometimes in Parliament (Jourdan 2007b:69). The discrepancy – still topical - among educated

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, whereas Pijin is frequently disparaged in daily conversations (as we will see), I never heard any Solomon Islander make negative judgemental comments on any vernacular language.

Solomon Islanders between discourses which endorse the negative prejudices against Pijin and actual linguistic practices which privilege it, will be at the heart of this dissertation. However, before presenting Solomon students' views on Pijin, it seems useful to provide some basic information on its current status in the country.

In line with the ideology inherited from the colonial period, Pijin has to date no official status, no *officially* sanctioned conventionalized orthography and no official place in the education system. Except for occasional cartoons and advertisements, print media – in particular the most widely read newspaper, *Solomon Star* – are produced in English<sup>16</sup>. Onenews, the national news TV program, is also presented in English. Radio news on the national Government-owned channel, SIBC (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation), are first presented in English then followed by a Pijin version<sup>17</sup>. By contrast, Tok Pisin in PNG and Bislama in Vanuatu, closely related to Solomon Pijin with similar origins in the Queensland plantations, have gained official status as national languages (Jourdan 2007b:1)<sup>18</sup>.

Pijin has made significant legitimacy gains in recent years, but they have come from civil society – churches and schools - rather than government intervention. As in Vanuatu and in PNG (see respectively Thomas 1990:238; Smith 2002:212), Christian associations in Solomon Islands, by translating religious texts, have significantly contributed to legitimize

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<sup>16</sup> In 1996, a newspaper in Pijin, named *Solomon Grasrut*, came out for the first time, but rapidly disappeared. This is little surprising considering that, as we shall see, educated middle-class people – who are typically the target readers of newspapers – read English much more fluently than Pijin.

<sup>17</sup> Calvet (1979:213) interestingly notes that, in most post-colonial situations, the radio is the only place where local languages find *some* room, while written media and education are in the colonial language - a practice which reinforces the position of these languages as limited to the oral level.

<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that official recognition was readily gained in PNG and Vanuatu. In PNG, negative prejudices against Tok Pisin as inferior to English do exist and are still common; the language has only recently been officially introduced in elementary schools, and only one newspaper, *Wantok*, is in Tok Pisin (Smith 2002:21). Similarly in Vanuatu, although Bislama was recognized as national and official language in the 1980 Constitution, it has long struggled to find its place in the legal and educational domains, due to prejudices that it would not be suitable for such “abstract” activities (Thomas 1990:234,240).

the language and have provided a first step toward standardization<sup>19</sup> (Jourdan 2007b:75). In most primary schools, Pijin, albeit not recognized as an asset, is largely used in classrooms. However, the interest of this language for political discourses and for the spread of nationalist ideology has not escaped the attention of politicians, who frequently use it in press conferences and election campaigns (Jourdan 2007b:106). As a common language, widespread and easy to learn, transcending ethno-linguistic barriers (i.e. not giving advantage to any ethno-linguistic group) and perceived as local (thus available to be emotionally appropriated as national language vs. the colonizer's language), it constitutes a powerful tool for national unification - which was first successfully tested by *Maasina Rule* (Jourdan 2004[1995]:110; 2007b:87). The importance of such an asset is highlighted by the thorny situation of neighbouring (still-colonized) New Caledonia, where French, the colonial language, is the only common language available for nationalist purposes (Barnèche 2004:50). Consequently, research on Pijin has now started to be promoted by the Solomon government (Jourdan 2004[1995]:111).

#### *Code-switching practices and social distinction*

With the imposition of the colonial order, which languages are mastered became for the first time a power issue for Solomon Islanders. Beyond mastery of English (which is required for many high-level jobs), phonological features close to English and the insertion of English words in Pijin are frequently used as a mark of sophistication by young urbanites (Keesing and Jourdan 1997:415; Jourdan 2007a:36). The hierarchical colonial ideology, putting English at its top, has left its mark on the linguistic order that now

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<sup>19</sup> The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) published in 1995 “*Wei Fo Raetem Olketa Wod Long Pijin*” (“How to write words in Pijin”), based on which the translation of religious texts was undertaken.

prevails in Honiara and plays an important role in the construction of social differentiation in Solomon Islands.

Language practices – such as the widespread “mixing” of Pijin and English - are shaped by language ideologies (Makihara 2004:529; Riley 2007:72); in turn, these practices reveal socio-linguistic ideologies, including in relation to class distinction (Bourdieu 1982). For this reason, although the focus of this dissertation is on discourses as ideological *content* of speech, I cannot leave totally out of consideration the linguistic *forms* used by students. The social significance of the practice of “mixing” Pijin and English will be examined in Chapter 5, but references to “code-switching” will occur in all chapters, and this calls for some preliminary clarifications.

“Code-switching” refers to the alternating use of two or more languages in one’s speech (Gumperz 1982:59). Alternation may occur between groups of sentences, or sentences (intersentential), or parts of sentences (intrasentential). The languages that people use in code-switching are part of their “linguistic repertoire” – i.e. the range of linguistic resources that people may employ in social interaction (Blom and Gumperz 1972:411). Code-switching is traditionally understood as respecting the “discreteness” of languages; it is different from “code-mixing”, which refers to the *simultaneous* use of two languages within one single utterance, without allowing for clear boundaries to be drawn between the languages used. It is also different from “loans”, i.e. borrowings from another language. However, these terms are under intense debate in the sociolinguistic academic field (e.g. Auer 1998; Woolard 1998; Spitulnik 1998:48-49). A major issue is whether “code-switching” and “code-mixing” should be understood as different in nature; in many cases, it may be more adequate to consider that there is a continuum from code-alternation to a

mixed code (Auer 1998). Furthermore, in many bilingual situations the distinction between loans, switch and mix is difficult to establish: Criteria of phonological (i.e. in pronunciation) and morphological (i.e. with regard to the internal structure of the words) assimilation and frequency of usage are often used by linguists, but they are not always straightforward, and the linguist's analysis may not match the speaker's perception (Spitulnik 1998:48). Several authors concerned with the study of "translingual" (Woolard 1998) or "syncretic" (Makihara 2004) practices and mixed urban codes (Spitulnik 1998 on Urban Bemba; Swigart 1994 on Urban Wolof; Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998) have pointed out that these widespread phenomena do not easily fit into traditional models<sup>20</sup>.

Distinctions between borrowing and code-switching are especially uncertain in the case of Creole languages (Smith 2002:94-95): What new words borrowed from the lexifier language should then be considered as having become "standard" vocabulary in the Creole language? In his thorough study of Tok Pisin among PNG youth, Smith (2002:202) notes that, between clearly Tok Pisin utterances and the insertion of clearly English phrases, "*lies a grey area where it may be difficult to say exactly what language certain forms belong to.*"<sup>21</sup> Myers-Scotton (1993) provided a model that, although criticized (e.g. Auer 1998), was useful to Smith's analysis and seems also relevant to my data. She distinguished between the "matrix" language (which provides the grammatical frame and the syntactic elements) and the "embedded" language (which provides lexical items). Smith thus shows that embedded English segments, which may or not be phonologically and/or

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<sup>20</sup> In particular, cases of "bivalence" (when a single word may belong to either language) and "interference" (e.g. when the phonological system of a language is applied to a word borrowed from another) may be better conceived as *simultaneities*, where the two languages overlap (Woolard 1998:6-7).

<sup>21</sup> Such cases of "competition" between English and Tok Pisin at the lexical, phonological, syntactic and semantic level were relatively rare in Smith's data corpus (2002:205-207) but were indeed frequent, between English and Pijin, in my own research.

morphologically integrated to Tok Pisin, are frequently inserted into speech in Tok Pisin without calling into question the nature of speech *as* Tok Pisin. This distinction can be useful to distinguish between Pijinized English (English matrix, Pijin words) and Anglicized Pijin (Pijin matrix, English words).

Importantly, throughout the thesis I will use the term “alternation” when the boundaries between English and Pijin are kept clear by the speaker, so as to emphasize the contrast with “mixing” (when the two languages overlap in utterances). “Code-switching” will be used as a general term covering both alternation and mixing practices - although Solomon students tend to use, conversely, the label of “mixing” for all code-switching/mixing practices.

The practice of code-switching often functions as a marker of social distinction; however, it can also be an unmarked feature of urban speech, considered normal and motivated by “practical” considerations - i.e. (real or perceived) lexical gaps (Spitulnik 1996:172, 1998:50; Swigart 1994:177; Makihara 2004; Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998). As Alfonzetti puts it: “*Code-switching* can, but need not, *call into play the social and symbolic values of the codes in the repertoire*” (1998:180, emphasis in the original). In the university context of my research, the use of English for academic or technical terms was often called for by a lack of equivalent term in Pijin. Many English words, which derive from the state culture and education system, are part of Honiarans’ everyday lexicon and have little social significance as foreign or sophisticated. Not *all* occurrences of code-switching are therefore socially significant. But the generalized use of a heavily mixed code among educated urban people, i.e. the constitution of a socially differentiated variant of the local language, definitely is (Spitulnik 1998:46; Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998:86).

### 1.2.3. Middle-class culture in Honiara

Social differentiation in Melanesian countries seems to be best conceptualized through a “Weberian” approach of the middle-class, as was adopted by Errington and Gewertz on Papua New Guinea (1999, 1997) and by Gooberman-Hill on Honiara (1999). In this perspective, middle-class is conceived not as an objective social category but as a cultural *project* (Ortner 2003) or *practice*, which has both material and discursive components. In other terms, class exists only through its production in everyday cultural practice, in the deployment of language, goods and ideas (Liechty 2003:265). This view largely draws on Weber’s theory on the nature of middle-classes as defined not in relation to production, but to consumption (2003:16-17).

Referring to the case of Tonga, Kerry (2003: 332,313) indeed argues that no middle-class in the *Marxian* sense (implying some collective action in the defence of common interests) can be said to exist in Tonga due to the continuing existence of alternative allegiances based on kinship and religion; but an educated elite of commoners (vs. the Tongan traditional nobility) has developed as an intermediary stratum of well-off urban professionals, who share similar types of occupations and socialize in similar settings (clubs or restaurants) – and this group can be considered as a middle-class in the *Weberian* sense of the term. Similarly, in PNG no strong workers/owners polarization exists: The “middle-class”, mainly constituted of owners of small businesses and professionals employed by the Government and churches, is then defined by the capacity to consume and display a desirable lifestyle (Errington and Gewertz 1999:11-12).

Gooberman-Hill (1999), in her analysis of the Honiaran middle-class, also looked at practices, life-styles and ideals to explore social stratification. As in PNG, the major



impetus for the creation of a sizable local middle-class in Solomon Islands was the process of localization (the jobs occupied by expatriates being redistributed to educated local people following Independence). Consequently, it is largely composed of teachers and civil servants, to which must be added church employees and a few small entrepreneurs (1999:20). In the urban context of Honiara, significant cultural changes are taking place: the spread of wage employment, an emphasis on the nuclear family over the extended one, the development of social relations outside kin, and the redefinition of social propriety and cultural practice (Jourdan 2007a:34). Social differentiation is to be understood in relation to these changes. At the same time, most middle-class people are reluctant to abandon their ethnic identity; but in order to be recognized as a member of an ethnic group and a *wantok* network, and thus keep one's place in the village social system, one must comply with a number of social obligations, which have non-negligible financial implications<sup>22</sup>. By refusing certain *wantok* demands as straining their family budget, they are likely to face accusations of selfishness. This practice is in line with the traditionally egalitarian social structure, in which *bigmen* are not conceived as a fixed hereditary high class, but based on personal prestige and redistribution practices (e.g. Jourdan 2007b:17). The complex negotiation to retain one's place in the social structure of *hom* while living a middle-class life is thus a significant part of what being middle-class means in Melanesia (Jourdan 2007a:35). Importantly, it limits the possibilities for conspicuous social differentiation through life-style.

Beyond the possession of material goods, an important part of Gooberman-Hill's analysis consequently examines middle-class *discourses*, and in particular the development

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<sup>22</sup> People are minimally expected to accommodate and feed visiting relatives, send remittances to their village kin, contribute to ritual events and provide financial support for relatives' education.

of a specifically urban, modern morality. The notion of modernity ('*moden*') is constructed by the Honiaran middle-class in opposition to '*lokol*' - delineating a distinct social group who shares similar values and crosscuts ethnic divisions (1999:224). It entails not only having paid employment and living "sophisticated" life-styles (through the consumption of imported goods and good housing), but also valuing education and cosmopolitan skills (i.e. travelling abroad, showing tolerance to ethnic differences), rejecting certain aspects of *kastom* and asserting relative autonomy from the demands of rural kin to the benefit of one's nuclear family<sup>23</sup>.

While middle-class practice is built on the sharing of certain values, it also implies the creation of social *boundaries* – i.e. processes of distinction and exclusion. According to Gooberman-Hill, education is increasingly used to mark the boundaries of social groups: Crass behaviours are often disparaged by middle-class people as due to a lack of education (1999:145), creating thus a sharp distinction between educated (i.e. '*moden*') and uneducated (i.e. '*lokol*') people. In the case of PNG, Errington and Gewertz (1997:335) argue that, as the new urban PNG middle-class positions itself as a "developed" elite (replacing to some extent the colonists' position) by opposition to the "grass-roots", its strategy of differentiation leads to the discursive creation of a marginalized underclass.

Social stratification does not seem as sharp in Honiara as it is in PNG. Certainly, as pointed out by Jourdan (forthcoming), kin groups do start to fragment along class lines. A good example of this phenomenon is the case of the *hoasgel*, generally a poor relative who

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<sup>23</sup> Gooberman-Hill notes that her respondents never referred to themselves as members of a middle-class, and rather resorted to the *lokol/moden* dichotomy. However, contrary to Errington and Gewertz (1997,1999), she stresses the distinction between the Honiaran middle-class and the wealthy ruling elite – referred to by the former as "Honiara's *bigmen*" (1999:20): Although middle-class members share with the elite relatively similar lifestyles, values and aspirations, they feel that their background excludes them from real economic and political power.

is “asked for help” by wealthier urban kin. Although kinship ties are the reason for her presence, she is also an employee: The *hoasgel* position, socially delineated, supplants her kin status and puts them at the margins of the family unit, in a different, and subordinate, social sphere<sup>24</sup>. A first generation of born and raised middle-class Honiarans has become young adults - several of them were among my USP informants – and how the reproduction of class identities will take place in the future is still an open-ended question. However, for now, since very few Honiarans were born middle-class, middle-classness is still largely viewed as based on practice and not on birth (Gooberman-Hill 1999:37,59), and the ‘*moden/lokol*’ opposition is complicated by a generational component. This fact was funnily illustrated when, in my middle-class adoptive family, the father told his appalled children that he walked to school naked when he was himself a child.

Generally speaking, as a category, middle-class is notoriously difficult to circumscribe: It is always heterogeneous and defies clear-cut definitions (Liechty 2003:64). Referring to the Tongan case, Kerry notes that, beyond white-collar occupations, it is necessary to take into account family background, consumption patterns, social networks, income and level of education (2003:312); as already mentioned, in Solomon Islands mastery of English should be added to these criteria (Jourdan 2007a:36). Currently, in Honiara, middle-class appears as a highly fluid and contextual category. Largely due to the difficult economic context, people may rate fairly well on certain criteria without apparently meeting others, making class definition particularly slippery. Most (if not all) middle-class families struggle to make ends meet. Parents may spend most of their income on school fees to send their children to a prestigious private primary school, such as

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<sup>24</sup> This tension was playfully encapsulated by an upper-middle-class friend after a phone call: “*I called my babysitter... basically she’s my cousin, she hates when I call her my babysitter!*”

Chung-Wah School, and concurrently live in an over-crowded tumbledown house in a disadvantaged settlement. A friend's aunt who had a good job in a Ministry on weekdays held a betel nut and cigarette stall on weekends. Indeed, many middle-class households have to rely on complementary sources of income through occupations that may not fit the "classical" definition of middle-class. Students may also attend college one semester in Honiara, then temporarily go back to their province of origin and work in a canteen so as to raise money for their school fees<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, unemployment is a pervasive problem which does not spare middle-class youth, even if they have reached a high level of education: The *masta liu* condition (unemployed youth who wander in the city, see Jourdan 1995) – with its share of marginalization, boredom and social problems - is in no simple way indexed by class membership. Neither is education a fully satisfactory criterion: As will be explained, the education system in Solomon Islands is highly selective, and youth who were pushed out of the system due to a lack of motivation in their early years may take a job as unskilled labour – if they find one - which by no means matches their aspirations and intellectual ambitions (also see Berg 2000:6). Conversely, if criteria of attitudes and values are emphasized to define middle-classness – such as the valuation of education and cosmopolitanism (Gooberman-Hill 1999) – this entails assuming that they are the preserve of the middle-class. Yet, as reflected in the increasing number of inter-ethnic marriages and in the growing weight of education, employment and cosmopolitan skills in the choice of a spouse (Jourdan 2004[1995]:109), these values seem to be largely embraced by urbanites

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<sup>25</sup> In fact, the high level of mobility between Honiara and the provinces renders even the distinction between urbanites and rural people problematic to some extent (Berg 2000; Stritecky 2001). Most of my informants born in the provinces had, for example, spent some time in Honiara on several occasions before settling there for their studies; the reverse also frequently happened. See Smith (2002:210) for a similar point on the case of PNG.

regardless of their social condition, not to say by most Solomon Islanders at the national level.

As a matter of fact, class categorization is not only fluid, but appears partly resisted by Honiarans. Based on research conducted in 1991, Jourdan (1995) observed that class differences, although more salient in Honiara than anywhere else in the Solomon Islands, did not seem strongly antagonized: The *masta liu*, who could represent an oppositional identity against which the middle-class would define itself, were still treated with some indulgence (albeit often criticized as lazy and unruly), partly because Honiaran people acknowledge the economic difficulties of life in town. Since the 90's, the reduction of public spending and decline in economic opportunities entailed by the '*Tenson*' has put additional pressure on the emergent middle-class, largely composed of public servants (Tara 2001; Bennett 2002:10; Jourdan 2004[1995]:102). These events were likely to have heightened not only ethnic, but also class tensions in the last few years: As noted by Liechty (2003:85), it is precisely when social difference becomes slippery that competition and exclusion are most necessary (see also Ortner 2003:61). Yet, Jourdan's observation seems to still hold largely true despite the deteriorated economic situation. For example, a song from the radio presenter Nate, highly popular during the time of my stay, criticized *all* high school students for wasting their time wandering in town, smoking and chewing betelnuts<sup>26</sup> - pointing out that they "*wearem uniforms, nating nomoa*"<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, many students whom I met seemed to resist, rather than endorse, the social categorization imposed on them by some of their elders, who stigmatized the "*betelnut type*" as lazy and irresponsible. Some young interpreters (upper-class and fully bilingual) at the Courts, who

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<sup>26</sup> The consumption of betelnuts (nuts of the areca palm), chewed together with mustard sticks and crushed coral lime, produces a mild narcotic effect, and large amounts of bright-red saliva which are often spat out.

<sup>27</sup> "*Just wear uniforms, nothing else*". A full transcription of this song is provided in Appendix.

were forbidden to chew betelnuts during the day because it stains the teeth, nonetheless did it on the sly at lunchtime. Other friends, perfectly well-behaved and successful students, could sometimes ‘*play raskol*’ by temporarily borrowing the *masta liu* style through their clothes - and occasionally their behaviours.

#### **1.2.4. Class consolidation vs. national affirmation: the language and education stake**

Although the valuing of education is hardly restricted to any particular class group in Honiara, it has been largely appropriated, if only discursively, by the middle-class to define itself. Education opens the door to socially-valued (ideally well-paid) jobs and to the acquisition of cultural capital through the development of class-based inter-ethnic friendships and cosmopolitan connections (Gooberman-Hill 1999:171-172). As in many other countries (e.g. Bourdieu 1966, 1977, 1984, 1991; Ortner 2003; Liechty 2003), education constitutes in Solomon Islands the cornerstone of the middle-class ethos.

Bourdieu, in particular, has extensively studied the role of education and competence in the “legitimate” language in the naturalization and reproduction of class privilege. Although this process is not the focus of my research, large parts of my analysis will draw on several important concepts that he developed. The term “cultural capital”, which I use above, refers to an ensemble of competences, dispositions and tastes valued in a given society and acquired through family socialization and education. The notion of “linguistic capital” (which is central to my research) denotes a particular form of cultural capital: proficiency in a socially valued language. Mastery of a language functions as linguistic capital *if* it provides material and symbolic profit, such as the access to socially attractive positions and jobs. Conversely, people who do not possess this linguistic competence are excluded from certain domains and positions. This reality - the sanction of

the linguistic market - leads people to recognize the domination of this language *even if* they do not master it themselves. Importantly, the capacity of a language to function as linguistic capital depends on the existence and maintenance of a linguistic market – i.e. “*the political and social conditions of production of the producers/consumers*” (1991:57). The educational system, through the weight it gives to the different linguistic competences, largely determines the reproduction of this market, without which the dominant language would lose its social value. As Bourdieu puts it:

*“The constitution of a linguistic market creates the conditions for an objective competition in and through which the legitimate competence can function as linguistic capital, producing a profit of distinction.”* (1991:55, emphasis in the original)

English in Solomon Islands, as in many other countries, functions as major linguistic capital: Required for much sought-after jobs in public services, it is valued as language of education and social success, and its central place in the educational system currently ensures the steady reproduction of the linguistic market. However, as pointed out by several authors (Stroud 2002; also Swigart 2000; Woolard 1985), the linguistic market is never *fully* integrated. There are always counter-forces at work, which leave room for the development of alternative forms of linguistic legitimacy. The continuing expansion of Pijin in Solomon Islands, despite its lack of status, is a case in point: Required in most urban interactions between Solomon Islanders, it has its own linguistic market.

Honiaran university students are the products of a highly selective education system in which English, as the legitimate language, plays a decisive role. Education in Solomon Islands is not compulsory<sup>28</sup>. It is not free either, and, as already mentioned, parents are often willing to spend a significant part of their financial resources for school fees in order

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<sup>28</sup> In 2002, the participation rate at the elementary level was officially 75%.  
Source: <http://www.apdip.net/projects/ict rnd/2002/pfnet>

to give their children the opportunity of social mobility (Jourdan 2004[1995]:107). Moreover, the system, based on successive national examinations that determine the future of the pupils (at the end of Grade 6, Form 3, Form 5, Form 6, Form 7), is harshly selective: Due to high - and increasing - demand for higher education, the competition is fierce (Gooberman-Hill 1999:172). For example, in 1992 only 25% of the pupils were accepted into secondary schools; similarly, after the third year in secondary school, only 25% of them were accepted into Form 4 (Jourdan 1995: footnote 7). Thus, if the drop out rate is high, so is the “push out” rate – i.e. students who are not admitted into higher grades for lack of space<sup>29</sup>. The tertiary level of education is centralized in Honiara, and is limited to two institutions: the Solomon Island College of Higher Education (SICHE, pre-university) and the University of the South Pacific Solomon Island Campus (USP SI Campus). This means that students have to move to Honiara if they want to further their education beyond high school, and that the number of seats is limited. In 2007, half of the students who applied for SICHE were sponsored through scholarships (from the Government or private founding, partly provided by international donors), while the second half were “self-sponsored”<sup>30</sup>.

With such a selective system, it is likely that most university students are not only the best students, but also those whose parents have the financial resources to pay university fees or the social/cultural know-how to support their application to scholarships. They are also pupils who master English well enough to be able to study successfully in this language. In brief, they are most likely youth who come from families endowed with

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<sup>29</sup> Students who fail to enter the tertiary level can enrol in distance-based courses offered by the USP Centre and SICHE. However, the poor communication system in the country does not allow for this system to be fully efficient. Source: <http://www.apdip.net/projects/ictrnd/2002/pfnet>.

<sup>30</sup> *Solomon Star*, February 15<sup>th</sup> 2007



financial, social and linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1966, 1977, 1991). Several authors (Jourdan 1990; Luke, McHoul and Mey 1990; Smith 1990 for the case of PNG where the education system is comparable) have pointed out that the Melanesian elites have a strong interest in maintaining English as the language of higher education, required for public service jobs: As it is, the system favours their children, who have more regular contact with English, and guarantees the reproduction of their middle-class status. English thus appears a key element in the recently established class system.

But education is *also* at the heart of the nationalist project, and this may play in favour of the recognition of Pijin as national language. As argued by Jourdan (2004[1995]:106), the construction of nationhood in Solomon Islands is still at its very beginnings: Allegiance is still much to people's home place and ethno-linguistic group. Nonetheless, a feeling of national consciousness, or at least of common purpose, is nascent, particularly among the young urban generation born in Honiara. Three factors contribute to its development according to Jourdan (2004[1995]:102-103): the education system, the success of Pijin as a common language belonging to no specific ethnic group and the development of a popular culture. Education plays a major role through the spreading of ideologies that foster emotional attachment to the nation and legitimize the existence of the State. In many countries, it has proven to be an efficient mechanism to create a common frame of reference beyond ethnic differences, and to instill nationalist values in a standardized way (Jourdan 2004[1995]:107-109; also Bourdieu 1991:47-49 on the case of France). In Solomon Islands, the education system was inherited from the colonial period and had long been in the hands of religious congregations; however, since Independence, the state education system has expanded dramatically and now largely overtakes the church

system (Gooberman-Hill 1999:171). Local teachers have replaced expatriates and the curriculum has been re-localized for nationalist purposes (e.g. with a history and geography syllabus focused on Solomon Islands, and the display of national symbols in school routines) (2004[1995]:109). Although Jourdan stated that in 1995 it was too early to assess the effectiveness of this policy, she noted that urban children had rapidly appropriated the national idea. As will be seen, my own data tends to confirm that national consciousness and attachment toward the country have grown and spread among Solomon students.

It may seem that I am presenting in this discussion class differentiation and nationalism as conflicting phenomena, but this is by no means my intention. On the contrary, the emergence of nationalism often *parallels* the appearance of class stratification: They are distinct, but tightly articulated processes (Foster 2004[1995]; Errington and Gewertz 1999; also Liechty 2003 for a similar remark on Nepal). Jourdan indeed argues that nationalism in Solomon Islands is a class-based ideology (2004[1995]:107). As nationalism develops, (sub-national) *ethnic* boundaries are replaced by (national) *class* boundaries. Gooberman-Hill (1999) also points to the development of inter-ethnic friendships as a fundamental element of the Honiaran middle-class ethos. In the emergent nation-State, middle-classness is generally taken as the new national norm – a standard allegedly available to any deserving and reasonable person (Foster 2004[1995]:130; Errington and Gewertz 1999:58).

Let us come back to the ideological weight of language and education. Bourdieu wrote “*the sociology of language is logically inseparable from a sociology of education*” (1991:62). Educational institutions play indeed a key role in the competition between divergent linguistic ideologies. They are the places where the dominant language ideology,

through the choice of the language of education, is enforced and sanctioned. In New Caledonia, Barnèche (2004:51) notes that only *taught* languages (e.g. French and English) are perceived by people as *full* languages (vs. dialects). Yet, as they are important agents of social change, schools are also sites from where these ideologies can be challenged and reversed. In the case of Haiti, the decision of the Ministry of Education to introduce Creole as the language of education (instead of French) in 1979 sparked off the most passionate reactions (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998:297). In PNG and Vanuatu, schools are the settings where the idea of introducing Tok Pisin and Bislama has been received with most reluctance (Thomas 1990; Kale 1990). Schools and universities are then simultaneously the *ground* for the competition of competing ideologies, a major *stake* and important *actors*.

There is no doubt that language planning is, beyond its “scientific” (ideologically neutral) appearance, a highly political endeavour (Calvet 1979; Luke and Baldauf 1990:26-27; Jourdan 1990:177; on the well-documented case of Quebec, see in particular Heller 1982, Levine 1990, MacMillan 1998, Fraser 2007). Yet, in post-colonial Melanesia, governments have appeared reluctant to take action in this domain, leaving considerable latitude to educational structures and religious associations to develop and implement language policies (Baldauf 1990:17; Smith 2002:21). Particularly in such a case, higher educational institutions are not only sites where class privilege is reproduced and state ideology implemented, but are also sites where dominant ideologies - and the unequal power relationships that they sustain - can be contested by civil society. This may be especially true in the context of Honiara, where the youth have an exceptional weight, not only demographically (60% of the city’s population is under 20), but also in terms of cultural influence (Jourdan 1995:212, 2007a:40).

Roughly speaking, contestation of dominant ideologies in universities may take two forms: “formal” (by recognized scholars) or “informal” (by students). At the formal level, Melanesian universities have significantly contributed to fighting the residual effect of colonial ideology. In Vanuatu, for example, the USP has long played a major role in fostering a debate on language in education and in pushing for the standardization of Bislama as a distinct (i.e. less anglicized), legitimate language (Thomas 1990:244-246). This latter issue is of course central since without standardized orthographies, and the concurrent production of pedagogical supports in these languages, Melanesian Pidgins cannot be efficiently used as languages for education (Jourdan 1990:171).

The second, informal form of contestation of dominant language ideologies in universities may come from the students. The case of the Thai female students studied by Simpson (1997) is enlightening in this regard. She observed that, by using stigmatized pronominal forms, these young educated women challenged the gender-specific obligation of polite speech. Simpson, drawing on Bourdieu’s idea of subversion, suggests that they were able to do so precisely because they were highly educated and had a privileged status. Yet, interestingly, while their *daily practice* was subversive, their *discourse* was not: Through their metapragmatic comments, they were condemning as crude a usage that was actually theirs. Less dramatically, university students may use in their daily interactions a language that lacks official recognition and suffers from negative prejudices. Swan and Lewis (1990) conducted, for example, in the mid-80’s a quantitative study on language use in two PNG universities. They found that Tok Pisin was in fact much used in the university, and suggested that any move from the authorities to positively sanction its use would have a major impact on the balance between English and Tok Pisin in PNG

(1990:221-223). Tok Pisin thus succeeded *without*, in fact *in spite of*, language planners (Kale 1990:191; see also Smith 2002).

Universities, because they are an integral part of both class *and* national projects, are sites where the competition of language ideologies is likely to be highly salient, in an especially articulate way. Born from a colonial education system favouring English, in a country where reciprocal multilingualism was originally dominant, they are driven by individual projects of social mobility but also worked by emergent nationalist values. These different language ideologies, which grant differing value to the English and Pijin languages, directly meet, interact and “creolize” in university settings. It is the various ways their interplay shapes Solomon students’ linguistic attitudes and behaviours, and with which outcomes, that I wish to explore in this thesis. Such exploration may be all the more needed that universities are also the institutions which train the future political elites of the nation, who will have in turn the power to make decisions in social and linguistic matters.

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

### Higher education linguistic practices in Solomon Islands: A neglected issue

Unlike the case of Papua New Guinea (Swan and Lewis 1990), language use and attitudes in Solomon universities had not been studied at all. Language ideologies in the Honiaran middle-class, while mentioned in several theses (e.g. Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000; Stritecky 2001), had not been a focus of investigation as such.

What is the current status of Pijin in these institutions? Is its use still penalized, overtly or covertly? What is the position of university students, who are likely to have a major influence on the country's future, in relation to these competing ideologies, and how do they deal concretely with them? Do they resist, in practice or/and in discourse, the prejudices against Pijin inherited from the colonial period? Is there, like among Simpson's Thai students (1997), a marked discrepancy between linguistic behaviours and discourses? Does this issue generate many metapragmatic comments in their daily conversations? These were the basic questions that I had in mind by the time I undertook my fieldwork. Importantly, my concern throughout this research has then lain less with linguistic *facts* (e.g. the "real" nature of Pijin) than with *perceptions* of them.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, my research is primarily concerned with the ideological *content* of students' speech; focusing on the linguistic *forms* that they use would have meant writing a totally different dissertation. However, two questions in relation to code-switching practices were borne in mind throughout my fieldwork:

1. How is "mixing" strategically used at the university?
2. What do these practices mean for Honiaran students, and how are they evaluated? In other words, do they hold positive or negative attitudes toward linguistic "syncretism"?

An important related question is whether the function of class distinction is currently being transferred from English to urban Pijin, as suggested by Jourdan (2007a). In the students' views, are new boundaries, crosscutting ethnicity and related to class status, generated in town through the linguistic diversification of Pijin? If yes, how may this new distinction process affect the issue of standardization of Pijin?

Before exposing how I attempted to explore these questions, the specific setting of my research should be presented. I will thus briefly describe the Solomon Island campus of the University of the South Pacific in Honiara<sup>1</sup>, its functioning, as well as its relationships with the main campus of the USP, based in Suva, Fiji. As a second step, I will present the methodological procedures through which the research was undertaken. Finally, I will account for the way I positioned myself in the fieldsite that served as a locus for my research, and the methodological, ethical and personal issues that this positioning raised.

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<sup>1</sup> The official name of the Honiara campus within the USP system is the University of the South Pacific Solomon Island Campus (USP SI Campus). However, Solomon students, and Honiarans in general, refer most often to it less formally as the USP Center. Throughout my thesis, I will therefore use equally both names.

### **2.1. Specific setting of the research: the USP SI Campus**

The USP SI Campus is located in downtown Honiara, close to Chinatown, in the direct vicinity of the Lawson Tama national stadium (the joyful noises of which can sometimes be heard from classrooms). It is small in size - a few minutes suffice to go round it – but well laid out, shadowed by banana trees and pleasantly decorated. There are three classrooms, one of which is of larger size and referred to as the “lecture theatre”. These rooms are also used as study rooms by students when no class is taking place. Indeed, at first sight it is sometimes uneasy to know whether a class is in progress or not, as the atmosphere is always quiet and studious in these places. In addition to the classrooms, the campus comprises several staff offices, a library, two computer labs, a science lab, a well-equipped audio-conference room for the satellite tutorials (given from Suva through the Internet) and a small canteen stall. In the open air, about ten tables are scattered in different points of the campus for students to work individually or in groups.

Approximately thirty people work in the campus as tutors or administrative staff. During the first semester that I witnessed (February-June 2007), 134 tutorials were provided for 1517 registered students. During the second one (August-November 2007), 112 tutorials were offered to 1347 students<sup>2</sup>. These courses are of pre-university (Preliminary and Foundational courses, equivalent to Form 6 and 7) and university (100-level) levels.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the administrative staff, the drop in registration was the result of a change in the system of screening of the students' applications. The recent transfer of the screening process to the main campus in Suva had provoked delays in the treatment of applications and consequently prevented a number of students from registering.





*Figure 2.1: Photograph of the USP SI Campus, with my female focus group participants*

It may seem surprising that three classrooms be sufficient for such a high number of students. Three main reasons explain this fact. Firstly, as is the case at SICHE, a significant part of the students are “self-sponsored”, which means that they receive no scholarship and have to pay for their courses. One course costs approximately 1000 SDB<sup>3</sup>, and the corresponding coursepack 500 SDB. This is a very significant amount of money for people who, despite their middle-class condition, often have scarce financial resources. Consequently, many self-sponsored students cannot afford taking more than one or two courses per semester (some may also take one semester off on a regular basis in order to work and raise money for their school fees). Secondly, some 100-level tutorials are not physically provided at the USP SI Campus. In this case, for example for the Psychology

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<sup>3</sup> SDB stands for Solomon dollars. Broadly speaking, 7 SDB = 1 Canadian dollar.

courses, the students have to study with the exclusive support of books and Internet-based satellite tutorials from Suva. Thirdly, and most importantly, only one hour of tutorial is generally provided per week for each course.

I was at first puzzled by the short duration of the classes: one hour – in practice, rather 45 minutes – per week for courses of sometimes dense content and high level of difficulty. This scarcity is explained by the system of the USP. In national campuses such as the USP Center in Honiara, the classes provided are conceived as tutorials, not lectures (although, depending on the professor's teaching style, the class may actually look much like a lecture). Students usually refer to their teacher as their "tutor", and were sometimes surprised to hear me refer to them as "professors". Yet, because the term "tutor" in the North-American education system does not reflect the authority relationship that nonetheless exists between students and USP local tutors, and may misrepresent the formal nature of tutorials in students' perceptions, I will often opt for the term "professor" in my analysis<sup>4</sup>. This appellation should not overshadow the fact that most of them try their best to foster students' participation in class and make themselves very approachable to students. Indeed, I was very impressed by the high level of motivation among tutors, their willingness to help students and to transmit their knowledge. More generally, I was very much impressed by the high quality of instruction in an institution which has to make do with very limited resources.

Let us come back to the USP system and the relationship between the main campus and local ones. Most decisions concerning the organisation of the courses and tutorials are taken in Suva. The course contents are designed in the main campus, and the course materials are sent from Suva at the beginning of each semester. Consequently, the course

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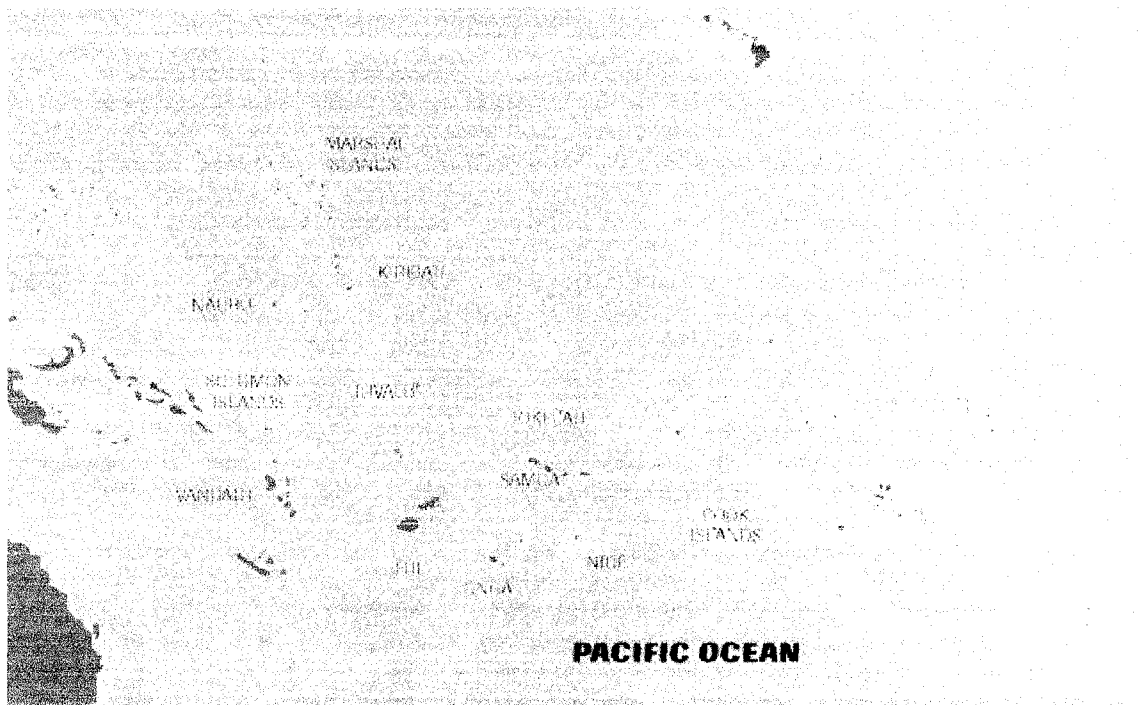
<sup>4</sup> The terms "professors", "tutors" and "lecturers" will thus be used indifferently throughout the thesis.

packs and textbooks are written in English and their content is Pacific-oriented. The compulsory books are often Australian or Asia-Pacific editions - while tutors frequently try to relate their content to local issues, i.e. taking examples from Solomon Islands. Local tutorials are in fact conceived as “added bonuses” to support students in their efforts, but the latter are expected to be able to manage with the course materials provided. In the textbooks, one page is dedicated to the professor-coordinator of the course in Suva: Through a “personal” letter, he/she introduces himself/herself, including a photograph and his/her e-mail address. The assignments, written in English, are frequently sent to Suva and marked by a non-Solomon Islander<sup>5</sup>. This system contributes to make the relationship between tutors and students relatively informal and egalitarian, as in many ways the university authority is far above the tutors’ heads.

Most importantly, the USP system entails that students start their degree at the national campus, but would continue and complete it at the main one in Suva, where the whole range of Bachelor courses is offered. In this sense, the USP SI Campus is a springboard for students, rather than an end in itself. This fact is widely acknowledged, as even tutors occasionally mention the existence of more advanced courses available only in Suva. In practice, students often spend one to three years at the USP Center, completing the required number of 100-level courses and waiting for scholarship – provided their GPA is high enough to get one from the Government.

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<sup>5</sup> This is also the case for national exams at the end of Form 6 and 7.



*Figure 2.2: Location of USP campuses in the Pacific region  
(Source: USP website, <http://www.usp.ac.fj>)*

One of my informants mentioned that the USP was planning to open a new larger campus in Honiara, in which hopefully most degree courses would be offered. However, this project has been under discussion for several years and its implementation still seems distant. Currently, a Bachelor degree cannot be completed without moving to the main campus. Thus, all the students I met in Honiara were planning, expecting or at least hoping to go to Suva. It is important to bear this fact in mind in order to understand both professors' linguistic choices at the USP SI Campus and Solomon students' attitudes toward English and Pijin.

## **2.2. Research methods**

### **2.2.1. The choice of research methods**

Attempting to answer my research questions entailed investigating student's attitudes about the languages they use (Pijin in its different varieties, English and secondarily vernaculars), while paying attention to the social ideologies which may be expressed through their language practices. In other terms, I needed to examine how these different languages are used, on the one hand, and perceived, on the other hand, by university students.

To do so, I decided to adopt a qualitative methodology<sup>6</sup>. More specifically, my methodological approach included three complementary methods of data gathering: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (also called group interviews). This combination allows for both an in-depth exploration of attitudes and a comparison with actual behaviours. Not only does the collection of different kinds of data compensate for the weaknesses inherent to each method, but, when considered in relation to each other, it permits to corroborate the results – a process that is referred to in qualitative research as “triangulation” (see e.g. Schensul 1999).

Participant observation took place within the USP SI Campus. Regular attendance of classes aimed at enabling me to conduct extensive observation, both silent and participant, within the university and to make the necessary contacts with students for interviews. Through silent observation in classrooms and social spaces (i.e. tables in the open air, canteen and library), I was able to gather data on language use in interaction - between students, and between students and tutors. This helped me to understand on which

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<sup>6</sup> Luke and Baldauf indeed called for qualitative research on the attitudes to and daily lived use of languages in post-colonial Melanesia to complement the (few) existing surveys (1990:351).

occasions (i.e. depending on which context, place, interlocutor, topic and activity) Pijin and English are preferably used. Educational institutions are indeed privileged settings for such observation, as I could take written notes without attracting too much attention<sup>7</sup>. By socializing with students, my observation activity rapidly turned into participant observation.

The second method that I used was semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a privileged way to explore the respondent's personal experience and obtain rich, finely detailed data. In particular, they allow observing how people manage their internal contradictions, construct discourses and choose to present themselves through a consistent narrative. They also provide an excellent occasion to examine language choice and code-switching practices. The questionnaire guide will be presented in the next section.

Finally, I also decided to conduct focus groups with students. Although the topics discussed during these groups were similar to those explored during interviews, it seemed relevant to do so because the group dynamics were likely to generate interesting additional insights on these issues. While group interviews are less adequate than individual interviews to investigate personal experiences in detail, they offer several benefits. Firstly, taking advantage of the creativity and frankness that group discussions often foster, they are an excellent method to explore social attitudes: Confronted with divergent opinions, participants tend to better articulate their own views – although group dynamics, if the composition of the group is not adequate, may sometimes also silence them<sup>8</sup>. Secondly,

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<sup>7</sup> In Honiara, educational institutions are also one of the places where cross-sex sociability is deemed most acceptable (Gooberman-Hill 1999:174) - thus enabling to observe both males' and females' linguistic behaviours and to witness cross-sex interactions.

<sup>8</sup> I was faced with such a problem during my focus group in Suva, as one of the participants, who was older than the others and had studied in Linguistics, adopted a position of "expert" that made it difficult for other participants to voice divergent opinions.

they constitute a playful context in which participants are more willing to do apparently “silly” exercises (e.g. writing a few sentences in Pijin), or creative ones (e.g. imagining “what would happen *if...*”). Lastly, group interviews allow for more natural linguistic exchanges than individual interviews, as the participants tend to relatively disregard the presence of the researcher and of the recording device (Gumperz 1972:25). This last point was important to observe the influence of peer-group context on the participants’ language choices.

In practice, though, in my field research the distinction between focus groups and interviews turned out to be less sharp than expected: I conducted several double interviews, and even a triple one. I quickly realized that answering the interview with a close friend was less stressful for my informants, so I usually gave them the choice of doing it alone or with a friend from the university. This format, which may be described as a form of friendly conversation between formal interview and focus group, proved to be very profitable, combining some of the advantages of both methods: Exchanges were more natural than in individual interviews, divergent opinions were acknowledged and debated without the leadership and consensus problems which frequently accompany group dynamics. A non-negligible number of my richest and most enlightening interviews were indeed conducted through this format.

### **2.2.2. Data gathering and analysis**

While participant observation started immediately at the beginning of my fieldwork, interviews could be conducted only once I had acquired sufficient linguistic proficiency in Pijin. Concretely, observation at the USP SI Campus took place from mid-May to mid-June 2007 (semester 1) and in August 2007 (semester 2). Individual interviews were conducted

in July (the month of academic holiday) for a few of them, and in August for the majority. Focus group interviews, which require more logistical organisation, a sufficient social network and an accurate idea of the way groups should be composed, were conducted at the very end of the fieldwork period, late August. My fieldwork was thus constrained by the academic schedule: From mid-June to early August, it was difficult to keep in touch with the students whom I had already met, and my work was significantly slowed down. By contrast, August was a hectic period, during which most of my data were gathered. Additionally, while the bulk of my research took place in Honiara, I had also planned to interview students from the Solomon Islands currently completing their degree in Suva (Fiji), where the USP is based. This seemed relevant to my project because their perceptions on Pijin were likely to be somehow affected by their stay abroad. This part of the fieldwork was carried out in September.

A total of 20 interviews (14 individual, 5 double, 1 triple) were completed: 16 in Honiara and 4 in Suva. As my research topic was focused on the USP, the huge majority of my data was collected within the campus, or with USP students out of the walls of the university. However, 4 of the interviews in Honiara were conducted with students from pre-university institutions: respectively King George VI College (the oldest and most prestigious high school in Solomon Islands), Honiara High School, SICHE, and a private program in journalism. This was meant to complement my USP data and put them in perspective<sup>9</sup>. The interviews, conducted in the open air within the campus (or at the nearby Honiara Hotel when the weather was bad and time allowed), were audio-taped. They lasted

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<sup>9</sup> Taking advantage of my stay in Honiara, I also attended a few Court cases to get a rough idea of linguistic ideologies in Courts - another important site where middle-class values and modes of expression are commonly given privilege (Errington and Gewertz 1999:134; Jourdan 2007b:101). I hoped that it would provide an interesting perspective on my university data, and it actually did, but in unexpected ways.



from 35 to 90 minutes, depending on the respondent's elaboration of his/her answers. In addition to these interviews, 3 focus groups were organised: 2 in Honiara and 1 in Suva. The groups lasted from 2 to 2 hours ½ and involved 4 to 7 participants. In Honiara, they took place in the audio-conference room of the USP SI Campus. In Suva, the group was organized at the respondents' home<sup>10</sup>. Their content was audio-taped, but a Solomon friend was additionally hired to take notes during the groups, as a safety net in case the recording quality was low. Except for two individual interviews during which the respondent preferred to talk in English, all interviews and groups were carried out in Pijin.

My fieldwork was undertaken without a set hypothesis; rather, I had defined a list of questions, related to my research topic and drawn from the existing literature, to be covered during each interview<sup>11</sup>. The discussion was thus semi-structured. The topics (refined in the course of fieldwork based on my first insights and slightly adapted to each respondent's profile) were originally the following:

- Background information on the student: name, age, grade and discipline studied, high school attended, place of birth and time of arrival in Honiara, future job hoped for.
- Languages spoken: first language and languages learnt; time and circumstances of acquisition of Pijin and of English; language most often spoken at home.
- Occasions of use of Pijin and English in university: in which contexts, with whom; perception of increase or decrease in use compared to elementary and high school.
- Status of Pijin at university: rationale for Pijin not being the language of university education; discourse of professors *about* Pijin; student's preference on the language used by professors.
- Attitude toward Pijin: perceived origins of Pijin; perceived evolution of the language over the last years; perceived differences between the variety of Pijin spoken in the village and the one spoken in university; definition and examples of 'good' Pijin vs. 'bad' Pijin

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<sup>10</sup> The participants were roommates, all from Are'Are (an ethno-linguistic group from the Southern part of Malaita).

<sup>11</sup> To constitute this list, I largely drew on the insights of Swan and Lewis' quantitative study on PNG universities (1990).

(spoken by whom, where)<sup>12</sup>; perception of the use of Pijin vs. English in other formal occasions (official speeches, media).

- Attitudes toward written Pijin: occasions of reading and writing in Pijin; how they know which orthography to adopt.
- Future of Pijin: what will be the situation of Pijin in 10 years; is this evolution good.
- Scenario: imagining that the Government decides that Pijin will be the main language in university and English learnt only as a second language, how they would react and what they would expect to happen. If it should happen, *what* Pijin should be used?

Transcription of the audio-recorded interviews was carried out within the few days following each interview, in order not to forget the non-verbal cues which enabled me to interpret correctly what was said. Once fieldwork and transcription were completed, content analysis was undertaken: Data from the interviews and from the focus groups were coded and analyzed separately<sup>13</sup>. They were then compared with my observations in the USP SI Campus. Such comparison was important not only for triangulation purposes, but also to examine if there were any discrepancies between the students' discourses on Pijin and English and their actual daily practices.

### **2.2.3. Profile of the respondents**

Since some interviews were multiple, the total of students having participated to them amounted to 27. For the focus groups, the total number of students involved was 17 (4 girls in Honiara, 6 boys in Honiara, 7 boys in Suva). Thus, my analysis puts together the opinions of 44 people – a number insufficient to proceed to statistical analysis, but which was indeed sufficient to reach saturation of my data<sup>14</sup> and draw conclusions.

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<sup>12</sup> In order to elicit comments on the different varieties of Pijin, as well as on the issue of Pijin orthography, written samples (transcribed from radio news and a popular song, see Appendix) were displayed.

<sup>13</sup> Such separation was meant to guarantee a higher level of accuracy in the analysis, as group dynamics could have slightly affected the results from the focus groups.

<sup>14</sup> Saturation in qualitative research is considered being reached when new interviews do not bring any new information but consistently confirm what has already been learnt (Glaser and Strauss 1967:61).

A few words are necessary concerning the profiles of my informants and the way I selected them. Their age varied from 19 to 34 years (most of them being actually around 23 year old in Honiara and 25 in Suva). They were all active students by the time of my fieldwork. They can all be considered as being part of the middle-class – if only by virtue of their status as higher education students. As mentioned previously, determining people's social class is a complex issue in Solomon Islands. However, it was clear that some of my informants could be said to be “more” middle-class than others. About one third of my respondents (among whom most of my Suva informants) could be labelled upper-middle-class: This was suggested by their parents' background, the previous schools that they had attended, their consumption habits and/or their overtly '*moden*' attitudes, which matched pretty well Gooberman-Hill's description of the Honiaran middle-class (1999). By contrast, one of my respondents attended the lowest grade at the USP SI Campus (Preliminary) and was in all likelihood a “push out” from Form 5; this fact, combined with knowledge of his family background and consumption habits, leads me to consider him as from the lower-middle-class.

It is likely that my personal affinities and the lesser shyness toward me of upper-class students led me to make friend with - and interview - students who were of slightly upper status than the average at the USP Center. I believe that this did not affect my research, as I had made the decision to regard all of them as members of the middle-class in my analysis. Actual class differences were not a criterion that I was considering when choosing my respondents. My concern was rather to find a relatively equal number of male and female informants, and of people who had Pijin as first and as second language. Such a balance was actually difficult to achieve, because recruitment followed a snowball process

on which I had only limited control due to very tight time constraints. This led me to interview a higher number of boys than girls (28 vs. 16), and in Suva a higher number of students who had learnt Pijin as a late second language (11 vs. 4).

I should clarify what is meant by “late second language”. Age and context of learning Pijin turned to be the main criteria that I used to analyze my data. The existing literature (e.g. Jourdan 2004[1995]) suggests that young people raised in Honiara with Pijin as main language may develop stronger affective ties toward it than those who learnt it at a later age after having grown up in the provinces with a vernacular as first language. However, in Solomon Islands, the relationship between place of birth and first language is by no means as automatic as I first hoped: A significant number of the informants who were born in Honiara had learnt a vernacular before learning Pijin, while one respondent born in a regional urban center (Yandina) had Pijin as first language. Consequently, I had to opt for a finer distinction: having Pijin as mother tongue (8 students, all born in Honiara except 1); having learnt Pijin in early childhood in a domestic context just after or along with a vernacular (12, most born in Honiara); and having learnt Pijin as a second language in a formal context - the primary school (24, all born in the provinces<sup>15</sup>).

As all anthropologists know it, methodology is one thing, but actual fieldwork is often a very different, highly unpredictable matter. Fieldwork is primarily a *social* experience, challenging and rewarding at the personal level, and to limit the discussion to its purely methodological aspect would be utterly misrepresenting field research. In the last section of this chapter, it is my lived experience as student-researcher that I will bring up.

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<sup>15</sup> A large majority of these informants were from Malaita - an over-representation which reflects the population composition in Honiara (Gooberman-Hill 1999:39). Conversely, 2 respondents were from Isabel, 2 from Temotu, 2 from the Western Province, 1 from Makira, 1 from Guadalcanal and 1 from Lord Howe (a Polynesian group).

### **2.3. A Canadian student in a Solomon university**

#### **2.3.1. My position in the field**

I was warmly welcomed at the USP SI Campus, and felt very quickly integrated in the university life. The director granted me full latitude for my research project, under the sole condition that, once written, my thesis would be available to the USP Center's staff and students. To me, this was self-evident. I was given access to all the classes that I wanted to attend, to the library and to an administrative office where I could work. I decided to attend in priority Foundational and 100-level classes in social sciences, the content of which would be familiar to my ears and thus easier to understand.

The director, Dr. Glynn Galo, also accepted to introduce me to the tutors as a visiting student from Canada, gathering data on the use of Pijin and English at the university for her Masters' thesis in Ethno-linguistics. As my slightly older age and my skin colour first prompted people to assume that I was a tutor, in the presence of tutors and students I recurrently stressed that I was "only" a student, whose role was listening and learning, and whose status was fully equal to that of other students. Yet, in a university where most tutors are themselves struggling to get scholarship for a Master, being a Master's student was already quite a high status - which I constantly minimized (more or less on purpose) through my behaviour. In particular, I insisted on my limited competence in Pijin and enjoyed making fun of myself with other students and staff members. For the same reason, I tried my best to keep the interviews as informal as possible, dropping sometimes questions about background (e.g. on parents' occupation) which, I felt, would have framed the exchange as overly formal.

My presence at the USP Center, where few white people (except an Australian tutor teaching English and a half-Australian staff member) ever enter the campus, aroused a great deal of curiosity. Some students jokingly remarked that I was coming to Solomon Islands while all Solomon students would dream to go study in Canada. The fact that I was trying to speak Pijin, had started learning it with books and cassettes when I was still in Canada, and had made it a research topic, was matter for amazement and sheer amusement. Within a few days, the word had spread and most students and tutors seemed to know who I was and what I was doing.

Nonetheless, I made a point of introducing myself personally to each tutor whose class I planned to attend. I did it in Pijin (so that it would be clear that they did not need to give their lecture in English for me), briefly explaining that I was observing how Pijin and English were used at the USP Center. Whether because they fully understood that my observation would be biased if they changed their practices, or because their language choices in teaching were already set (most probably both), my presence did not seem to affect their linguistic strategies. The tutor usually mentioned my presence (which for sure had already been noticed by all students) in a welcoming way at the beginning of the class then let me introduce myself. In Pijin, I presented myself as a visiting student from Canada, gathering data on Pijin at university for her Master. Again, the students' linguistic behaviours in class did not seem to be significantly affected by my presence: As will be explained throughout this thesis, their language choices were shaped by more determining factors.

A few words should be said on my research strategy in Suva. At the main campus, a portion of the dining room, in the open air, is known as the place where Solomon students

usually gather (indeed, they jokingly refer to this place as “Point Cruz”, name of the heart of downtown Honiara). Once I had found this place, it became relatively easy to recognize Solomon Islanders (through their dressing style, necklaces, and often slightly darker skin colour), to eavesdrop a few minutes in order to check that they were speaking Pijin, then go introduce myself and ask for an interview. Although they did not know me personally, the simple fact that I was just returning from Honiara, wore Malaitan necklaces and spoke Pijin was sufficient to establish almost instantaneous friendships.

### **2.3.2. Dealing with my whiteness in Honiara: from ‘*Misis*’ to ‘*sista*’**

Although racial relationships were not meant to be at the center of my research, my skin colour was definitely not an issue that I was allowed to disregard during my fieldwork. Stritecky (2001) provided a detailed narrative of what it entails to be a ‘*misis*’ in Honiara. Probably thanks to my south-European physical appearance and socialization, I did not encounter such difficulties in integrating in Solomon society and in becoming a ‘*sista*’ in the eyes of many Solomon acquaintances. My relatively quickly acquired fluency in Pijin and the fact that English was not my mother tongue (as most readers would have noticed by now) also certainly helped. After a few weeks, quite a number of people even started to take me for a ‘*haf-haf*’<sup>16</sup> – to my great pleasure.

Still, my whiteness did affect my relationships with Solomon Islanders, and in many ways my behaviour was evaluated in relation to it. On my first day at the USP Center, a student remarked that it was the first time that she was chatting with a white girl – the first time that she met one so “open up”. In fact, my skin colour had a double-edged effect. On the one hand, as noticed by Gooberman-Hill (2001), friendship with white people is much

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<sup>16</sup> Person of mixed descent, half European and half Melanesian.

valued among middle-class Solomon Islanders as a mark of cosmopolitan sophistication<sup>17</sup>. My willingness to make friends in the campus consequently contributed to make me rapidly popular. On the other hand, my whiteness created a barrier for people who did not know me yet, and I had to prove through my behaviour that in *my* view such a barrier did not exist. I constantly had to overcome my own shyness and make the first move toward the others – both within the USP Center and in daily life. A relative of the family with whom I lived formulated it in this way: “*Mifala testem iu fastaem, mifala fraet lelebet*”<sup>18</sup>. Once I could exchange jokes with people, I had “won” and become a ‘*sista*’. While exhausting at times, overcoming this barrier was very rewarding for me as well as for my Solomon friends, and during my whole fieldwork I took a huge pleasure in consistently challenging as many as I could of the stereotypes of seriousness, restraint and moral superiority that still much stick to the skin of white people in Solomon Islands.

To a great extent, I was feeling “at home in the world” (Jackson 1995) in the company of Solomon Islanders, and soon started to avoid the few expatriates who lived in Honiara. Wandering alone or with Solomon friends was an effective way to make myself approachable to other Solomon Islanders, and I became very reluctant to speak English in the presence of Solomon people, as I felt (probably exaggeratedly) that this was creating distance between me and them. Beyond all strategy, my reluctance to gather and be seen with expatriates was much driven by a self-perceived feeling of loyalty toward Solomon people. This probably says much on the “liminal” nature of my personal and professional identity - and that of many anthropologists: I could not become a Solomon Islander, but I

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<sup>17</sup> Love affairs with white people are also matter for gossip and jokes; during my fieldwork, any occurrence of a male student being seen alone with me attracted much attention and comments. This paradoxically contributed to the over-representation of males in my sample, as it was more comfortable for the respondent and for myself to conduct a multiple interview than an individual one.

<sup>18</sup> “*We tested you at first, we were a little afraid.*”



was a white girl who had temporarily embraced a Solomon way of life, to the great fun of my Solomon acquaintances and my own.

Because my skin colour could not be disregarded, it was of great importance that I could speak Pijin. As is well known in ethno-linguistics (e.g. Jourdan 2007a:32), languages have two distinctive functions: a pragmatic one (i.e. communication) and a symbolic one (i.e. identity creation and affirmation). Virtually all students at the USP SI Campus *could* have communicated with me in English, and indeed some would have been happy to be offered the opportunity to practice it. But, as was confirmed by one of my informants, my relationship with the students would then not have been as open as it turned out to be. Many of them would not have dared to approach me, or would have avoided my company (if only for fear of being *heard* by other Solomon Islanders while speaking English, as will be explained in Chapter 4). Proficiency in Pijin was thus not only a necessary tool to be able to distinguish between language varieties, make sense of the discussions on proper use of Pijin and discern patterns in code-switching between English and Pijin. It was also, and most importantly, the bridge which enabled me to overcome the barrier of skin colour, establish warm friendships - indispensable for the success of my fieldwork - and obtain rich, freely articulated data.

### **2.3.3. Confronting my assumptions about Pijin**

In line with my formal training in linguistics and anthropology, I came to Honiara with the assumption that Pijin and English are two fully distinct languages. Needless to say, I still stick to this idea, sustained by an abundant literature on Melanesian Pidgins and

without which my research work itself would make little sense<sup>19</sup>. However, once in the field I had numerous occasions to question the sharpness of the distinction that I had at first taken for granted. Although they were at times frustrating, the difficulties which I encountered in the acquisition of Pijin were useful to help me understand how this language is lived and used in Honiara. The main problem was that I was trying to keep English and Pijin strictly separate. At the beginning of my learning process, I felt that using English phrases when speaking Pijin was a failure to speak properly, as if the language that I was trying to learn was slipping through my fingers. I was also puzzled by the very low level of normativity that Solomon people manifested toward my imperfect Pijin<sup>20</sup> (a point which will be explained throughout this thesis).

After a few weeks, I learnt to loosen my own normativity and to accept to insert English phrases in my use of Pijin when it seemed appropriate. This was all the more necessary since the variety of Pijin spoken by young middle-class people, which was precisely the variety of Pijin that I needed to acquire, contains numerous borrowings from English and entails frequent resort to English phonology (Jourdan 2007a:36). Noticeably, such a fluid boundary between English and Pijin brought about serious difficulties in transcribing the content of my interviews – difficulties to which any Solomon student who tries to write in Pijin is confronted as well. I had to make a choice between using Pijin spelling, which did not necessarily correspond to the actual pronunciation of the word, or English spelling. On each word, I attempted to determine whether the word was *felt* to be a Pijin word or a loan word from English. For this reason, I decided not to use different fonts

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<sup>19</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to broach the academic debate in Linguistics on the genesis and alleged nature of Pidgin and Creole languages. See Jourdan (1991) for a thorough review of this debate.

<sup>20</sup> In four months, only three people – all close friends and well acquainted with my research – corrected a grammatical or pronunciation mistake in my use of Pijin. Incidentally, all were men.

for English and Pijin words in verbatim quotes, as this would suggest a stronger distinction than was probably intended by the speaker. In numerous cases, a word could be considered bivalent (i.e. belonging equally to English and Pijin) and I had the delicate task of assigning it, in a way which I sometimes felt quite arbitrary, to one spelling system or the other<sup>21</sup>.

I should also acknowledge what some people in Solomon Islands may consider as a bias: my affection for Solomon Pijin – my pleasure in speaking it, and my conception of it as a full language deserving as much consideration as any other one. While in my Canadian university, surrounded by linguists and anthropologists, such an attitude seemed to be mere commonsense, my fieldwork experience brought me to view it as rather situated commonsense. It could be argued that this “bias” might have slightly affected the results of my research: Although I was careful not to disclose my own attitudes on Pijin, the simple fact that I wanted to learn it revealed an interest which could have led some cunning informants to figure out my positive perception of this language. Yet, to my own surprise, my “pro-Pijin bias” was so unexpected by Solomon students, and was viewed as such a friendly fancy, that it did not seem to influence significantly their answers<sup>22</sup> - as will be noticed throughout the thesis. At the end of the last interviews, I sometimes “pushed” my respondents toward a nationalist position to observe their reaction, but I was cautious not to confuse their polite management of my move with their genuine opinions.

To conclude this preliminary part, I should make clear my intentions in writing this dissertation. Throughout the forthcoming discussion, I will point out and explore a number of contradictions in which Solomon students are enmeshed. This should not be

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 1 for a theory-oriented discussion of these points, and the Conventions (at the beginning of the thesis) for the concrete choices that I eventually made.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, after an individual interview a respondent asked me whether I liked Pijin, and as I replied “*Ya, hem here naes lo mi*” (“Yes, it sounds nice to my ears”), she had a short, very meaningful, laugh.

misinterpreted: I do not intend to provide answers to the complex social issues that I raise. As I was listening to the sometimes contradictory discourses of my informants, I realized that I would not necessarily have fared better in terms of consistency. Indeed, the “inconsistencies” of certain upper-class students that I describe in Chapter 5, whose discourses largely derived from academic theories, mirrored in many ways the contradictions in which I was myself, as a student in linguistic anthropology and as a thinking individual, entangled. Nonetheless, I definitely stick to some basic assumptions that no linguist would contest: that Solomon Pijin is a language, which enables highly effective communication, and that, as such, it is of no lesser worth than any other.

Admittedly, this thesis can be viewed as a discourse, *my* discourse, which is partly shaped by the language ideologies which currently prevail in the academic fields of linguistics and anthropology, and of which I am only partially – because self-analysis has always its limits – aware. As such, it could theoretically be submitted to precisely the same kind of analysis as I applied to my informants’ discourses. I do not claim the higher ground, but simply hope to contribute to constructive dialogue and reflection. In doing so, and with every regard for the academic world, I consider that my *primary* readers are not Western academics but my Solomon fellow students, informants and friends. I will feel rewarded beyond hope if this work can provide some useful insights to contribute positively to the functioning of the USP SI Campus, and encourage Solomon students to love the language that they speak.

### CHAPTER 3: LINGUISTIC PRACTICES AT THE USP SI CAMPUS

Before exploring students' attitudes toward Pijin and English, I shall describe which languages are actually used at the USP SI Campus, by whom, and on which occasions. I will first examine USP professors' language choices in classrooms<sup>1</sup>; next, I will present students' responses to these choices, as well as the way they interpret and assess them. Understanding tutors' language practices in the classroom is important to put in context students' behaviours, which significantly diverge from the former. The description of these divergent language choices will eventually highlight the discrepancy between students' actual behaviours and declared preferences, which is a major point in this dissertation. Finally, I will end this chapter with a brief discussion of the written/oral diglossia in the campus, a striking feature of the USP Center.

Although this chapter is primarily focused on practices, issues of attitudes will unavoidably come into play. Larger issues will be broached, such as the important debate on which language should be used in the Solomon education system, and these are of course related to broader attitudes toward English and Pijin. Many points raised in this chapter will be discussed in detail in the next ones; however, an important difference between this chapter and the following ones is that the discussion is here circumscribed to the USP SI Campus itself – i.e. to what *is* and *should be* done on campus in the students' view. This brief presentation of students' assessment of language choices at the USP

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<sup>1</sup> Note that I will engage in a relatively detailed analysis of code-switching patterns among tutors, a type of analysis that I refrain from undertaking with regard to students' speech. I do so because I feel that this brief discussion of tutors' language choices might be of practical interest to USP staff members, to whom I consider myself deeply indebted (for this reason, I deliberately avoid using overly technical terminology, which would exclude non-linguistic readers). Conversely, attempting to engage in a systematic linguistic analysis of students' code-switching practices would have significantly shifted the focus of this thesis – although such analysis would have been valuable indeed in its own right.

Center will then set the stage for a thorough exploration of their general attitudes – and contradictions.

### **3.1. The use of English and Pijin on the campus**

In daily life at university, Pijin is by far the dominant language. Among students, it is used systematically regardless of the topic: whether in friendly social talk, or in talking *about* studying, or while studying together<sup>2</sup>. As we will see, this does not entail that the type of Pijin used in these conversations may not contain a large number of English loan words – most often it does, but the language is nonetheless clearly recognized as being Pijin, not English. Out of class, when interacting with tutors or members of the administrative staff (as well as among USP staff members), Pijin is also the common language. To illustrate this fact in the students' view, here is how James<sup>3</sup>, a group participant, reacted when I asked what the main language at the USP Center was:

1. “*Iu mean, dat mifala spikim o mifala learnim?*”

To a large extent, students feel that they study English *along with* their academic subjects (which are studied in Pijin), rather than studying *in* English.

As a matter of fact, there are very few contexts in which the use of Pijin is not deemed proper and English is privileged. Leaving aside contacts with the main campus in Suva during satellite tutorials<sup>4</sup>, students are likely to communicate in English on two well-circumscribed occasions: firstly, with the Australian tutor who teaches the English courses, whether inside or outside the classroom; secondly, with the director of the USP Center

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between these three types of talk was proposed by Swan and Lewis (1990) in their study of language practices in PNG universities.

<sup>3</sup> In order to preserve the confidentiality of my informants' utterances, all students' names are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> English, which is Fiji's official language, is the operating language in the main campus in Suva. Melanesian Pidgin is not spoken or understood in Fiji (except of course by Solomon, PNG and Ni-Vanuatu expatriates).

(himself Solomon Islander) if they meet him at his office or anywhere else inside the campus – although on this point opinions are split, a few informants claiming to communicate with him in Pijin. Furthermore, in the classrooms a small minority of Solomon tutors give their lectures exclusively in English (this minority is indeed so small that some students had never witnessed the case), but, as will be detailed in the next section, most of them employ *both* Pijin and English.

A significant number of students (about a third of my informants) tended at first to overrate the presence of English at the USP Center. As they quickly acknowledged, many of them were actually answering to what *should* happen according to them, rather than to what was actually happening. Joyce, looking back on her Honiaran experience from Suva, provides a good example of this tendency:

2. *“English nao main language. (...) Bikos... some of otta lecturers blo mifala, otta ekspektim mifala, taem otta askem mifala eni question, mifala ansa oketa lo English tu.”*

On other occurrences, the exceptional cases were underlined, as if the student wanted to counter-balance the hardly deniable predominance of Pijin:

3. *“Not evriwan bae Pijin: usually, otta evri English klas blo mifala, otta evri tutors otta English nao.”* (Kate)

4. *“Wetem hu iu speak English insaed lo university?*

*Teachers, students...*

*Students iu iusim English tu??*

*Ya... Sometimes mifala save speak English, kaen type fo fan mifala save speak English wetem eachother olsem.”* (June)

In this last exchange, the reduction in scope of the use of English is telling. Such emphasis on exceptions highlights by contrast the overwhelming prevalence of Pijin as the ordinarily spoken language at the USP Center. Occasions to speak English are rather exceptional and commented upon, as is playfully recounted here:

5. “*Bat if samfala... European kam an English, an mifala respond bak lo English, mifala save spikim. Bat taem otta go bak, bae garem joke ia: ‘ouh, taem ot whiteman kam nomoa, English ia, English taem lo klas ia!’* (laugh)” (Sarah)

A third category of languages which can be heard inside the campus are the vernaculars, referred to in Pijin as ‘*langgus*’. Usually in Honiara, between two ‘*wantok*’ (people from the same ethno-linguistic group), the common vernacular would be spoken as soon as the actors realize that they are from the same group – provided that they are both fluent in it. This is true even between professors and students if they happen to meet by chance in the street. As stated by one of my informants, sticking to Pijin would be felt “unnecessary”, not to say against ‘*kastom*’. Within a national institution such as the USP Center, which brings together speakers of diverse vernaculars, the situation is slightly different. Speaking ‘*langgus*’ may be perceived as a desire *not* to be understood by other students, to ‘*tok haed*’ (secret talking), which would be considered at best impolite<sup>5</sup>. This certainly accounts for the fact that I rarely heard vernaculars on campus, except for a few short exchanges during which the speakers did not expect to be listened to. *Langgus* are thus present, but their presence is kept discreetly in the background.

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, in the Suva campus Solomon students sometimes refer to Pijin as ‘*langgus*’ and to Melanesian-Pidgin speakers as ‘*wantoks*’: Pijin as opposed to English is felt to fulfill the same function of “private” language as do vernaculars as opposed to Pijin in Honiara.



### **3.2. Linguistic strategies at the USP SI Campus: the tutors' side**

#### **3.2.1. Professors' linguistic practices in the classroom**

I attended classes in 14 different courses, mainly at the Foundational and 100-level, in the following disciplines: Politics, Sociology, Anthropology, Linguistics, Geography, History, Management, Mathematics, Statistics, Accountancy and English<sup>6</sup>.

Leaving aside the English course, in which the teacher was an Australian expatriate who lectured exclusively in English, these courses revealed a great variety of linguistic practices from the local professors. Out of the 13 tutors to whom I came to listen, 3 gave class almost exclusively in English (Politics, Anthropology, Linguistics), 3 almost exclusively in Pijin (Geography, Management, Statistics)<sup>7</sup>, 4 tended to alternate between the two (Sociology, Accountancy, 2 in Geography), and 3 (Maths, History, Politics) could be describing as “mixing” - a term which will be specified below.

These are rather broad categories covering in reality a diversity of practices: Let us examine each of them.

1. The tutors who gave their lecture in English were making a marked choice: They visibly felt that they had to justify it at the beginning of their first class. One of them specified that he was doing it not because *I* attended the class, but because the use of English was required for USP courses (i.e. assignments would have to be written in English). Giving the class in English entailed that everything which was to be learnt in relation to the subject, i.e. the actual content of the course, was said in English. Pijin could nonetheless be used at

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<sup>6</sup> I attended 2 different courses in Politics (Foundational and 100-level) and 3 in Geography (2 Foundational and the third at the 100-level). The 14 courses were all given by different lecturers.

<sup>7</sup> I mention the discipline so as to dismiss the hypothesis that some subjects may be naturally “better handled” in one language or the other. The professor’s teaching strategy appears to be independent from the content of the course: Management is here a case in point.

the beginning or end of the class to discuss assignments and administrative issues in a less formal way. In one interesting occurrence, the tutor arrived and mentioned in Pijin which class was about to take place, so that students who were simply using the room as a study room would leave; then he formally started teaching the class in English. The last words to conclude the class were also usually in Pijin (e.g. “*Oraet lelebet? Hem nomoa, lukim iufala next wik.*”<sup>8</sup>) Pijin and English were generally kept strictly separate, with a different tone of voice and accent, and the distinction marked the boundary between what is class and what is not.

2. The tutors who clearly privileged Pijin never justified their choice. They were often younger, as noticed by one student, and some of them had only recently come back from the main campus in Suva. Giving the class in Pijin did not mean that no English words were used: Key concepts and technical words (e.g. “unemployment”) were borrowed from English, but used within sentences otherwise in Pijin. If a tutor *accidentally* began a sentence in English, he came back to Pijin after a few words. Only when reading from the manual would he pronounce a full sentence in English (and in this case, he would use a marked English phonology).

3. Tutors who practice alternation between Pijin and English may in theory privilege either one or the other. In practice, 3 out of 4 spoke English most often and reserved Pijin for specific (albeit sometimes numerous) cases. Firstly, Pijin could be used to recount anecdotes, make jokes, or foster interaction with students through direct questions. Secondly, it was frequently employed to reformulate explanations or illustrate a concept through examples taken from Solomon national reality. Finally, transitions (e.g. to wrap up and move to another topic: “*Hem nao biosphere.*”, “*Hem klia nomoa?*”) and rhetorical

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<sup>8</sup> “*Okay? That’s all, see you next week.*”

questions (e.g. “*Hao nao iumi save kontrolim pollution? There are 2 solutions.*”)<sup>9</sup> were also sometimes formulated in Pijin<sup>10</sup>. It should be noted that *most often* (and contrary to what students claim, as will be seen in the next section), Pijin is used less as a clarifying tool<sup>11</sup> than as a relational device, to keep in touch with the students and encourage them to speak in class. The parts of the lecture given in Pijin were usually not the most difficult to understand, nor the most important ones: Typically, they were complements or reformulations that, as a student, I would not have felt obliged to write down in my notebook.

4. The practice of “mixing” may also privilege either Pijin or English. At one end of the continuum, it can entail speaking English interspersed with a few words of Pijin (e.g. ‘*nao ia*’ after a noun or ‘*hemi*’ instead of ‘it is’). At the other end, it involves the use of English syntax and lexicon, but of Pijin morphology and phonology: Pijin is then overtly, albeit superficially, predominant. This “mixed code” (which is also widely used by students in the classroom, for reasons which will become clear in the next chapter) may be described as Pijinized English, or as English *framed as* Pijin: English is in fact the “matrix language” (Myers-Scotton 1993) which determines the grammar of the sentence, but a (rather small) number of Pijin words and forms recur to signal that the language spoken should be interpreted as Pijin rather than English: typically, ‘*wat nao*’, ‘*hem*’/‘*hemi*’, ‘*iumi*’, verbs ended in ‘*im*’/‘*em*’, ‘*oketa*’, ‘*wanfala*’/‘*tufala*’, ‘*olsem*’, ‘*trae fo*’, ‘*disfala*’, ‘*ia*’, ‘*talem*’,

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<sup>9</sup> “*That is biosphere*”; “*Everything is clear?*”; “*How can we control pollution?*”

<sup>10</sup> Ferguson (1964:431) remarked that, in diglossic countries, the specialization of functions assigned to the “High” and “Low” codes is often looser and more complicated in formal education settings than in other contexts. The USP Center illustrates well his point: Among a few tutors, clearly distinct functions were sometimes assigned to English and Pijin (i.e. jokes and personal anecdotes in Pijin within a formal speech in English), but this pattern was far from being systematic.

<sup>11</sup> Pijin is, however, largely used in this way in primary schools, where many pupils have difficulties understanding English (Christine Jourdan, personal communication).

'bae', 'kasem', 'waka', 'lo dea'/'lo hia', 'blo iumi', 'tingting', 'garem', 'save' and 'finis'.<sup>12</sup>

The use of Pijinized English happens most patently when tutors read their notes, written in English, to give their class in Pijin<sup>13</sup>. English phrases (at times long sentences) which are not easily translatable into Pijin are said in English without a marked English pronunciation. Here are a few examples of this practice<sup>14</sup>:

"So *bae iumi* *garem* this number multiplied by..."

"...*peem* reparations to other countries."

"In the very last part of reading *ia*..."

"As *mi talem finis*, you have to bear in mind that *iufala mas explenim*..."<sup>15</sup>

The code-switching pattern (especially in case 3) was often difficult to determine at first sight and could be defined only after several classes. It was difficult because most tutors, whatever their desired strategy and in addition to their main pattern, would sometimes "slip" and insert short phrases of the other language in their speech. To make things even more complex, several professors modified their language choices over time, whether deliberately or not<sup>16</sup>. From one class to the other, or in the course of the same class, some started to resort more frequently to Pijin or moved from alternation to mix - typically to speed up their speech as time was getting short by the end of the class. In one striking occurrence, the tutor began his class in English, then (after 30 minutes) started to alternate every couple of sentences, then to alternate in midsentence, and ended with a mix where

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<sup>12</sup> See Glossary for translation.

<sup>13</sup> Noticeably, this is the type of Pijin which can be heard on SIBC, the national radio broadcast, in the Pijin version of the news which follows the English one: In both cases, it is originally English "put into" Pijin.

<sup>14</sup> Exceptionally, in order to clarify my point, I use different fonts for Pijin and English bits in these quotes.

<sup>15</sup> The last three examples are all taken from the same class; this shows that the practice of "mixing" is indeed a continuum in which Pijin and English may alternatively predominate. In fact, when the use of two languages in code-switching is balanced as in this case, this may be interpreted as a desire to *avoid* choosing a main language for the interaction (Moyer 1998:223).

<sup>16</sup> Note that, throughout this discussion, I use the term "choice" to refer to *both* conscious and unconscious linguistic choices (cf. Moyer 1998:232); the term "strategy", by contrast, suggests that a conscious decision has been made.

Pijin predominated. In any event, all the changes in language choice that I witnessed during the semester entailed using *more* Pijin, not less.

In order to make sense of this diversity, and clarify the difference between alternation and mix (both commonly referred to by students as “mixing”), it is useful to call upon linguistic theory<sup>17</sup>. Everyone at the USP Center has a linguistic repertoire which contains at least English and Pijin<sup>18</sup>: All tutors make use of both, but in different ways.

The alternation strategy generally involved the phenomenon described by Blom and Gumperz as “situational switching” (1972:424-425). The change in code (Pijin vs. English) signals in this case a change in definition of the social situation: Class begins, class ends, or students are called on to participate in a free and open discussion. Expected behaviours, rights and obligations of all participants change accordingly. In fact, in many cases, linguistic cues marking the change in situation comprised not only the change in code but also a change in tone and speed of speech (i.e. a friendlier tone and accelerated speech in Pijin).

Tutors who clearly privilege one language or the other (cases 1 and 2) or who alternate between them (case 3) treat the two linguistic codes as distinct entities which are preferably not mixed, and select at each moment the language they deem most appropriate. Languages are kept separate through strict respect of co-occurrence rules, in phonology and

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<sup>17</sup> Note that I do not intend to provide a thorough and exhaustive linguistic analysis of tutors’ code-switching practices, but to sketch a fair picture of their linguistic strategies. Although I am aware of the existence of more recent, elaborate models with regard to code-switching (e.g. Poplack 1980, 1988; Heller 1988, Myers-Scotton 1993; Milroy and Muysken 1995; Auer 1984, 1998 to name a few), I opt for Blom and Gumperz’s relatively old distinction between situational and metaphorical switching because I feel that it offers the best explanatory value for the specific context that I wish to describe. Indeed, Blom and Gumperz’s model, after having fallen into some disuse, has recently regained some favour among sociolinguists (see e.g. Sebba and Wootton’s, Stroud’s and Rampton’s chapters in Auer 1998).

<sup>18</sup> The question whether *all* students are proficient in English, according to the students themselves, is an issue that will be discussed later.

morphology (i.e. all elements in the English parts will be selected from English and follow English syntax; all elements in the Pijin parts will be Pijin). Occasionally they may repeat twice the same sentence, once in Pijin and once in English (e.g. “*dat iumi save identifiem, that we can identify*”) – a repetition which makes sense only by virtue of the respect of such selection rules<sup>19</sup>.

By contrast, tutors who “mix” freely insert Pijin phrases (e.g. ‘*hemi*’) in English sentences, without following these co-occurrence rules. In Blom and Gumperz’ terms, this entails “metaphorical switching”: The quasi-simultaneous use of the two languages does not indicate any situational shift, but rather alludes to the dual relationship which exists between tutor and students: a difference in status, but also a common condition as fellow Solomon Islanders (thus a less formal, more egalitarian relationship)<sup>20</sup>.

#### *Students’ replies: linguistic behaviours on the students’ side*

I never discussed with these tutors their switching practices or their motivations in opting for one language rather than the other. However, through observation and informal conversations with other professors, I had the opportunity to figure out why they are doing so. A major stake in their choice is students’ active participation and the best way to obtain it – a complex issue to which any professor, regardless of his/her place of teaching, is confronted. At the USP Center, the tutor’s choice of language is (or is perceived as) an important variable which impacts on student participation. Whether through “situational” or “metaphorical” switching, Pijin is commonly used to mitigate the formal nature of the

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<sup>19</sup> In this case, an example of breakdown of co-occurrence rules would be: ‘*that iumi can identify*’.

<sup>20</sup> The interpretation that I propose here is necessarily debatable, as is any sociolinguistic analysis which attempts to assign social motivations to language choices (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1993). Ultimately, the USP tutors themselves will be in the best position to judge the accuracy of my analysis on this point. However, this interpretation may be supported by Moyer’s remark (1998:225) that, in Gibraltar schools, the formal relation (and social distance) between student and teacher established by the use of English may be temporarily cancelled by the reciprocal use of Spanish.

student-professor relationship and foster active involvement. Many tutors seemed to increase their use of Pijin when they felt that they were losing their students' attention. Only one tutor consistently resisted the temptation of "metaphorical" switching and tried to make students feel comfortable through discourses *in English* on the shared embarrassment, but necessity, to use English in class<sup>21</sup>. However, if the tutor's language choice is interpreted by students as signalling the level of participation that he/she *expects*, this association may well powerfully bind down tutors' linguistic strategies<sup>22</sup>.

On their side, and virtually *regardless* of the tutor's language choice, students privilege Pijin in class. Sarah playfully commented on this point:

6. "*Narawan hem traе best as an example, o role model, an hem bae speak in English. Bat, I think, response: students, evriwan bae Pijin nomoa!*" (laughs)

When a student gave an oral presentation based on written notes, he/she might indeed use numerous phrases in English taken from his/her notes, but framed the whole speech as Pijin through morphological and phonological devices (in a way similar to that described in case 4 for "mixing" tutors). Furthermore, improvised elaborations would always take place in Pijin. During my whole time of observation, only on 3 or 4 occasions did I hear students clearly opt for English when they spoke in class (either to present a group work, or to ask or answer questions)<sup>23</sup>. In the rare cases when it could be felt that the tutor was strongly expecting a contribution in English, and if they could not *escape* answering, students generally replied with only a few words, leaving it ambiguous whether they were speaking

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<sup>21</sup> Quite interestingly, it was the tutor in Linguistics.

<sup>22</sup> Needless to say, participation in class also depends on numerous other factors (e.g. size and composition of the class) and my limited time of observation did not allow me to draw clear-cut conclusions on the weight of this particular variable.

<sup>23</sup> In one case this was ostensibly intended *for me*, with a knowing smile, from a student whom I had already interviewed: During this interview, while he was claiming his preference for English in class, I had rather mischievously pointed out his own tendency to answer in Pijin to tutors' questions asked in English. The other occurrences happened during the first classes of the semester and did not recur. Note that my analysis leaves aside the English courses, where exclusively English is used.

English or Pijin. In Woolard's terms (1998), they were making their answers strategically "bivalent".

As is suggested by these avoidance and bivalence strategies, not all students feel comfortable with the diglossic situation which takes place in classes where the tutor strictly employs English. That such discrepancy is not deemed natural is demonstrated by students' behaviours when they interact with the director of the USP Center:

7. *"Taem hem English, den mi have to English nao, bikos... I mean, bikos hem reply lo... mi no laek reply bak lo Pijin."* (Lydia)

8. *"Mi respektim hem nao so mi have to... givim go bak lo English. Olsem, hem tok lo mi lo English, so hem lelebet no mas fil gud taem hem English kam an bae mi givim go bak diferen language ia, olsem Pijin. Mi have to givim go bak sem... sem samting hem givim mi, ia."* (David)

In this case, answering in a different language is felt embarrassing, if not as a lack of respect. Yet, students frequently do it with tutors who strictly lecture in English. Beyond the highest authority with which the director is adorned, three reasons may explain this difference. Firstly, in the classroom the tutor is clearly in a minority, while students can comfort each other in their language choice. Secondly, many students had already experienced similar situations in high school for years and had become used to it. Finally and most importantly, as will be explained in Chapter 4 after students' attitudes toward English have been discussed, compelling forms of social pressure quickly convince any hesitant student to accept the otherwise embarrassing divergence in language choice.

### **3.2.2. Professors' implicit discourses on Pijin**

Tutors never commented upon the students' language choices when the latter used Pijin – not even those who strictly employed English themselves and had emphasized the importance of doing so. In all likelihood, it was assumed that such comments would have significantly jeopardized class participation. In fact, the professors' language choices



appeared rooted in pragmatic, rather than ideological, considerations: Their differing strategies were arguably all designed in the best interest of the students. As explained by another professor during an informal conversation, the tutors' dilemma is either to privilege the *form* which will be necessary for students to further their studies in Suva (i.e. English), or the *content* of the course (i.e. the full understanding and active involvement of all students through Pijin). Such a strategic choice may be disconnected from tutors' personal attitudes toward Pijin – and with regard to the courses that I attended, it often conspicuously was. Among the three tutors who strictly employed English during their classes, two were overtly favourably disposed toward Pijin: They described it as a “real” language with its own qualities<sup>24</sup>.

Admittedly, according to students it is not usual that professors talk *about* Pijin during their lectures<sup>25</sup>. Nonetheless, even if the status and nature of Pijin are not directly discussed, implicit (or even fully involuntary) devaluation may sometimes happen. When he explained that his course would take place exclusively in English, the third professor referred consistently to Pijin as “Pidgin-English”. In the Linguistics course that I attended, while it had been firmly stated that *all* languages have a grammatical system (thus implicitly including Pijin), all examples of grammatical rules were taken from English and Fijian languages. Finally, the widespread idea that Pijin causes insurmountable interference in the proper acquisition of English may be reinforced by frequent allusions to the difficulty of speaking English for Solomon Islanders. This is a striking example of this

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<sup>24</sup> Maybe not so surprisingly, these tutors were respectively in Linguistics and Anthropology. It is also interesting to note that the expatriate tutor who taught English also voiced positive views on Pijin.

<sup>25</sup> These tutors may well have expressed their views specifically because of my presence; yet, there is no ground for believing that they were insincere. Noticeably, one of the tutors who did so prompted laughter among students when he asserted that Pijin is a very beautiful language and not, “*as some people declare*”, a form of broken English.

tendency: *“English blo iumi hem no stret, but you should try to do your best.”*<sup>26</sup>

Paradoxically, such allusions, originally meant by tutors to encourage students to practice English in spite of their imperfect mastery of it, may well in fact discourage them from doing so in the socially stressful context of the class. They may also sustain among students the dangerous belief that, regardless of their efforts to practice it, they will never reach adequate fluency in this language, due to “natural” factors beyond their control.

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<sup>26</sup> *“Our English is not good, but you should try to do your best.”*

### **3.3. The students' side: interpretation and evaluation of tutors' linguistic strategies**

Before examining how USP tutors' linguistic choices are interpreted by students, I should clarify a point. Officially, English is the medium of education in Solomon Islands<sup>27</sup>. However, in actual practice, Pijin is widely used at the oral level in many educational institutions - by pupils, but also by teachers. A minority of (mostly private) schools strictly apply the official rule, but most headmasters/directors seem to largely leave the choice in the hands of the teachers. This is the case at the USP SI Campus: As far as I have been told, no language regulation has been set to constrain the tutors' choice; they are free to make their own decision as to which language they prefer to employ in the classroom<sup>28</sup>. It is also with regard to this discrepancy between official rule and majority practice that tutors' language choices, and students' evaluation of these, should be understood.

A first remark is in order: Spontaneously, tutors' decision to privilege one language over the other was often understood by students less as a conscious strategy aimed at their best interest, than as a personal preference from the tutor. Opting for Pijin was thus occasionally interpreted by students as a form of laziness from the tutor, or even as a mark of limited competence in English (i.e. it is easier for him/her to teach in the language that he/she usually speaks). Conversely, a few students (who had become acquainted with "nationalist" discourses on language through their travels abroad, as will be explained in Chapter 4) presented this choice as a form of patriotism among young tutors – but often judged it rather misplaced in the context of the university:

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<sup>27</sup> To be accurate, there is currently no *official* language policy in education, but, after Independence, the Ministry of Education has continued following the recommendations made by the British colonial administration in this regard – i.e. privileging English as the medium of education. However, a new language policy, more favourable to Pijin and vernaculars, is currently under consideration, as we shall see later.

<sup>28</sup> According to a friend teaching there, this is also the case at SICHE, Honiara's other higher education institution.

9. *“Hao mi lukim nao, otta new professors, otta new generation, ot no rili wari nomoa hao otta spik. Ot no save care nao... If iu luk, stay lelebet lukim, normally Pijin nao bara big tumas nao. Bikos ot se: ‘oh, mifala Solomon Islanders, locals, so Pijin nomoa’.” (Janet)*

In David’s answer, note how positive and negative motivations for this choice - effectiveness in teaching, nationalism and laziness - are confusedly enmeshed<sup>29</sup>:

10. *“Maybe hem tingim dat nogud... Hem nao hao fo pikinini understandim gud, I think. Otta things wea hem teachim. Dastawae nao hem se, ‘oh, I think bae mi speak Pijin, datwan oketa... mifala lo hia, language blo mifala nao lo Solomon Islands, iusim Pijin. Fo... Bikos mi get used lo hem so bae mi spikim language blo mifala, mekem ot pikinini save gud’. So dastawae nao hem Pijin lo oketa.”*

But, beyond personal preference, making sure that all students understand accurately what is taught was widely acknowledged as a likely motivation for tutors to give class in Pijin. Most interviewees suggested that Pijin - as a common language that tutor and students all fully master – is the most effective oral medium to ensure comprehensive understanding of the subject by students:

11. *“If hem lokol, bae hem Pijin nomoa. Bikos, mi ting, from lokol to lokol (laugh), I mean, wetem Pijin mifala save communicate gud naia. English nao shud gud, bat...” (Sarah)*

12. *“Tingting blo mi, otta... samfala teacher ot laek fo iusim Pijin, kos... ot laek fo explainim fo hem klia lo otta student. (...) Kos hemi common language blo ot students, ot used fo spik lo hem. So otta ting dat... otta bae explainim lo Pijin, bae hemi save givim a clear picture fo ot students.” (Simon, FG)*

13. *“I think samfala no understandim gud olsem, sapos... fo oketa kaen olsem, oketa technical ideas olsem lo textbook o eniting olsem. Talem olsem, most students otta no understandim gud. (...) Fo explainim, lo Pijin I think hem better fo students.” (Mark)*

As such, Pijin is considered to be a language perfectly well-suited for teaching. Indeed, most of my informants had received their primary and secondary education mainly in Pijin<sup>30</sup>. However, the evaluation of tutors’ linguistic strategies by students was most

<sup>29</sup> There is a complex relationship between nationalism, patriotism and self-denigration, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Here I simply mention it as part of students’ understanding of teachers’ choices.

<sup>30</sup> During my first interview, as I knew from the literature (e.g. Lotherington 1998:70) that Creole languages were often considered too “gross” for educational purposes, I asked my respondents whether they felt that Pijin was well-suited for education. A stunned silence, followed by a slightly disdainful positive answer let me know that my question was pointless. Pijin is *already de facto* a language of education in Solomon Islands. Its adequacy to teaching purposes was never questioned by my informants.

often strikingly divorced from this consideration: The question was whether students *really need* to be taught in Pijin.

A few students suggested that tutors who privileged Pijin for this reason were mistakenly underestimating their competence in English:

14. *"I think dat ot think dat otta students no understandim English. Otta minim... bat mi no save wat nao tingting blo oketa taem otta iusim Pijin lo klasrum."* (Kate)

Others considered that this *might* be relevant for *some* students with limited proficiency in English, but none ever included him/herself in this imagined small minority:

15. *"Maybe like samfala wea no rili understandim spoken English, ot preferem teacher Pijin lo klas."* (Janet)

As will be discussed in the next chapters, oral competence in English is a sensitive topic, perceived as related to social differences. When I asked my informants whether they thought that students at the USP Center could easily understand and speak English, my question frequently provoked embarrassment. They generally tended to modestly downplay their level of competence in English. Yet, the high standard in aural comprehension of English among Solomon Islanders was emphasized by the same students in relation to other topics - in particular when they discussed the fact that Solomon officials make their speeches in English, not in Pijin. Indeed, in the family where I lived, I noticed in many instances that when we were all watching the Australian TV channel, young children were getting much more of it than I did myself. Furthermore, the alternation rules that I have observed when I attended USP courses do suggest that what is at issue when a tutor resorts to Pijin in the classroom is less often clarity than a concern for active involvement and free participation from the students.

In the end, out of 44 students whom I interviewed, only 4 considered that tutors were *right* in privileging Pijin in class<sup>31</sup>. By contrast, the huge majority of my respondents (40 out of 44) resolutely claimed that English should be used systematically by tutors and students at the USP Center. Even those who stated that Pijin made the learning process easier, such as Mark whom I previously quoted, did not consider it a *sufficient reason* to opt for Pijin in the classroom.

Teaching in Pijin was thus deemed a mistaken (if understandable) choice; by contrast, the motivations of USP tutors who privileged English in the classroom appeared both clear and sound to students. A few interviewees mentioned that it “had to” be so because English was the official language, and/or because the education materials (i.e. manuals and textbooks) were in English. However, these were secondary reasons. The primary motivation ascribed to tutors who privileged English – a motivation vigorously endorsed by virtually all my informants – was to improve students’ skills in English. Professors were expected to set an example and encourage students to practice English:

16. *“If speak English nao bae hem gud. Mekem mi lelebet heremsave hao fo speak tu, bikos mi... mi nid fo mi save speak English. Wat nao mi laekem nao... ot shud duim, ot tutor.”* (David)

Underlying this declared desire for practice is a concern about making oneself ready to go further one’s studies abroad – i.e., in the shortest term, at the main USP campus in Suva. This pressing concern reveals among students a great level of anxiety about their verbal competence in English. Raphael, who had spent 3 years at the USP Center before moving to Suva, remarked that he was virtually unable to speak English by the time of his

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<sup>31</sup> These were all upper-middle-class students who had traveled abroad and were aware of the existence of alternative education systems which privilege education in local languages. Their position will be detailed in Chapters 4 and 5; for now, suffice to say that they endorsed the mother-tongue education discourse and applied it to the USP Center as to the whole education system in Solomon Islands (i.e. all subjects should be taught in Pijin, and English learnt as a second language). Noticeably, these students were already proficient in English and did not support education in Pijin because they personally “needed” it.

arrival in Fiji. Indeed, among Solomon Islanders who studied in Suva, speaking (as opposed to understanding) was highlighted as the major issue – both in the classroom and in daily life:

17. “*Most student lo Suva, fo herem hem oraet. Bat fo talem aot nao, problem.*” (Francis)

18. “[First year lo Suva] *hem had, ya. (...) Taem mifala kam lo hia, staka bae findim had time tu fo switch go lo English olsem. Bae hem lelebet paspas, bae hem no... flow tumas.* (laugh)” (Laura)

#### *The debate on imposing “policy” at the USP SI Campus:*

Several students went as far as to condemn as *irresponsible* the behaviour of USP tutors who teach in Pijin. Here are some examples of these vigorous reactions:

19. “*Mi no identify wae nao otta professor iusim Pijin olsem, ia. Even taem iu Form 6 o 7 iu expektim ot bae spik lo English, bat nomoa! They come an speak Pijin nomoa!*” (Lionel)

20. “*I think that our lecturers don’t realize that we really need to improve in speaking in English.*” (Nelson)

21. “[Referring to a tutor who comes back from Suva but opts for Pijin] *Lukim! Kaen olsem ia, hemi bae contribute nomoa fo deprivim English olsem. As an educator iu mas spikim English nao, mekem otta student ot learn from you.*” (Martin)

This often led them to suggest the imposition of constraining rules to oblige both tutors and students to use English at the USP Center. This idea of imposing language regulations (within classrooms or in the whole campus) – referred to as “*putum policy*” by students – was spontaneously mentioned by almost one quarter of my informants<sup>32</sup>. The concept of “policy” was familiar to all students, who had gone through or heard of primary and secondary schools which practiced it<sup>33</sup>.

In practice, on the students’ side, the absence of “policy” seems to favour *de facto* the use of Pijin over that of English (which seems less “natural” and requires effort):

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<sup>32</sup> As I already mentioned, although English is officially the medium of education in Solomon Islands, Pijin is widely used in many schools. This is so true that strictly privileging English has become perceived by students as the *exception*, rather than the rule: Schools which do enforce English as the exclusive medium of education and ban the use of Pijin in classrooms are said to have a “policy”.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, students who went to primary school in the provinces had sometimes experienced the same form of constraint *in favour* of Pijin: Their vernacular was banned and only Pijin was allowed inside the school compound.

22. *"Lo hia, no strict rules, lo saed lo spikim olsem, so mifala speak Pijin nomoa."* (David)
23. *"I think ot shud talem 'Oh, evri student mas speak English'. Bikos hem naia, taem ot students ot answer bak lo Pijin, professors acceptem answer blo oketa. So ot se 'oh, I ting hem best fo iumi ansa professor lo Pijin nomoa'."* (Nancy)

Those who supported the idea of imposing "policy" viewed rigid language rules as the only solution to force students to practice English, and asserted that the USP Center, contrary to their expectations, was significantly less "strict" than many high schools in this regard. However, some other students vigorously protested against the idea, stressing that such constraint at their age would be not only insulting, but intrinsically unenforceable:

24. *"Mi disagri lo kaen olsem, putim policy. Kos had fo hem waka! Ot putim policy, wari blo man ia! Man if hem no nid fo hem tok, kam aot from campus hem tok Pijin nomoa. Hem laek kam insaed lo campus, boundary lo dea, policy insaed lo ples ia iu mas English... if mi les fo tok, had fo mi tok lo hem, hem oraet nomoa!"* (Raphael, FG Suva)

Indeed, discussion on previous high school experiences and interviews with high school students showed that in the institutions where such rules exist, their application is actually limited. Even the students who supported the concept acknowledged that its enforcement was highly problematic in the high schools that they took as examples:

25. *"Students ot no folom. Ya, hem tru. Samfala skul trae fo enforcim nao otta regulation bat... hem had."* (Kate)
26. *"Lo Suu, ot mekem English as common... bat certain times nomoa pipol duim. Gogo hemi... nomoa, bikos teacher hem no karem aot nomoa den... No punishment, ia."* (Martin)
27. *"Lo Honiara High, fastaem ot putum rules ia fo spikim English insaed lo klasrum, bat gogo... ot teachers and students no cooperate."* (Allan)

In these institutions, only a small minority of teachers actually penalize students if they speak Pijin in class – a behaviour often implicitly condemned as extreme:

28. *"Samfala full English: ot duim tekem Maths bat ot spikim English. Ot se, students oketa mas speak English, an still mekem punishment, semsem primary."* (David)

Conversely, students report that most high school teachers resort at least *sometimes* to Pijin if they feel that their explanations are not understood by pupils. They also accept questions and answers in Pijin, in order to ensure class participation - lip service is only occasionally



paid by students to the imposed rule, by asking permission to speak in Pijin. As exceptions multiply, the policy progressively “*dissolves*”:

29. “*Taem professor hem se ‘iufala no Pijin lo klasrum’, bae student laf tu bikos sometimes professor tu hem Pijin lo klasrum. Den students bae luk falom professor, students tu bae speak Pijin.*” (Sandra)

30. “[Lo Honiara High] *ot teacher, ot English kam. Bat iumi save ansarem oketa lo Pijin nomoa. Olsem, most students... mi no save lo eni student hem bae tok English go lo teacher tu.*” (Joseph)

In the end, the difference between the USP Center and “strict” high schools appears quite limited. Even at King George VI, the most prestigious high school, “exceptions” are so frequent (on the part of the students) that they actually appear to be *part of* the rule. A striking exception is Chung-Wah primary school, which a couple of my informants had attended; interestingly, respect of the rule was in this case explained by the fact that most teachers are expatriates. But between local tutors and students – as Sarah put it, “*from lokol to lokol*” – Pijin seems to obstinately arise as the common, “natural” language.

Students’ strong emphasis on the necessity to privilege English in the classroom leads us to a major point. The contrast between what students *say* – that everyone should use English at the USP Center – and what they actually *do* – answering in Pijin even when the tutor consistently employs English – cannot be stressed enough. Students’ behaviours seem to validate the choice of tutors who privilege Pijin, but the *same* students could nonetheless vehemently criticize this choice during interviews. These criticisms reveal an important assumption among students: that they go to university *firstly* to learn English, and that professors teach English *at least as much as* they teach their own subject. However, this assumption is not necessarily shared by tutors: In their view, they primarily teach a subject (e.g. Geography) on which they have acquired knowledge. If they feel that the most effective medium to share their knowledge is Pijin, they may well opt for it.

### **3.4. The written/oral diglossia at the USP SI Campus**

#### **3.4.1. English as the university written language**

Another phenomenon which makes the USP SI Campus a fascinating place – for someone who is in the habit of thinking and writing in the same language – is the written/oral diglossia which takes place in it. While Pijin is the daily language at the USP Center, English is definitely the written code: During my whole observation time, I did not see a single word written in Pijin on campus. Not only are books and learning materials in English, but also all administrative documents and internal information messages (e.g. notices informing students that a class will be postponed). This discrepancy is most striking in the classroom. Regardless of the tutor's language choice, everything that is noted down on the blackboard is always in English. A professor may therefore frequently develop an explanation in Pijin and simultaneously summarize his main points on the board in English.

Through a research project that I carried out alongside my Master's fieldwork, I had the opportunity to observe that Pijin phrases written on a blackboard are felt out of place. I was involved in the organization of group discussions with Honiaran youth on social issues for the SIDT<sup>34</sup>, a local-based NGO. Along with a Solomon volunteer (who also happened to be a tutor at the USP Center), I co-moderated 6 focus groups. The whole discussion was always in Pijin, but the local moderator systematically jotted down in English the ideas voiced by the participants. When my turn came to lead the discussion, I spontaneously wrote down the ideas in Pijin on the board – in my view, Pijin was the language in which the utterance had been voiced, and I could not see the point in translating it into English. The very first time that I did so, immediately after I had noted down a few words which

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<sup>34</sup> Solomon Islands Development Trust. The focus groups were conducted in premises provided by churches, schools, and the SIDT headquarters.

were unmistakably in Pijin (“*raowa lo haos*”), I started to feel general discomfort around me. The Solomon moderator intervened and politely asked to take the lead again; he erased what I had written in Pijin and rewrote it in English. Later, we evoked this rather awkward moment and joked about it. Following this conversation, during the other focus groups he refrained from erasing my notes in Pijin (since I could not reconcile myself to writing them in English), but they always looked forlorn and out of place on the blackboard filled up with English phrases.

Solomon students do precisely the same thing as this moderator when they take notes in class: Even when the tutor’s explanation is in Pijin, they write it down in English in their notebooks. Now, it should be remembered that while some tutors at the USP Center use Pijin for relational and illustrative, rather than explicative, purposes, a number of them give the bulk of their lecture in Pijin. Students are thus frequently confronted with the obligation of turning Pijin utterances into English written forms.

When I asked students if they sometimes took notes in Pijin, their reaction was generally a stunned amusement. My consequent assumption was that they had to *translate* what was said in Pijin into English before writing it down. This is not, however, how my interviewees spontaneously viewed it. This discrepancy in perception is well illustrated by the following exchange:

31. “An taem iu lo skul, nomata professor hem tok lo Pijin bae iu raet lo...  
*Hem tok lo Pijin bat mi raet lo English! Ya. Let’s say, taem professor hem kam explenim things lo English - he! in Pijin – mi mas raetim lo English, whatever mi putum daon den mi raet in English.*  
 So iu mas translatim fastaem?  
*Ileu...*  
 From Pijin kasem English?  
*When hem tok kam moa, mind blo mi hem, olsem, immediately hem olsem putum go lo English nao. Mi no have to... luluk lo wod ia, mas translatim olsem - nomoa. Semtaem hem spik kam lo Pijin, mi translatim olsem, wat mi herem, olsem, wat hem talem nao, sens blo mi talem mi nomoa ‘hem minim things olsem ia’ so mi trantranslatim lo English.” (Sandra)*

A few informants understood that this practice may sound strange to me; however, they always considered it as a potential problem only *after* I had raised it as such. For Solomon students, writing in English what is said in Pijin is simply a habit that they have acquired since primary school. They have successfully practiced it for years, and can therefore hardly question it as problematic:

32. *"Ot praktisim olsem taem ot smol lo primary, taem ia. So taem otta stei lo otta high school, oketa familiar wetem kaen type system naia."* (Kevin)

33. *"One thing common lo students naia, lo Solomon: they're very... mind blo oketa prepare fo changim. Otta herem kam lo Pijin, tutor tok kam lo Pijin, ot changim lo English naia."* (Martin, looking back from Suva on his Solomon experience)

Indeed, although they do not view it as such, Solomon students could be said to develop astonishing competence in simultaneous translation<sup>35</sup>.

### **3.4.2. The issue of competence**

The previously recounted anecdote on the SIDT focus groups may suggest some marked reluctance in writing down Pijin during "formal" events, such as a class or a meeting: On a school blackboard, it seems felt to be especially out of place. Attitudes toward literacy in Pijin is a complex issue which is beyond the scope of this chapter on students' practices at the USP Center and will be rather examined in relation to social differentiation in Chapter 5. For now, I will limit the discussion to what appears to be the most obvious and imperative reason for students taking their class notes in English: their relative incompetence in written Pijin.

Indeed, it would be writing in Pijin, and not writing in English, which would be perceived as requiring a laborious transliteration process. I had the occasion to observe this

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<sup>35</sup> However, one may wonder whether some pieces of information are not lost in the process: Translating into a different language requires instantaneous and clear understanding of what is being said, while professors' explanations of a new concept (even in one's mother tongue, based on my own experience as a student) sometimes require being reread and reflected upon before being fully understood.

fact during the SIDT research project: A volunteer who was in charge of transcribing interviews carried out in Pijin referred to the transcription task as “*translation lo Pijin*” - as if the notes (taken in English) had to be translated into Pijin and were not *themselves already* a translation from Pijin. Such a perception is also reflected in the following answer from a USP student:

34. “*Mi raet lo English. Kos mi understandim, kos mi save, taem hem tok kam lo Pijin. bat den... bae mi no save hao fo tarnim daon lo Pijin wod ia. (...) So mi have to raetim lo English nao wat nao meaning blo otta explanation blo hem.*” (Kate)

The reason for this is that Solomon children acquire literacy in English from the very first year of primary education: Although teachers may privilege Pijin at the oral level, the only language that they learn to read and write, and consistently practice at the written level, is English. One might say that, when they reach the university level, Solomon students are thus fully proficient in one language at the oral level, and in another at the written one. My interviewees profusely commented upon the fact that, for them, English is significantly easier and faster to read and write than Pijin:

35. “*English, hem nao kuikaem wan. I mean, bikos iumi bara skulim tu! Fo toktok nao, nomoa, bat full time iumi, brain, save ridim nao English.*” (Lydia)

36. “*English nao hem fast. Pijin, iu ridim go iu paspas nao! (laugh) Bae iu stop an bae iu lelebet ‘heu... wat nao diswan?’ (laugh) Olsem type ia. Bae hem no flow. English nao iu ridim bae iu bara... gogogo nao.*” (Laura)

37. “*Mi raet lo English, bikos English hem lelebet... isi tu, than Pijin. Pijin, olsem, mi save raet bat mi have to lelebet think more, hao nao fo spelim, kaen olsem.*” (June)

38. “*Pijin hem had fo raetim. Mi no rili save. Lelebet nomoa, sapos ot spik kam den mi... raetim pronunciation, kind olsem. Bat English nao mi best fo raetim.*” (Martin)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> My experience at the SIDT confirmed this self-perceived incompetence in written Pijin among young Honiarans. The volunteers who were in charge of transcribing the interviews in Pijin (a demand made by a foreigner, noticeably) were at first very reluctant to do so. I had to firmly insist on this point; yet, few of them eventually resisted the temptation to write down in English the approximate content of the tape, before translating it into Pijin. During a working session, I heard one of them (otherwise perfectly fluent in Pijin) whisper with a heavy sigh: “*ah, lelebet unfamiliar wetem Pijin ia...*”. (“I’m a bit unfamiliar with this Pijin...”)

Pijin had not been learnt at school; consequently what is known about the Pijin spelling system had to be grasped through other means. Most often, such knowledge had been acquired by reading (or rather having a quick look at) texts in Pijin - generally the Bible. Many students were acquainted with the spelling system used for vernacular languages (described by my informants as “a-e-i-o-u”) – i.e. they had at least *heard about* it. As explained by Martin in the last quote, they would pronounce the word in Pijin and try to write down what they heard by using this system. However, even those most knowledgeable in it - because they had learnt to write their vernacular through it - were much more familiar with the English phonetic system, and had to struggle against the continuous temptation to use the latter when they wrote Pijin:

39. “*Mi raet lelebet, bat mi slow fogud! (laugh) Bikos English laek kam. (...) Honestly mi se: mi raet gogo, bae mi laek English nomoa nao!*” (Lydia)

English always remains the system of reference – since it is the one that they have learnt first and practiced for numerous years – while Pijin spelling is felt as a diversion from it. During the focus groups with USP students in Honiara, I carried out a short experiment by asking the respondents to write down a sentence in Pijin. In two especially interesting occurrences, the respondents spontaneously provided a double version: one closer to English, the other aimed at following strictly the Pijin spelling system:

“*Last night me itim egg. / Last naet mi itim egg.*” (“Last night we ate eggs”)

“*What nao iufala kaikaim last night for dinner? / Wat nao iufala kaikaim last nite fo dina?*” (“What did you eat last night for dinner?”)

The hardly escapable resorting to the English spelling system - at least as a first step - was illustrated even more strikingly when a high school informant, who had claimed to pass notes in Pijin in class, was asked to write down a phrase that he had passed as an example. He wrote “*Me likem you*”, hesitating several seconds before adding the ‘m’ at the end of the

verb. Needless to say, in all such exercises, writing the sentence took a significant amount of time. Writing Pijin requires careful thought and takes time, and taking notes in class is clearly not a context where such a luxury can be afforded.

Beyond their lack of familiarity with the Pijin spelling system, some informants also pointed to an additional difficulty: that Pijin now contains numerous English words, for which it is hard to decide which spelling system to apply (a difficulty that I experienced myself when I transcribed my data, as I noted earlier)<sup>37</sup>. This is how Lydia expressed it:

40. *"Hem had tumas! Bikos tude, otta pikinini ot mixim English wetem Pijin nomoa. I mean, hem no rili Pijin, ia. So taem iu.. raet up olsem, insaed lo Pijin ia bae iu mixim nomoa English. So bae iu se nomoa: 'diswan hem no Pijin, ia? Hem English'."*

The students' competence in reading Pijin was virtually as limited as in writing it - if they happened to read *some Pijin at all*. During an individual interview, a student spontaneously tried his hand, for the sake of fun, at reading aloud a popular song that I had transcribed. He read the lyrics slowly and at times laboriously<sup>38</sup>. Once he completed the task, he sang it from memory, very fast and perfectly fluently. As a matter of fact, students have very few occasions to read Pijin, or even to see anything written in Pijin<sup>39</sup>. My interviews often provided them with the opportunity to do something unusual and rather amusing, as was highlighted by one of the youngest respondents:

41. *"Longtaem mi no riridim Pijin... Distaem mi jes riridim Pijin naia! Olsem mifala ridim English olowe. Taem mifala rid olsem, mifala fil fan tu, ia! (laugh)"* (Kevin)

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<sup>37</sup> A SIDT volunteer had similarly grumbled when he was transcribing interviews in Pijin: *"Sometimes I don't even know if this word is Pijin or English, so I don't know how to write it!"*

<sup>38</sup> Yet, I have ground for believing that he was the most knowledgeable in written Pijin among all my informants: He wrote on a regular basis letters in Pijin to his relatives without resorting to English spelling.

<sup>39</sup> At the library of the USP SI Campus, I found one book in Bislama (Vanuatu Pidgin), but no book in Solomon Pijin.

The students' lack of familiarity with written Pijin had an unexpected consequence on my research procedure: I had to abandon the idea of using consent forms, which I had prepared in English before leaving for the field and planned to translate into Pijin. I realized that Pijin, in my informants' view, is not a language to be used in formal written contexts - and a consent form is definitely a formal document. Not only would they have had difficulties in reading it, but offering consent forms in Pijin would in all likelihood have amused them as a glaring mark of faulty socialization<sup>40</sup>.

As my last remark illustrates, with regard to languages, behaviours can hardly be divorced from attitudes. In this chapter, I have tried to focus strictly on linguistic practices at the USP SI Campus; however, already on several occasions this description has led us to broach larger issues involving attitudes toward Pijin and English. We have noticed, in particular, the sharp discrepancy between students' actual behaviours in the classroom (i.e. using Pijin, even if the tutor tries his/her best to have them speak in English) and their strong claims that they should practice English at the USP Center. In the next chapter, we will explore more in depth how students conceive and evaluate these two languages, and which social values they respectively associate with them. This exploration will eventually enable us to understand and contextualize the apparent inconsistency of students' behaviours.

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<sup>40</sup> Conversely, I felt that offering consent forms in English would have given an excessively formal tone to interviews, which I was trying to keep as informal and friendly as possible.



### Translation of verbatim quotes (Chapter 3)<sup>41</sup>

1. *"You mean, the one that we speak or the one that we learn?"*
2. *"It's English the main language. (...) Because... some of our lecturers, they expect us to answer in English, when they ask us a question."*
3. *"Not everyone will use Pijin: usually, in all our English classes, all the tutors use English."*
4. *"With whom do you speak English at the university?  
Teachers, students...  
With students you use English too??  
Ya.. Sometimes we speak English, like just for fun, we speak English with each other."*
5. *"But if some... Europeans come and speak English, and we reply in English, we would speak it. But when they're left, there will be this kind of joke: 'ouh, it's only when white people are here that we speak English in this class!'"*
6. *"That one he tries his best to be like an example, a role model, so he speaks in English. But, I think, in response, all the students will just use Pijin anyway!"*
7. *"If he speaks to me in English, then I have to use English, because...I mean, because he replies in... I don't feel like replying in Pijin."*
8. *"I respect him so I have to... reply in English. Like, he talks to me in English, so it doesn't sound really correct if he speaks English to me and I answer in a different language, like in Pijin. I have to answer in the same... the same language he talks to me."*
9. *"The way I see it, the new professors, the new generation, they just don't really care about the way they speak. They just don't care... If you observe them for a while, you'll see that normally they really use Pijin a lot. Because they say: 'oh, we are all Solomon Islanders here, all locals, so Pijin is just fine'."*
10. *"Maybe he thinks that they may not... that's the best way to be sure that children get it right, I think. These things that he teaches them. That's why he says, 'oh, I think I will just speak Pijin, that language at least they will... for us in Solomon Islands, it's our language, Pijin... For... Because I'm familiar with it, so I will just speak our language, and the children will really understand well'. So that's why he speaks Pijin to them."*
11. *"If he is a local tutor, he will just use Pijin. Because, I think, from a local to a local (laugh), I mean, in Pijin we can really communicate well. It would be good to use English, but..."*
12. *"According to me, the... some teachers prefer to use Pijin, because... they want to explain, to make it clear to the students. (...) Because it's the usual language of the students, the one they are used to speaking. So they think that... they will explain in Pijin, and this will give a clear picture to the students."*
13. *"I think some of them don't really understand well... for this kind of things like technical ideas in the textbook or things like that. Viewed in this way, most students don't really understand well. (...) To explain things, for students I think it's better in Pijin."*
14. *"I think that they think that students don't understand English. But they understand... so I don't know what they have in mind when they use Pijin in the classroom."*
15. *"Maybe a couple of students who don't really understand spoken English, they prefer that the teacher uses Pijin in class."*

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<sup>41</sup> These translations are not meant to be in Standard English; rather, I attempt to remain as close as possible to the original formulation of my informants. The English parts in the quotes are generally kept unchanged, and the Pijin parts are translated in a way which retains part of their original "flavour".

16. *"If they spoke English, that would be good. To make me know how to speak it too, because I... I need to know how to speak English. That's what I would like, what the tutors should do."*
17. *"For most students in Suva, for understanding it's okay. But the problem is really for speaking."*
18. *"[The first year in Suva] it's hard, ya. (...) When we arrive here, many of us find it hard to switch to English. It will be a bit messy at first, it won't... really flow."*
19. *"I really don't understand why professors use Pijin like that. Even when you enter Form 6 or 7, you expect that they will speak in English, but they don't! They come and just speak Pijin!"*
20. Quote in English
21. *"You see! This kind of tutors, they just contribute to deprive us from speaking English. As an educator you must speak English, make the students learn from you."*
22. *"Here there are no strict rules regarding what we should speak, so we just speak Pijin."*
23. *"I think that they should say 'All students must speak English'. Because that's it, when students reply in Pijin, professors accept their answers. So they think 'oh, I think it's better just to answer professors in Pijin'."*
24. *"I disagree with this kind of things, like putting policy. Because no way it would work! They want to put a policy, that's their problem! You don't need to talk, you just leave the campus and speak Pijin outside. You want to enter the campus, but there is a boundary, the policy says you must speak English inside... if I don't feel like speaking it, I won't speak it, that's all!"*
25. *"Students don't follow it. Ya, that's true. Some schools try to enforce this regulation but... it's hard."*
26. *"At Suu, they made English as common... but only sometimes people did it. Then it... dissolved, because teachers did not really carry it out then... No punishment."*
27. *"At Honiara High, at first they put this kind of rules, for speaking English inside the classroom, but then... the teachers and the students didn't cooperate."*
28. *"Some of them used only English all the time: they teach Maths but they speak in English. They told students that they must speak English, and would punish them, just like at primary school."*
29. *"When the professor says 'you can't use Pijin in the classroom', it just makes students laugh because sometimes the professor too uses Pijin in class. Then, the students imitate the professor, and speak Pijin too."*
30. *"[At Honiara High] teachers lecture in English. But usually we reply to them in Pijin. Like, most students... I don't know any student who would answer in English to the teacher."*
31. *"And at school, even if the professor speaks in Pijin, you will write in... He speaks in Pijin but I write in English! Ya. Let's say, when the professor explains things in English - he! in Pijin - I have to write it down in English, whatever I write down I do it in English. So you have to translate it first? Heu... From Pijin to English? When he says something, it's like my mind immediately puts it into English. I don't have to... look for the words, translate them - actually not. Just as he speaks in Pijin, what I hear, like what he says, my brain just tells me 'this is what he means' so I put it into English."*
32. *"They've practiced it from the time they were small, at primary school. So when they are at high school, they've got used to this kind of system."*
33. *"That's one common thing for students in Solomon Islands: they're very... their mind is prepared to change things into English. They hear something in Pijin, like the tutor says something in Pijin, and they change it into English."*

34. *"I write in English. Because I understand, I know what he means when he says something in Pijin, but then... I wouldn't know how to write down this particular word in Pijin. (...) So I have to write in English the content of his explanation."*

35. *"English, that's the fast one. I mean, because we really learn it at school too! Not like for speaking it, but reading English, that's what we do all the time."*

36. *"In English it's much faster. Pijin, when you read it, like you skip some parts! You stop and you're like 'heu... what's that word?'. Like, it doesn't flow. But English when you read it you're really fast."*

37. *"I write in English, because in English it's a little bit easier than in Pijin. Pijin, like, I know how to write it but I have to think a little bit more, how to spell the words, this kind of things."*

38. *"It's hard to write Pijin. I can't really do it. Just a little bit, if someone says something and I... write down how they pronounce, just like that. But I'm much better at writing English."*

39. *"I can write a little bit, but I'm really slow! Because English always wants to come in. (...) Honestly I tell you: if I write it, after a while I just feel like going back to English!"*

40. *"It's too hard! Because nowadays, children just mix English with Pijin. I mean, it's not really Pijin. So when you... try to write like that, inside your Pijin you'll just mix some English. Then you'll say: 'this word is not Pijin, is it? It's English'."*

41. *"I haven't read any Pijin for a long time... In fact, it's only now that I read some Pijin! Like, we read in English all the time. So when we come to read this one, it looks funny to us!"*

## CHAPTER 4: ATTITUDES TOWARD PIJIN AND ENGLISH AMONG STUDENTS

In this chapter, I will present a detailed description of students' discourses on Pijin and English. We will see how the idea of hierarchy between these languages, inherited from the colonial period, remains, while being partly reinterpreted. We will also see how the "social meanings" (Blom and Gumperz 1972) attached to these two languages lead students to avoid using English in the classroom, despite their claims that they *should* do it. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I will discuss how Solomon students react when they are confronted with divergent views on Pijin, held by certain expatriates in Honiara (including myself), and with divergent language ideologies which prevail in neighbouring Pacific countries.

### 4.1. Pijin as a "broken" common language

We noticed in the preceding chapter that Pijin is unanimously felt as the language in which two Solomon Islanders, if they are not '*wantok*', would naturally address each other. As an informant put it, if students are not *obliged* to use English, they just "*communicate normal lo Pijin*" at the university. As a language, Pijin is perceived by my informants as having two main attributes: It is intrinsically natural to Solomon Islanders, and it is a "broken" language (more specifically, a "broken" version of English). In Honiara, the latter characteristic is generally given much more emphasis than the former in discourses, including among USP students, and will be explored at length in this section. However, the "naturalness" attribute largely underlies students' attitudes and has important implications. It is thus worth examining it more in detail first.

#### 4.1.1. The “naturalness” of Pijin

In contrast to English, Pijin is presented by Solomon students as a local language. It is part and parcel of Solomon life and is deemed easy to acquire for all Solomon Islanders<sup>1</sup>.

These are some illustrations of this perception:

1. *“Pijin, mifala Solomon Islanders ia, hem very isi tumas fo mifala understandim and isi tumas fo mifala lanem. Olsem... hem wanfala language blo mifala Solomon Islanders, Pijin.”* (Gabriel)

2. *“Pijin mi lanem... mi no rili lanem Pijin olsem, hem kam olsem samting mi spikim nomoa.”* (Joseph)

The accessibility of Pijin is generally explained by its pervasiveness in Solomon social life. According to my interviewees, all Solomon Islanders are – at least to some extent – made familiar with it from childhood. Even in the villages, where the vernacular is usually spoken, it is stated that people would necessarily hear Pijin sometimes and get acquainted with it. Children would gather basic knowledge with other children, in particular young neighbours coming from other provinces:

3. *“Otta pikinini, taem ot born kam, they mingle around with their age group oketa spikim Pijin, so hem isi... By staying with them bae hem heherem nomoa, bae hem save spikim.”* (William)

4. *“Ot pipol, ot live wetem. Taem iu born kam iu born kam insaed. That’s why hem very isi fo pikinini ot lanem.”* (Steven)

Interestingly, the second quote comes from a student who grew up in East Malaita, not in Honiara. This process of acquisition of Pijin was long known for the capital city, where people from all provinces live side by side, but is now – at least at the level of discourse - transposed to villages for the youngest generation. In fact, beyond actual socialization, proficiency in Pijin is presented as quasi *innate* for all Solomon children:

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Jourdan (1985:102, 1991:198, 2000:99) notes that a Solomon Islander who speaks one of the Southeast Solomon languages as his vernacular, and who arrives to town from the provinces with no knowledge of Pijin, can master it within three or four weeks. This remark matched my own observations at the beginning of my stay in Honiara, when a young child from South Malaita came to stay at the house where I lived and became fluent in Pijin faster than I did.

5. *"Ot small pikinini taem ot 2-3, kolsap lo haos, ot stat fo Pipijin together an gogo Pijin hem kam up."* (Matthew)

6. *"Taem pikinini grow up an iu speak Pijin lo oketa gogo, somehow language ia hem transmitted lo datwan. I guess bikos evri Solomon Islander – o most Solomon Islander – taem oketa grow up kam, Pijin olsem naturally hem insaed lo oketa."* (Alison)

7. *"Hem toktok blo mifala nao. I mean, common wan mifala iusim lo country, ia. Hem stei lo blod nao! (laughs)"* (David)

As this last quote playfully suggests, the naturalness of Pijin is conceived as virtually inscribed in Solomon Islanders' genes. Its easy acquisition is *never* explained by the fact that Pijin is close to (in fact, largely mapped onto) Solomon vernaculars in terms of grammar and morphology<sup>2</sup>.

Most interestingly, several of these remarks on the naturalness of Pijin were made by students who were not born in Honiara and had learnt Pijin relatively late in their life. In their case, "naturalness" should not be seen as self-evident: They had not acquired this language through natural socialization with family and friends, but in a formal context at the primary school<sup>3</sup>. David, who authored the last quote, had indeed learnt it through a constraining regulation which banned his vernacular from school. Furthermore, students born and raised in the provinces often reported that they had started to become familiar with Pijin at the primary level, but mainly in a passive way. It took several years – until they entered secondary school, where they had classmates from other ethnolinguistic groups - before they actually started to *speak* it fluently:

8. *"Pijin, taem mi go lo secondary nomoa mi stat fo lanem nao. Bat taem mi lo primary, mi save heremsave. Taem mi go lo secondary skul, mifala mix together so mi stat fo lanem nao lo dea. An English lo secondary skul tu."* (Luke)

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<sup>2</sup> A fact consistently pointed out by Keesing (1988). The case of phonology is more complex, since it is common knowledge for all students that Pijin is pronounced differently by speakers of different vernaculars. In this sense, Pijin pronunciation is drawn closer to that of '*langgus*'. However, as will be discussed later, using the phonological system of one's own '*langgus*' is actually not perceived as being "good" Pijin.

<sup>3</sup> As explained in the previous chapter, although Pijin is not officially taught in primary schools, it is largely used, and sometimes imposed, by teachers (who often have a different '*langgus*') in the classrooms.

9. *"Pijin mi stat fo tok nao taem mi go lo high school, lo Suu. Bifoa, mi no confident fo tok."*  
(Raphael)

In such cases, Pijin and English were learnt almost at the same age and both at school – although they were acquired and used in different contexts: Pijin to communicate with fellow pupils from other ‘*langgus*’ out of class; English to communicate exclusively with the teacher inside the classroom and mostly in a written form. Nonetheless, it seems that these students, who clearly learnt Pijin as a *second* language, have fully adopted the discourse of “naturalness”, which only partially matches their own experience.

The conviction that Pijin is an inborn language for Solomon Islanders has an important corollary: Unlike English, it does not need to be formally learnt at school. This point was recurrently made by USP students. Here are a few examples:

10. *"You don't need classroom to learn Pijin. (...) You just sit under a tree or play, iu save nao."*  
(William)

11. *"Pijin, iu born, iu born kam wetem Pijin insaed, lo Solo. Iu born with Pijin an mother tongue. But for English language, you need to go to schools."* (Steven)

As my informants generally assumed that one goes to school *firstly* in order to learn a (socially useful) foreign language, this led a large majority of them to firmly believe that schooling in Pijin is unnecessary and pointless. Such reasoning can be exemplified as follows:

12. *"Just like otta mother tongue languages ia, Pijin bae mifala save lanem. Bikos lo Honiara, otta used fo spikim, so taem man... pikinini hem born kam, automatically hem just speak. So bae hem no nid fo skulim moa bikos hem... brought up insaed disfala... automatically bae hem behave an bae hem tok. Pijin nao. So, case blo Solomon Islanders, hem no nid fo skul lo Pijin. I think English hem mas skulim bikos... hem no language blo hem. So iumi mas lanem formally."* (James)

Or, as another student, Daniel, bluntly put it:

13. *"Lanem Pijin hem no useful. Kos otta students, otta go fo skul fo lanem English nao, no Pijin."*

#### 4.1.2. Pijin as “broken English”: an inherited prejudice diversely reinterpreted

If Pijin is deemed so accessible by Solomon students, it is also because it is perceived as a relatively “loose” language. On my very first day in Honiara, I could hear from a Solomon NGO representative that: *“In Pijin you cannot make mistakes”*. As noted by Keesing (1990), the idea that Pijin is a form of bastardized English - a “broken” version of English - remains pervasive in Solomon Islands despite Independence. Indeed, I had countless occasions to observe how widespread and deep-rooted this colonial prejudice still is. For example, when I met Solomon Islanders in Fiji and mentioned that I had learnt Pijin, the comment *“Pijin is just broken English”* (presented as barely factual, and by no means intended to mock or devalue my efforts) was virtually systematic. During a survey conducted in a primary school alongside my Master’s research, a 12 year-old girl wrote *“broken language”* instead of Pijin as the second language that she had learnt.

Disparaging Pijin is still commonplace in Honiara, and the USP SI Campus constitutes no exception in this regard. In daily life at the university, spontaneous depreciative comments on Pijin were numerous. On my first day on the campus, when I was introduced by the director to the rest of the USP staff, the fact that I had started to learn Pijin with a grammar book and cassettes when I was still in Canada was deemed so amusing that I was asked to recount it several times. An employee told me by way of encouragement: *“Pijin hem broken English nomoa, so iu save minim...”*<sup>4</sup>. Yet, in parallel, I was also frequently congratulated for my relative fluency in Pijin. My first conversation with USP students set the tone: As soon as they knew that I was learning Pijin, and without asking any question myself, I was offered the following comments: *“I wonder if you can find a structure in this language, because it’s broken”* and *“the problem with Pijin is that it*

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<sup>4</sup> *“Pijin is just broken English, so you’ll be able to understand it”*



*affects the way people speak English*". These students also remarked that people frequently insert words from their '*langgus*' in Pijin and that people spoke it differently depending on which part of the country they come from. Within a few minutes, most of the issues that I would have to explore during my fieldwork had been spontaneously broached.

Let us examine what USP students actually said during interviews about the nature of Pijin. When I asked whether Pijin is similar to English or whether it is a different language, my informants almost unanimously emphasized similarity:

14. "*Tufala kolsap similar nomoa. Hem English nomoa, Pijin.*" (Gabriel)

15. "*Hem sem nomoa, actually. Bikos majority blo Solomon Island Pijin language, hem English, English wod insaed. Just a few wod nomoa hem lelebet diferan from English.*" (Matthew)

Because a large part of the Pijin lexicon derives from English, they were considered as virtually similar languages. The difference between them would be confined to a few words, as well as pronunciation for some, and spelling for others. The emphasis on this latter difference is all the more surprising that, in practice, students hardly ever read or write Pijin.

16. "*Otta letter nomoa hem confusing lelebet. Bat taem iu spikim, hem almost like English nomoa. Samfala wod, spelling nomoa hem diferan.*" (Luke)

Interestingly, my informants often stressed the proximity of Pijin to English by comparison with Tok Pisin and Bislama. This led to a paradoxical phenomenon: While Solomon Pijin and other Melanesian pidgins are to a large extent mutually intelligible (as I experienced myself, and as was widely acknowledged by students)<sup>5</sup>, the difference between them was clearly emphasized at the level of discourse:

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<sup>5</sup> Tok Pisin is frequently heard in popular songs in Honiara. Bislama is less familiar to Solomon students, although it is actually much closer to Solomon Pijin. At the end of several interviews, I mentioned that, during a holiday trip in Vanuatu, Ni-Vanuatu people often thought that I was speaking Bislama when I was speaking Solomon Pijin; my Solomon respondents were always amazed by this fact. Several USP students,

17. *"Hem isi fo heremsave, bat staka difference lo dea, I think."* (Mark)

18. *"Pijin lo Solomon hem nao broken English nomoa. (...) Olsem, kaen type Pijin olsem blo PNG and narawan ia, hem diferen, ia. Ot barava diferen from Pijin blo Solo tu, samfala wod ia, samfala wod insaed."* (Franklin)

Conversely, whereas English and Pijin are *not* mutually intelligible, actual differences were played down. Consequently, foreigners are *in theory* supposed to understand Pijin:

19. *"I think semsem nomoa. Only few words nomoa save mekem difference lo dea. Bat Pijin an English hem still sem... Nomata iu no save Pijin, bae iu save minim nomoa."* (June)

Such emphasis on similarity partly derives from the colonial assumption that Pijin is a version of English<sup>6</sup>. However, it may also suggest from the students' part a desire for symbolic association with the highly-valued "global" English-speaking community, as we shall see in the next section.

The discrepancy between such a discourse of similarity and students' actual treatment of the two languages is striking. All students immediately recognized that I was speaking Pijin, not English, and commented upon this fact. Furthermore, if the two languages were not treated as distinct, it would not matter whether a student spoke English or Pijin in the classroom – while, as a matter of fact, it strongly did<sup>7</sup>. Neither is English considered a perfect version of Pijin, or Pijin "simple" English, as this discourse may suggest. As explained by a high school student, simple English is used exclusively in interactions with expatriates and by teachers at primary and secondary school. When I was

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who had never heard Bislama spoken in Honiara and happened to have the unusual occasion to hear a speech in Bislama during a funeral (an event over which I will go back later in this chapter), were similarly struck by its unexpected closeness to Solomon Pijin.

<sup>6</sup> An "old-school" expatriate, headmaster of a prestigious strictly English-speaking private school, voiced for example in a very similar way the idea that Pijin, *by opposition to* Bislama and Tok Pisin which would be more "evolved" languages, was basically broken English.

<sup>7</sup> With regard to Tok Pisin, Smith (2002:205-206) also notes that, despite notable convergence between Tok Pisin and English at the lexical level, speakers are still clearly aware of the distinctiveness of the two languages. This was in particular evidenced by occasional self-correction (repetition of a word/phrase in the other language, which was deemed more appropriate), a phenomenon that I also observed in Honiara.

not fluent in Pijin yet, several Solomon friends suggested to me to address them in a mix of “simple English” and Pijin; they thus clearly conceived them as distinct codes.

### *How “broken” is Pijin?*

Indeed, it was taken for granted that English-speaking people, like Solomon Islanders who live in rural areas, need to *learn* Pijin before they can speak it correctly - and for having reached relative fluency within two months, I was actually considered a fast learner. This widely acknowledged fact directly clashes with the just-as-widespread belief that Pijin is a “broken” language. For a huge majority of Solomon students, that “*Pijin is broken English*” is mere commonsense. Over one third of the interviewees mentioned it spontaneously in relation to other topics, presenting it as a “fact”. Most others agreed with it when I asked for their opinion on this phrase. However, all were visibly caught off their guard when I asked them to explain what this actually means.

The expression was interpreted in a variety of ways, but one general idea underlies all interpretations: Pijin is broken because it does not follow English standards. The point of reference is consistently English, as the only language formally studied – and following the premise that Pijin is a version of English:

20. “*Hem wanfala version blo English nao bat hem broken wan.*” (Mark)

All differences from the reference language are therefore assessed as *deviations*. Furthermore, except for phonology (in which vernaculars are deemed to interfere with the “right” pronunciation), these deviations are generally perceived as *random*. But let us first examine how the students describe what is broken in Pijin in their view.

Firstly, English phrases would be shortened, simplified: The term “shortcut” recurred in students’ descriptions of Pijin. Words as well would be shortened: Due to the interference of vernacular languages, they would not be fully and “properly” pronounced<sup>8</sup>:

21. *“Hao mifala putim, English into short terms. (...) Example ia, ‘tekem kam’: lo English bae hem mas ‘bring it to me’ o kaen samting, bat mifala se ‘tekem kam’.”* (Gabriel)

22. *“The way mifala prononsim nomoa hem maet folom language blo mifala. Mother tongue nao hem distabim lelebet hao mifala save prononsim otta wod. ‘I think’, taem hem kam lo Pijin, just bae mi se ‘ating’: shortcut!”* (James)

23. *“Pijin hem no mas herem stret gud falom English. Sometimes our pronunciation hem out of tune lelebet, if iu komparem wetem English.”* (Kevin)

Secondly, the word order which prevails in English would not be respected:

24. *“Olsem ‘iu go lo wea’, ‘where are you going’: olsem otta opposite, changim round nomoa otta... sentence o kaen type olsem, sort of mixim round nomoa. Hem nao mi se hem broken English!”* (Laura)

25. *“Eni English sentence ia, bae hem mix olobaot nomoa taem iu turnem kam lo Pijin. I mean, oketa wod ia lo English hem stret nomoa, bat lo Pijin hem lelebet diferen.”* (Joan, FG girls)

Finally, English grammatical rules would be given a rough ride when people speak Pijin:

26. *“[Taem iu Pijin] iu no spikim according... iu no spikim stret lo English. Iu enihao. Iu brekem rules, ot grammatical rules, so iu jes spikim enihao.”* (James)

Note that these remarks were made *as if* Solomon Islanders were targeting English when they speak Pijin, whereas, as I already pointed out, it is clearly not the case. These views actually stem from the deep-rooted belief, detailed below, that Pijin was *originally* born from a failed attempt to speak English.

Importantly, it is often assumed that if Pijin does not follow English rules, it follows *no rules at all*: It is then not just “broken English”, it is in itself a “broken language” without grammar. The meaning of the term “grammar”, which originally refers to the codified product of grammarians’ work, is here extended and interpreted, at the expense of

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<sup>8</sup> I am well aware that these remarks cannot be automatically interpreted as meaning that Pijin is broken English. However, I mention them here because several students clearly presented them as such.

Pijin, as denoting the existence of an internal system (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:63)<sup>9</sup>.

At the very least, because students feel that it has no tense system comparable to that of English, Pijin would be said to have no “proper” grammar:

27. “*Hao oketa save talem, hem no garem grammar. Like English hem garem grammar: past tense, past participle an future...*” (Joan, FG girls)

28. “*Pijin, hem no garem eni proper grammar, tenses, o kaen olsem.*” (Alison)

But, not infrequently, students infer straight that Pijin has no structure at all, i.e. no conventions and no internal system:

29. “*Hem broken English bikos, I think, hem no garem kaen olsem subject-verb-argument, kaen olsem. Hem olobaot nomoa. ... Sometimes ot garem, insaed lo wanfala sentence, bat... hem no that structure olsem lo English wod, wea wanfala kam first, olsem next... olsem hem stei olobaot insaed lo sentence nomoa.*” (Mark)

30. “*The reason why Pijin hemi called broken English, hem bikos Pijin hem hasn’t got a rule. Iu just spik nomoa, iu just talem go samting, spik nomoa. No eni rule fo governim, eni conventions fo guidim nao hao fo spikim Pijin.*” (Lionel)

31. “*Hem no garem kaen grammar, rule... rule fo iu lanem. Olsem English ia hem garem rule, certain rule fo iu lanem lo English. Pijin, nomoa: hem olobaot wan.* (laugh)” (Franklin)

The contradiction is noteworthy: On the one hand, following the colonial view that one cannot make mistakes in Pijin since it is “just broken English”, students assumed that Pijin would be easy to learn for foreigners; on the other hand, they acknowledged, based on their own academic experience, that one needs “rules” to be able to learn a foreign language, and since Pijin assumingly do not have any, then it must be very hard to learn. On a few occasions, I could not resist teasing students who claimed that Pijin had no rules by asking them how they thought I had been able to learn so quickly a language with no conventions. My remark left them nonplused and, in their defence, they resorted to the argument that they had not studied linguistics. This is one of such exchanges:

32. “So hao nao mi save lanem Pijin?

L: ... *That’s a... That’s a, I mean, reality.*

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<sup>9</sup> Noticeably, in line with the pre-mentioned Western bias in favour of literacy to assess the nature of a language, the absence of standardized orthography in Pijin (in contrast to English) seems to be a factor which reinforces the idea that there are no grammatical rules in Pijin.

*That's the reason mifala no garem idea tu bikos mi no stadi language tu!*  
*S: Pijin mifala save.. Bat mifala no garem clue saed lo grammar o olsem, mifala just spik nomoa."*

The idea that Pijin has no rules is in fact a set discourse, which collapses as soon as one closely examines it. Indeed, a number of students (such as Mark, quoted above) somehow felt that they were saying something excessive, and several interviewees started their explanation with a cautious "people say" - before endorsing themselves the opinion.

More generally, "Pijin is broken English" is a stock-phrase directly inherited from colonial ideology: Among students, it often has an ill-defined and largely contradictory content. As a matter of fact, students generally do not know when, where and from whom they learnt this idea (some vaguely mentioned a workmate, a teacher, a friend). It is simply deemed common knowledge. As suggested by the example of the schoolgirl who wrote "broken language" instead of Pijin, it may well become fixed in Solomon people's minds through socialization from early childhood.

#### *A perceived corollary: the problem of interference*

This colonial prejudice has an important corollary: as "broken English", Pijin is deemed responsible for the difficulties in acquiring proficiency in Standard English, because it creates "interference". Among students, this idea was expressed through the stock-phrase "*Pijin spoelem English*". This problem is believed to exist for all Pijin speakers who attempt to learn English after, or along with, Pijin. But, in particular, learning *formally* Pijin before English - even simply learning to write and read it as a subject - is assumed to jeopardize children's capacity to become proficient in English. This belief, along with that of the "inborn" nature of Pijin, largely accounts for the overwhelming opposition of Solomon students to the concept of schooling in Pijin. For some, the risk was to *extend* the interference problem perceived in the oral domain to the written one:

33. *"Sapos ot skul olsem, bae hem had tumas, bae ot speak English bae hem rong. Totally rong. Bikos Pijin hem broken English."* (Martin, Suva)

34. *"The more oketa learnim Pijin, the more oketa laek trae spikim Pijin, the more likely oketa bae raetim along Pijin tu, taem otta raetim English."* (Gabriel)

This concern was so pervasive that, often, when I asked about the *usefulness* of acquiring literacy in Pijin, answers tended to immediately move to the risks that it entailed, as these two quotes illustrate:

35. "So pipol shud no lanem fo raetim Pijin? Wae nao hem no useful?  
*Bikos.. sapos ot lanem Pijin olsem, ot lanem gogo an ot save gud olsem bat.. I think bae hem disturbim nao taem ot kam fo lanem English nao."* (Mark)

36. *"Hem no rili necessary... Hem useful, bat hem gogo confusim brain moa..."* (Wendy, FG)

The "problem" of interference was spontaneously mentioned by a large number of students to account for Solomon Islanders' lack of fluency in English. It was especially (but by no means exclusively) emphasized by students in Suva, who are faced more often with the obligation to speak English and view Pijin as a major obstacle in their endeavour:

37. *"Pijin hem bekam a barrier tu, taem iu spikim English, bikos hem broken, ia? Hem broken English, so sometimes ot English, ot sentence ot grammatical error happen. Most student, including mi, bae mifala findim problem. Mifala trae fo interact moa wetem English, bat mifala Pijin an sort of... causim barrier."* (Martin, Suva)

38. *"Pijin nao hem influencim oketa fo ot save spikim nao English olsem. Fo spikim gud olsem, ia? Bikos... Pijin hem nao hem lelebet broken. Hem nao hem mekem oketa no save spikim gud nao, English ia. (...) Bikos samfala students tu talem mi, olsem, ot save go lo taon, olsem, ot save findim hard time fo ot save askem otta things ia lo otta shops, ia? Lo English. So bae otta forcim lo oketa: hu nao fo talem, o hu nao fo askem olsem. So means that... Pijin naia hem affectim oketa fo speak English olsem."* (Joyce, Suva)

Yet, if I straightforwardly asked whether it was possible to speak both Pijin and English fluently, students unanimously agreed, without any hesitation:

39. "So iu tingse hem had fo save gud Pijin an gud English?  
*Hem isi nomoa... isi nomoa!"* (June)

They have indeed several examples of such double competence around them at the USP SI Campus, and personally aspire to it if they have not reached it yet.

The discrepancy between students' emphasis on interference, as making it impossible to fully master English if one learns Pijin first, and their own experience of actual bilingualism is quite noteworthy. The discourse on interference clearly stems from the colonial ideology which presents Pijin as a second-best version of English: In this view, people are expected to *move* from one to the other (i.e. from "broken English" to "proper" English) as they become educated, rather than becoming bilingual. It entails that people *should not*, rather than *cannot*, master equally both languages.

Interference itself is a common linguistic phenomenon: When a speaker of a language A learns a language B at a later age, he/she is likely to resort to the phonological and syntactic system of his/her mother tongue as a guideline, at least at the beginning of the learning process of the second language<sup>10</sup>. This is for example the case for Solomon Islanders who learnt Pijin after their vernacular, and Honiarans often make skilful use of slight phonological differences to assess the ethno-linguistic origin of their interlocutors (Jourdan 1985; 2007a:37); yet, this is not perceived as impairing their capacity to learn Pijin. Interference may also occur between two languages without assuming any *hierarchical* relations between them, even if they are closely related (e.g. in Europe between Italian and Spanish). This seems to be the case between Solomon vernaculars (e.g. an Are'Are speaker who moves to North Malaita as a young adult and learns the To'abaita language); however, again, this is never pointed out *as* interference. In Honiara this idea, expressed through the highly negative term "*spoelem*", seems to be reserved to Pijin in relation to English, and is laden with assumptions of hierarchy. It was presented by my

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<sup>10</sup> As Smith puts it (2002:200), "*that one's first language influences the production of second language forms is uncontroversial*". There is a rich literature in the fields of second language acquisition and socio-psycho-linguistics on the phenomenon of linguistic "interference", but it is clearly beyond the scope of this dissertation to present and discuss it. The point I wish to make here is simply that it is a widespread phenomenon, and that it is not *necessarily* deemed to jeopardize effective communication.



informants as *directly* related to the broken nature of Pijin, which, because it is dangerously close to English, would “disturb” its proper acquisition:

40. “Pijin ia hem kaen type... broken English. So taem hem kam fo... English olsem, bae hem lelebet had nao fo iusim raet English. Bikos Pijin hem bara spoelem tumas nao! So taem man English go, bara brekbrek type, ia! (laugh)” (Laura, Suva)

41. “Solomon Islanders, like ot understandim English fluent, olsem perfectly. Bat then Pijin tu sometimes hem save interfere, so taem ot spikim hem lelebet... Bikos Pijin hem broken English tu so bae hem lelebet disturb kam insaed. (laugh) Sometimes ot bae iusim olsem, like, enikaen phrases blo Pijin...” (Janet)

While interference between languages is in itself an objective phenomenon, *perceptions* of this phenomenon are highly ideological in nature, and can powerfully affect people’s linguistic behaviours. For example, risks of interference may be emphasized in colonial situations, even between totally unrelated languages such as French and vernacular languages in New-Caledonia, in a way which deters parents from teaching their vernacular to their children and fosters language shift in favour of the colonial language (Barnèche 2004:53). Conversely, it can be used as an argument to protest against the early learning of the “colonial” language in situations of linguistic resistance, such as in Quebec where the maintenance of French is deemed threatened by the pervasive presence of English. It thus seems to be given social emphasis when *unequal* relationships (either endorsed or resisted) are assumed between languages.

In order to understand the pervasiveness of the idea of interference among students, Bourdieu’s notion of “*habitus*” (1977, 1991) may be useful. The *habitus* can be defined as an external world of cultural assumptions in which people are socialized and which becomes unconsciously internalized, so that it creates dispositions to think, perceive and act in a certain way (1977:83). It durably shapes the view of one’s world, and of one’s possibilities within it – albeit without totally determining them, as these assumptions can be partly reinterpreted and transformed. Self-denigration of their language – and more broadly

of their culture, as will be discussed later - remains part of Solomon students' *habitus*; it includes not only the conviction that Pijin is a language of little worth, but also that it has a major detrimental effect on the acquisition of English, a more "important" language. Solomon students thus internalize limits in the level of proficiency in English that they can hope for, and have to deal with these imagined limits when they use this language in the classroom and with foreigners. But, like the idea that Pijin is "broken", the notion of interference has never been formally learnt by students; rather, they have been predisposed to think in this way through routine suggesting from adults, who transmitted this belief without even consciously aiming at teaching it (1991:51). It is its appearance of obviousness, and the power of repetition, which give its force to ideology and transforms it, in people's perceptions, into "mere commonsense" (also Calvet 1979:131).

Interestingly, though, a few students seemed to be aware of the ideological and political weight of the assumption of interference. As in the previous discussion of the "broken English" prejudice, some interviewees first cautiously distanced themselves from it - before, often, endorsing the opinion themselves. For example:

42. "Olsem lo Solomon, Pijin, samfala otta lukim hem... hem spoelem nao English.  
Samfala lukim olsem, bat iu agri o nomoa?  
Mi agri! (laugh)" (Jeffrey, Suva)

This verbal precaution hints at the (nascent) existence of counter-discourses in Solomon Islands on the nature of Pijin – counter-discourses of which these students are aware, but which to date largely fail to convince them. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1992:29), drawing on Bourdieu (1977), stated: "*The moment that any set of values, meanings, and material forms comes to be explicitly negotiable, its hegemony is threatened; at that moment it becomes the subject of ideology or counter-ideology.*" One may argue that, among at least *some* students, the hegemonic position of the colonial prejudices on Pijin has been eroded:

They are no longer “things that go without saying” but are presented as opinions, which could potentially be subjected to debate. Indeed, as we shall see later, a small minority of USP students *did* hold divergent views on Pijin, which sparked off animated debates during double interviews and focus groups.

*Pijin in a diachronic perspective: from “broken English” to “broken Pijin”*

Since its birth, Pijin has been a rapidly changing language (e.g. Jourdan and Keesing 1997). Now that the students’ general reasoning has been unfolded (i.e. Pijin as a version of English, thus broken English, thus creating interference), we shall examine how they view such evolution in relation to the “broken” nature of Pijin.

*Pijin as a “failed” offspring of English*

It is first interesting to have a brief look at what students know, or imagine, about the historical origins of Pijin. Many knew very little – about a third of my respondents frankly acknowledged it. Those who had an idea about it asserted that Pijin was born when their ancestors attempted to communicate with British people during the colonial period: They tried to pick up English and gave birth *by mistake* to Pijin. Pijin is thus the result of a failed attempt to acquire English, due to the inadequacy of Solomon people; hence the perception that Pijin is a failed version of English. It was originally targeting English, but with time took a trajectory of its own.

43. “*Pijin ia, ot ol pipol blo mifala bifo, taem ot just kam iet, ot findim English had. That’s why broken English hem nao hem kam! (laugh) So Pijin hem derive from, hem rooted from English.*” (Gabriel)

44. “*Somehow otta man otta go waka bifo, taem otta kam bak, otta trae nao fo spikim English. Bat wat otta spikim hem broken English nomoa. Hem nao Pijin.*” (Ruth, FG girls)

45. “*I guess, taem... forfathers blo mifala, otta herem nao taem otta speak English, den because of our accent, like, mifala no speak gud English. Mifala short form nomoa, catem wod ia. So hem nao hao mi belivim Pijin hem kam about.*” (Alison)

Some suggested that British people had voluntarily “shortened” their language, or accepted that Solomon people do so, in order to facilitate communication with them:

46. *“Ating otta white pipol, kam lo Melanesia, den ot laek interact wetem pipol so ot trae fo mekem ia, simplify go daon fo tok wetem pipol blo Melanesia. Local pipol tekem, den modify, modify, modify gogo kasem distaem.”* (Laura)

Two students situated the birth of Pijin as late as World War 2, with the arrival of American soldiers. By contrast, several students knew - for having learnt the history of blackbirding in Form 5 or 6 - that it was created during the plantation period, prior to colonization. However, this did not significantly alter their account of Pijin’s genesis:

47. *“Taem otta kam bak from dea [plantations in Australia and Fiji], otta trae fo imitatim hao otta whiteman toktok. Oketa no save, den wat oketa kam up wetem nao, hem broken English ia.”* (Joan)

I had indeed the occasion to observe that whatever is learnt about Pijin may be *pre-filtered* by the belief that it is broken English, and interpreted in a way which reinforces the prejudice rather than challenging it. During an interview, the respondent did not know anything about the history of Pijin and asked a Solomon friend to help him. This person was acquainted with my research and knew that he should not interfere in the process; he thus gave a very general, and rather neutral, account of Pijin’s history (i.e. it was born to facilitate communication in plantations). The respondent deduced from it that Pijin was born from a failed attempt to speak English and reformulated it in this way. Even the fact of having attended courses in Linguistics sometimes failed to debunk the deep-rooted prejudice. Two students who had taken the Linguistics course that I attended asserted that they had learnt *from the tutor* that Pijin is broken English. Yet, through conversations with this professor, I became certain that he by no means endorsed such opinion and would never voice it in the classroom. This clearly hints at the fact that ideology is at work:

Ideology provides “*an organizing scheme, a master narrative*” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:29) according to which new information is interpreted.

*From “broken English” to “broken Pijin”: perception of the current evolution of Pijin*

Let us come back to the current evolution of Pijin. Students often spontaneously pointed out that Pijin had significantly changed – both in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation – and drawn closer to English<sup>11</sup>.

48. “*Distaem Pijin hem lelebet change, ia? In the sense that mifala mekem close to English.*” (Simon, FG)

To a large extent, they feel that, in contrast to their grand-parents who spoke “real Pijin” (a concept discussed below), they now speak a mixture of Pijin and English.

Does such change “rectify” Pijin or makes it even more “broken”? On the one hand, this evolution is perceived, in the long term, as getting closer to the standard norm, English. This is an occurrence in which it was overtly, though incidentally, presented as such:

49. “*I think, in terms of using Pijin as the national language, we need to use the old version of Pijin. Because, I believe, if we were starting to adopt the new version, it would rather become English than Pijin. Instead of being Pijin. Like, getting more perfect, and perfect, and then very much perfect.*” (Nelson)

On the other hand, this change is also perceived as making the language that they speak *more* broken: From “pure Pijin”, it becomes “broken Pijin-English”. In this sense, “real” Pijin appears as a concurrent norm from which the version of Pijin spoken by the youth deviates. Indeed, about a quarter of my interviewees interpreted the phrase “Pijin is broken English” as referring mainly to the fact that it had become mixed with English, and *thus* broken English – as a relatively recent, and increasing, phenomenon:

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<sup>11</sup> Linguistic change in Pijin is a marked phenomenon that I could notice myself in Honiara. Compared to my pre-fieldwork readings (e.g. from the US Peace Corps), I observed for example that young people frequently used ‘*if*’ instead of ‘*sapos*’, ‘*itim*’ rather than ‘*kaekae*’, and ‘*after*’ rather than ‘*behaen*’. Indeed, a student remarked that expatriates generally tend to use “old” Pijin: They cannot keep up the pace.

50. “*Distaem Pijin hem mixed wetem English, that’s why pipol se ‘broken English’.*” (Sandra)

51. “*Tude, otta pikinini ot mixim English wetem Pijin. Hem no rili Pijin. (...) Distaem nao hem broken, broken Pijin ia, broken English.*” (Lydia)

While the idea that young people no longer acquire the “pure” language, but replace it with a decayed “mixed” code, is common in many countries<sup>12</sup>, this concern is often particularly marked in post-colonial contexts where cultural revival movements and language revitalization efforts take place (Riley 2007:70). This perception is rooted in an ideology of “linguistic purism”, which grants higher legitimacy to “pure” codes and insists on correctness, strict separation between languages and avoidance of foreign loans (Makihara 2007:50). This ideology – arguably of European influence<sup>13</sup> – not only disparages Creole languages as “bastard” languages, as noted in Chapter 1, but also condemns creolized language varieties such as urban mixed codes, which are viewed as corrupted by comparison with their “parent” language (Swigart 1994; Spitulnik 1998). Students’ ambivalent attitudes toward the “mixed” type of Pijin that they speak will be further explored in Chapter 5; for now, I simply wish to highlight that this ideology is present in their discourses, *despite the fact that* the “parent” language is itself a Creole, already devalued as “mixed” and “broken”. This significantly complicates their account of Pijin’s evolution.

Implicitly - and at times explicitly – the idea of “pure” Pijin supposes the existence of an original version of Pijin which was *not* broken English. One student even suggested

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<sup>12</sup> This conception may be seen as part of a general theory of universal decay, which has been durably influential in European thought (see Jones 1961: chapter 2).

<sup>13</sup> This point has been argued by Riley (2007), Makihara (2004, 2007), Woolard and Schieffelin (1994), Swigart (1994), Meeuwis and Blommaert (1998), among others. This does not mean that linguistic purism is *exclusively* a European ideology (see e.g. the Tewa case in Kroskrity 2000), but in many colonial and post-colonial contexts (including, arguably, Solomon Islands), this ideology, which has been promoted by Christian associations and political elites trained in European universities, i.e. directly influenced by Western thought, did not seem to be as salient in the local culture as it was in Europe.

that Pijin existed *before* English came in at all, assumingly imported wholesale from PNG, then got mixed with English and became Pijin-English - i.e. Solomon Pijin:

52. *"Bifoa, pipol se desfala Pijin blo New Guinea otta iusim, otta mainly iusim lo Solomon. Bat then English hem stat fo introduce lelebet kam, den join tufala nao, an tufala olsem combine, an tufala form nao desfala Pijin blo Solomon. So Pijin ia, hem Pijin English."* (Kate)

While this may appear as a surprising reading of history, it should be pointed out that many students *implicitly* suggested that Pijin pre-existed the arrival of English and became mixed with it to give rise to Solomon "Pijin-English". For example:

53. *"Taem otta Labour trade ia, otta go waka lo Fiji, olsem taem otta laek fo tok lo English, samfala Pijin kam insaed, otta jes kam out nao hem Pijin-English ia."* (Joan, FG girls)

If Solomon Pijin is a mixture of English and real Pijin, what is "real Pijin" and where does it originate from? Only a small minority of interviewees suggested that "old" Pijin included numerous words from vernacular languages. Among many of my respondents, there seemed to be an idea of past "pure" Pijin which would have been influenced neither by English, nor by vernaculars – an idealized view which would make Solomon Pijin better conform the tenets of the "purist" ideology:

54. *"Pure Pijin hem datwan hem kam from taem hem originated. Hem stretwan nomoa."* (Allan)

55. *"Real Pijin, olsem full Pijin nao, olsem no langgus moa o no mixmix. No mix moa wetem English o langgus, full time Pijin nomoa."* (June)

56. *"Bifoa ot still spikim... Pijin seleva nomoa nao."* (David)

These students had, however, great difficulties in defining what this "pure" Pijin, previously spoken in Solomon Islands, sounded like and where it came from. Most often, it was likened to Tok Pisin (secondarily to Bislama, less familiar to Solomon students). Solomon Pijin would then have deviated from this original norm by integrating more and more English words, and thus became an anglicized version of the Melanesian pidgins.

57. *"Lo PNG hem pure wan, Pijin ot save spikim. Otta no mix wetem English."* (Daniel)

58. *“Desfala real Pijin, hem nao olsem oketa lanem lo New Guinea. That’s the real Pijin. Blo mifala lo Solomon naia, hem English-Pijin, ia, hem haf. If iu herem gud lo Pijin ia, bae iu herem lo English wod, hem mix wetem Pijin ia. So hem broken Pijin-English.”* (Kate)

59. *“Bislama and PNG tufala quite similar. For Solomon Islands hem more like an English one... I would say hem English version blo tufala pidgin!”* (William)

It should be noted that Pijin, in contrast to Bislama and Tok Pisin, has a significant handicap: its name. Dangerously close to the colonial label “Pidgin-English” (which is still sometimes used interchangeably for it), this name suggests - and is at times explicitly taken to *prove* - that Solomon Pijin is bastardized whereas the other two are “real” languages<sup>14</sup>:

60. *“In the PNG they call it Tok Pisin. The Vanuatu one they call it Bislama. But the Solomon one they call it Pijin-English, because it is kind of a mixture of English with our own words.”* (Nelson)

Solomon Pijin is thus less “pure” than other Melanesian pidgins; let us move now to the national frame of reference. According to students, a relatively “pure” version of Pijin can be found *within* Solomon Islands among old people, in the Bible and on SIBC (though many informants stressed that SIBC Pijin also contains numerous English words<sup>15</sup>):

61. *“Otta lo SIBC, otta very old Pijin ot save iusim: ‘wanem’, ‘plande’, ‘melewan’... (the other participants repeat the words in chorus in a feigned bored tone)  
SIBC Pijin ia, hem quite here olsem rili Pijin blo Solomons.”* (Gabriel, FG)

Noticeably, my informants described a situation of increasing linguistic gap between young people and old people, who speak “old” Pijin (different in vocabulary, and to a lesser extent in phonology). In many ways, “real” Pijin came to be discursively treated as a *foreign*, indeed exotic, language. This telling exchange, which took place during a double interview, illustrates this perception:

<sup>14</sup> This fact certainly contributes to the tendency, mentioned earlier, to emphasize Pijin’s similarity with English and its difference from other Melanesian pidgins - against actual linguistic facts.

<sup>15</sup> David stated for example: *“If iu herem gud, if hem ridim, olsem hem English nomoa tu, ia! Ot shud kolem Pijin-English, Pijin news ia, bikos ot mix up.”* (“If you listen well when he reads, it’s just like English. They should call it Pijin-English, what they use in these Pijin news, because they mix it up.”) Pijin news on SIBC radio follow news in English; it constitutes a Pijin version *translated* from English, and arguably *calqued* on English (see extract in Appendix). Indeed, this variety of Pijin (which is largely used by USP tutors who give class in Pijin based on notes in English, as noted in Chapter 3), resembles in many ways the one spoken by expatriates when they have not reached fluency yet.



62. “B: *Olsem, wanfala example nao lo Pijin, otta kolem... olsem ot kolem ‘sicra’* (he pronounces it with difficulty, like a word from a non-mastered language). *Bat distaem had tumas fo iu herem ot iusim distaem. ‘Sea’ stret nomoa bae ot iusim.*  
 Iu laf! Joyce, wae nao iu laf?  
 J: *Mi jes herem wod ia, ‘sicra’...*”

Students also frequently stressed that they had very limited competence in “old” Pijin:

63. “*I think, if [lo SIBC] ot iusim desfala Pijin bifo, most mifala distaem bae no getem gud.*”  
 (Simon, FG)

64. “*Mifala new generation distaem, mifala no save old Pijin language. Like, my grand-parents, ot nao save old language. (...) If mi communicate wetem somebody from older age, taem hem spikim Pijin blo hem, bae mi findim had lelebet fo understandim gud. Mind blo mi hem trae fo working out, ia? (...) Bae mi understandim, bat had fo mi spikim bak lo old language. I’m not fluent, hao fo spikim.*” (Alison)

It is noteworthy that, when the evolution of Pijin is discussed, its “broken” origins tend to be disregarded and a concept of “pure” Pijin independent from English prevails. As a matter of fact, most interviewees had *both* the perception that Pijin was born as broken English, and that it was becoming increasingly broken English as it integrated more English vocabulary and syntactic features; they resorted *alternatively* to these two perspectives. However, one respondent happened to be directly confronted in his speech to the paradox that arises when both views are combined:

65. “*Ol kind ia, hem rili... barava stret Pijin, datwan ot kolem broken English. Bat distaem hem sort of like... English nomoa. Hem go English. Bat the thing is that kind English hem stat fo gogo olsem ia... barava broken English nao.*” (Martin)

The future evolution of Pijin is indeed a highly complex, open-ended issue. It will be further discussed in Chapter 5, in which students’ personal predictions will be presented.

#### *A minority position: Pijin as a full-fledged language*

The perception presented above – i.e. depicting Pijin as a bastardized version of English, interfering with its proper acquisition – was that of a large majority of my informants. However, a few divergent opinions stood out, giving rise to keen (and sometimes covertly tense) debates during double interviews and focus groups.

Two students in particular, Joseph (in Suva) and David (in Honiara) – and it is worth noting that they had both learnt Pijin as a second language at primary school – conceived of Pijin as a full-fledged language, not less worthy than English. They rejected the idea that it might be “just broken English”: In their view, Pijin was a distinct language, the national language of Solomon Islanders, and it should be officially recognized as such. Consistently with this view, they agreed with the concept of education in Pijin. Joseph even spontaneously advanced it:

66. *“Mi tingim if Government hemi... mekem Pijin olsem... pasem fo hemi language fo iusim lo Solomon Islands, olsem lo Parliament an lo education... If hem mekem hem olsem official language lo Solomon Islands, mi ting hem gud, bikos... I mean, ot students ot iusim bae ot save learn effectively.”*

Keesing noted in 1990 that a minority of Solomon Islanders, “imbued with ideologies of cultural nationalism and liberation from colonialism” (1990:163), supported the legitimization of Pijin in public spheres. This position, epitomized among my respondents by Joseph<sup>16</sup>, will be referred to as the “nationalist” stance on Pijin throughout the rest of the thesis. At this point, I shall however refrain from discussing its ideological and political content, and focus strictly on its linguistic aspect.

From David’s and Joseph’s perspective, since Pijin is a distinct language, it has no particular reason to interfere in the acquisition of English. On the contrary, full mastery of Pijin was felt as a necessary condition to learn any foreign language, including English<sup>17</sup>.

67. *“[Students lo Suva] otta findim had time, ya. Bat hemi no samting to do with Pijin nomoa, hem samting to do with eni new language iumi new lo hem.”* (Joseph)

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<sup>16</sup> David shared with Joseph many attitudes, but not all political implications of the nationalist position. His case is peculiar indeed, because he grew up unaware of the colonial prejudices against Pijin (the stock-phrases “*Pijin is broken English*” and “*Pijin spoelem English*” were, surprisingly, totally unfamiliar to him). He disagreed with them because they did not match his personal experience of Pijin, and not (as Joseph did) to make a political point sustained by the nationalist ideologies to which Keesing refers.

<sup>17</sup> Note that this view is supported by a whole literature on bilingualism (see in particular Cummins 1978; Harley, Cummins, Swain and Allen 1990; Thomas 1992).

68. *"Hem lelebet had fo iu save lo English taem iu no save gud nao lo otta language blo iu, iu iusim."* (David)

In their view, Pijin was "broken English" *exclusively* when people carelessly mixed Pijin and English – a practice that they implicitly condemned:

69. *"Mi no tingim bae hem spoelem... Tufala diferen, ia. (...) Hem should not broken English, ia. Bikos hem diferen... diferen from English. I think, broken English naia iu minim taem iu mixim Pijin wetem English. Hem naia: taem iu mixim nao ot kolem broken. Bat hem should not broken English, ia."* (David)

Finally, they tended to emphasize the fact that Pijin was partly born from Solomon vernacular languages, and not exclusively from English:

70. *"Otta borom samfala wod from English, den samfala wod from langgus blo oketa. Taem ot borom tufala language ia together, hem formim nao Pijin."* (Joseph)

To be fair, it should be noted that a few other students, without adopting a fully nationalist position, also had more nuanced views on the nature of Pijin. Some mentioned the contribution of local languages to Pijin's genesis, and the problem of interference was occasionally perceived as related not to the nature of Pijin, but to the Solomon social environment:

71. *"Hem combination of... other languages insaed lo country wetem English."* (Andrew)

72. *"If iu stei lo environment blo evri Englishman, bae iu save flow. Bat fo stage blo Solo, bae hem no... bae Pijin affectim English nao."* (Joan, FG girls)

In Joseph's and David's reasoning, the conviction that Pijin is a full-fledged language was clearly paired with a concern for preserving "real" Pijin. However, again, they were not the only ones who had such a concern: Several other informants were sincerely worried that "real" Pijin might "get lost" and claimed that solutions should be sought to counter this trend:

73. *"Pijin bifo mi laekem. Bikos hem... hem kam from wea hem stat, ia. Bat hem had fo iumi holem... otta wordings blo hem. Kos as time hemi go, changes hem mas happen insaed. So mi no save hao nao fo... one way fo iumi trae fo maintaining datfala Pijin, hem nao iumi... mas lukaotem (the others laugh). Kos mi laekem otta wordings bifo, hem here... respectable, ia."* (Simon, FG)

74. "Mi duim readings, ia, bikos mi garew interest fo kaen olsem. So that's... hem nao hao mi getem idea dat Pijin hem stat fo... gogogo lus naia. Original Pijin hem shud no olsem, ia? An mi tingse we should go back moa, refining moa. Fo real Pijin. Hem nao originality hem grow wetem iumi an iumi stei wetem tu." (Lionel)

### *Affection toward Pijin: defending a "broken" language*

These last points bring us back to the complexities of many students' discourse on Pijin. A significant number of my informants (about one third) did have, like Joseph and David, "purist" concerns for preserving Pijin; they had sincere affection for this language, but *at the same time* stuck to the prejudice that it is "broken English". As "flawed" as it may be, Pijin was their language – their first language or, more often, a second language which had become appropriated to the extent that it was treated as a mother tongue.

In several cases, this inherited prejudice directly clashed with the rest of their discourse on Pijin. For example, Lionel viewed Pijin as a local language which should be preserved from extinction (he did use this term himself); he vigorously defended the idea that "real" Pijin was part of Solomons cultural heritage and national identity - not to say *kastom* - and should be protected as such. Nonetheless, he also asserted that Pijin had no structure and, because he did not know anything about the history of Pijin, he had no other option but accepting the version offered by the other interviewee, who presented Pijin as a failed version of English.

The case of William was even more telling. In many ways, he adopted a nationalist discourse admittedly inspired by his travels in European countries: He conceived of Pijin as a language of its own, which was a precious part of his Solomon identity, and even presented Pijin as a fully Melanesian creation, born in plantations to allow inter-communication between Solomon Islanders from different '*langgus*'. Yet, in the course of the interview he mentioned several times that Pijin was broken English. When I asked him

in which way it was broken, since he had stressed that Pijin had its own grammatical structure, he ended up explaining that it was broken because Pijin spelling did not follow English orthography:

75. *“Hem broken language in the sense that... pronunciation hem sem, bat hao raetim nao hem different.” (William)*

Laura, in Suva, was similarly caught in her contradictory attitudes when she defended the idea of teaching “proper” Pijin to young children:

76. *“Ot shud lanem lo skul. If olsem, if ot pikinini go lo primary olsem, at least wanfala subject, ot lanem hao fo raetim Pijin. Lanem grammar lo Pijin... if there is any grammar at all! (laugh) I mean, ya, I mean hem shud gareem grammar distaem nao...”*

The issue of Pijin grammar indeed provided fertile ground for the expression of conflicting learnt discourses during the focus group with Honiarian males. When we discussed the possible meanings of “broken English”, I asked whether Pijin had a grammar, and the participants reacted very much as if this were a trick question. After a few seconds of reflection, a participant hesitantly advanced that *all* languages have a grammar, thus Pijin *should* have one too. They had learnt this principle in the Linguistics course, but some effort of thought had been necessary before applying the general rule to Pijin. Indeed, putting together the words “Pijin” and “grammar” or “structure” sounded so odd to their ears that the discussion was constantly interrupted with laughter. This is a nice piece of speech offered by Simon, who was progressively moving away – under his friends’ laughs - from the deep-rooted prejudice through live reflection:

77. *“Mi se... Pijin hem gareem grammar, structure blo hem hem stei, bikos if iu tok Pijin iu agenstim structure blo sentence, bae hem minim diferen samting, o bae hem here diferen nao. Iu tok kam, bae mi no understandim wat nao iu trae fo talem, bikos iu no folom structure blo Pijin o... sentence blo Pijin. Hem minim diferen samting naia! If iu laek toktok lo Pijin nao diswan. Pijin hem gareem grammar! (the others laugh; Simon becomes inflamed) Hem gareem grammar!! Bat eniwan fo... skul lo desfala Pijin fo hem pikim aot. (big laughs from others) Hem nao mi se... Pijin hem mas... Tru, hem kam from English (the others conspicuously approve), bat structure blo hem hem lelebet stei nao. If iu misim structure, iu spikim diferen language naia! (laughs again) Bae iu tok olsem ot man wea mentol nomoa. Kos sentence iu talem aot hem no mek sense. Insaed lo perspective blo Pijin.”*

Such a recurrent discrepancy in attitudes clearly suggests that, for many Solomon students, the idea that “Pijin is just broken English” has become an empty shell, a learnt discourse inherited from the colonial period and assimilated independently of their actual feelings toward Pijin. For students like Simon or William, who recognize Pijin as a language of its own, the meaning of “broken” is reduced to simple *difference* from English – but a difference understood as *deviance*, laying bare the hierarchical relationship that still exists between the two languages. As Calvet pointed out (1979:49-51), denigration of one’s language can be so profoundly interiorized that it remains, at a deeper level, *even as* one attempts to defend that language. It happened for example in France in the nineteenth century, when regional languages were defended *as lower-class dialects* by some of their prominent speakers. Once such denigration, instilled through insidious repetition over several generations, has become part of people’s *habitus*, it can hardly be totally wiped out within a few decades.

*By way of conclusion: the awkward position of Pijin*

To close this discussion on Solomon students’ attitudes toward Pijin, it could be argued that this language is mobilized in two different pairs of opposition, to which USP students *alternatively* resorted - usually at the *expense* of Pijin. By contrast to English, it appears as a local, natural language along with vernaculars (thus not requiring formal learning); by contrast to vernaculars, it is perceived along with English as a foreign introduction without deep “cultural” roots (thus not worth of State-sponsored promotion and protection - a view especially well articulated by students in Suva, and which will be detailed in the last section of this chapter).

The assimilation of Pijin to English was brought to light when informants born in the provinces incidentally related the learning of one language to the acquisition of the other. This was done for example in explaining that people in rural areas do not know English because they never use Pijin, or that themselves learnt Pijin by the time their primary teacher started to use English in the classroom. For example:

78. *“Lo primary skul mi go lo hem, lo hom, mifala langgus nomoa. Teacher nomoa taem iumi interact wetem o taem hemi tok bae hem English. Dastawae mi tingim mi stat tok lo Pijin dattaem.”* (Joseph)

In this other quote, progress in English at the national level is hoped for and expected, based on the evidence of growing use of Pijin among young children in the provinces:

79. *“[Bifoa lo hom] lo primary, pipol no mas laek... toktok Pijin o English. Bat hem stat fo improve, ia? Olsem ot small pikinini, mi herem, ot Pipijin nao.”* (Jackson, FG Suva)

Another glaring occurrence of assimilation was voiced as follows:

80. *“We can make that language our first language, I mean speaking Pijin and English, and we can make our mother tongue our second language”* (Nelson)

While this last remark directly derives from the inherited perception that Pijin is a broken version of English, the first two cases of assimilation may rather be explained by the fact that Pijin (at the oral level) and English (at the written level) are acquired concurrently at primary school in the provinces. Arguably, this simultaneous acquisition of Pijin and English at primary school may well reinforce in children's minds the idea that Pijin is an oral (thus less valuable, due to the Western bias in favour of literacy inherited from the colonial period) version of English.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that the evolution of Pijin – as increasingly mixed with English - was frequently related in students’ speech to a parallel evolution of vernaculars – as increasingly mixed with Pijin - in the provinces<sup>18</sup>. For example:

81. *“Pijin hem change, bikos hem lelebet mix wetem English. Hao mi findim naia. Olsem lo langgus tu, langgus blo mifala, hem change lelebet tu distaem... Hem mix up, hem mix wetem Pijin, an even samfala English wod.”* (David)

In this sense, Pijin and vernaculars are both viewed as losing ground - respectively to English and to Pijin - and are thus similarly, albeit at different levels, perceived as endangered local languages. Pijin and vernaculars are all considered as “natural” languages for Solomon Islanders, and this perception induces the potentially dangerous belief that they do not need to be formally learnt – dangerous in the sense that it makes the language especially vulnerable to processes of language shift. It is a recognized fact that the linguistic repertoire of many Honiarans, in the course of one generation, has largely shifted from vernacular(s)/Pijin to Pijin/English (Jourdan 2007b:94). Pijin is given priority by parents as the language most useful to succeed in town and, even when the parents’ vernacular is learnt, Pijin often becomes the main language for family interactions and is definitely the main one for social interactions out of the household (Jourdan 1985, 2007b:99). This seems to be largely due to a widespread assumption that vernaculars are easy to learn and can be easily learnt later once Pijin (and possibly English) are mastered (Gooberman-Hill 1999:18; Jourdan 1985, 2007a:36).

Deemed natural but not as “authentic” as vernacular languages, Pijin, like many Creole languages, could find itself in a particularly vulnerable position. Although the current situation in Honiara by no means suggests that Pijin may, in the near future, be

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<sup>18</sup> This fact is well recorded and has been studied in particular by Lichtenberk (2003) with regard to the To’abaita language of Malaita.



superseded by English in Solomon Islanders' daily life, Pijin is not *in theory* shielded from such a danger. Enlightening in this regard is the case of St Lucia, a Caribbean island, where a process of language shift from the local Afro-French Creole to a vernacular version of English is currently taking place (Garrett 2005)<sup>19</sup>. Garrett (2005:336-340) observes that the assumption of naturalness of Creole for St Lucians, combined with the belief that it has highly detrimental effects on the proper acquisition of English, leads parents to forbid their children to speak Creole before they master English. Parents thus address their children mainly in English (in fact, in a vernacular version of it, as very few parents are fluent in Standard English). They assume that, once English is mastered, their children will at any rate start to speak Creole as they wish, and are deeply surprised when they notice the children's actual lack of proficiency in their "natural" language - proficiency often limited to swearing. Any language which is perceived so "natural" that formal learning is deemed unnecessary may thus well, under certain social conditions, be at risk of losing ground in its speakers' repertoire.

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<sup>19</sup> See Paugh (2005) on a similar phenomenon in Dominica, West Indies.

#### **4.2. The double status of English and its consequences for USP students**

In contrast to Pijin, English, as a *foreign* language, is viewed as requiring formal learning. As a matter of fact, out of school, Solomon youth have very limited opportunities to practice English: They hear it on a regular basis, in particular on TV, but rarely speak it. Expatriates are relatively few in Honiara and interactions between these expatriates and Solomon Islanders are generally very limited<sup>20</sup>.

82. *"Bat English, taem otta go lo skul o lo ofis nomoa otta save spikim, o fo mitim diferen frens, olsem foreigners. Bat taem kam bak lo lokols olsem, Pijin nao ot save spikim tumas."* (Sandra)

83. *"Hem no language blo mifala, so iumi findim had."* (Jackson, FG Suva)

My research was primarily focused on students' attitudes toward Pijin; their attitudes toward English were not discussed as such, but always in the shadow of discussions about Pijin. The students' explanations for their obstinate use of this language in the classroom, in the last part of this section, will provide particularly enlightening insights on the social meanings attached to English.

##### **4.2.1. English: a formal language, a global language**

English can be said to occupy two distinct domains for Solomon Islanders: the formal one and the intergroup one. We will first describe how USP students conceive the formal use of English in Solomon life.

##### *English as a formal language*

In Honiara, English plays a role of formal language which roughly conforms to the situation of diglossia described by Ferguson (1964): Newspapers are in English, radio news

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<sup>20</sup> The city used to be segregated along "race" lines, and most Solomon Islanders still feel uncomfortable to enter places where expatriates usually gather, such as the Mendana Hotel or the Lime Lounge café. For most of my USP informants, I was their first white friend, and accompanying me to the terrace of the Honiara Hotel for an interview was quite an event.

are given first in English (followed by a Pijin version), TV news are presented in English (although interviews with members of the general public are usually in Pijin). Speeches by Solomon officials during formal events (e.g. festivals) are virtually always delivered in English. However, my discussion will focus on the ways students understand and explain this situation of diglossia, rather than describing it in detail. When I asked why news and official speeches took place in English, whereas Pijin is the usual language in Honiara, a few students tensed up – simply stating that it “had to” be so – or reacted defensively – i.e. replying that it was the kind of questions that outsiders typically asked. These were exceptional reactions, though, and the large majority of students, albeit a bit uncomfortable with it, agreed to discuss the issue. Let us examine the rationales provided by USP students for this situation, starting with the less frequent answers.

A first reason, pointed out by a small number of informants but compelling, is that speeches and news have to be prepared in a written form before being read in public. This is done in English since it is the only language that people learn to read and write. Beyond this, Solomon people are little trained for using Pijin in formal performances, which require a polished oral style, while in English they can model on a large range of examples drawn from their school experience and TV programs<sup>21</sup>.

Another type of justification for privileging English in formal contexts – indeed common in situations of diglossia according to Ferguson (1964:437) - was that English is intrinsically superior to Pijin: Assumingly, it would be a more “beautiful” language, would allow a person to express ideas more precisely, and would be better suited for certain “high-level” topics (e.g. economics or politics). Here are some examples:

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<sup>21</sup> In this regard, it is noteworthy that Solomon students, by virtue of their reluctance to use English during oral presentations in class, actually do practice and develop competences in the “formal” use of Pijin. They acquire in this way command of a genre – formal speech - which is not usually associated with Pijin.

84. *"Pijin ia hem common wan nomoa... Bat fo hem here naes, go moa nao English."* (Ruth, FG)

85. *"Iu tok lo English, mi tingse hem really meaningful, olsem mi iusim right terms, something like that. Bat taem mi iusim Pijin sometimes hem no minim samting mi trae fo talem."* (Annie - though Pijin 1<sup>st</sup> language)

86. *"Bikos staka wod nao lo English. Lo Pijin hem... hem not enough, I mean, bae iumi no save talem wat nao rili... bat lo English ot garem staka wod, bae iumi luk lo dictionary den 'oh, wod ia nao fitim', olsem."* (Lydia)

However, it should be stressed that only a small minority of informants (who generally grew up with Pijin as first language and, for reasons that remain obscure to me, exclusively girls) actually resorted to this type of argument.

The major rationale that students put forward, not surprisingly, was that English is the only official language in Solomon Islands, and is thus expected to be used in "official" situations. Students often spontaneously carried on their reflection and discussed why, in their view, English is still the official language of Solomon Islands. A few informants presented this fact as a legacy from the colonial period that Solomon leaders had never thought of (or seriously attempted) altering<sup>22</sup>:

87. *"Mi ting, mifala tritim hem formal an hem official, bikos datfala type mentality hem passed daon since colonial times, wea ot save iusim mostly lo ot gatherings o big events, o whatever... English nao ot save iusim tumas. Gogo, hem wanfala... idea o social perception wea hem just... kam daon from otta first generations an go kasim mifala."* (James, FG)

88. *"Maybe kaen type... colonizing effect ia stay iet! (laugh) Olsem pipol no get rid iet lo colonizing effect ia. Olsem otta still... se, ia, 'iumi nid fo English, English'. Olsem, 'livim Pijin second language blo iumi, English nao iumi mas iusim olowe lo enikaen samting'."* (Laura, Suva)

89. *"Hem depend lo otta... high level nomoa, lo Parliament. Maybe no eniwan kam up wetem that idea."* (Rosalyn, Suva)

A similar point was made concerning the language of education:

90. *"Hemi to do with... whoever hem luk after mifala lo Solomon bifo. British nao luk after Solomon bifo, an most of education, skuls, ot British tu tekem kam. (...) Den, no eniwan fo changim datwan."* (Simon, FG)

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<sup>22</sup> Noticeably, discussions on the colonial legacy never disclosed any resentment toward the former British colonial administration. Indeed, during my stay in Honiara, I was never given the slightest ground for believing that such feelings prevail among young Solomon Islanders. This observation matches Goberman-Hill's remark on the attachment expressed by Honiarans toward "England" (1999:11).

Due to this “passed down mentality”, Solomon Islanders are said to expect that a formal speech be made in English, not in Pijin:

91. *“Olsem if man hem Pijin, ot bae ting dat man ia hem no... hem informal. Bae ot se ‘wae nao man ia hem Pijin taem occasion olsem happen?’ Olsem hem no fit fo iu spik lo Pijin taem... otta big gatherings happen. English nao pipol expektim olowe.”* (Laura, Suva)

92. *“Like lo Parliament, if otta members lo Parliament ot Pijin, mi save herem samfala man ot save complain ‘wae nao man ia hem Pijin? Hem shud no... hem member blo Parliament, hem shud English’. (...) Pipol expektim otta higher pipol mas English.”* (Rosalyn, Suva)

93. *“Maybe someone who are high-rank, someone special like a Minister, maybe he has to speak in English fo pipol regardim ‘oh, bigman ia’. Expectations lo hem, expectations blo pipol lo audience lo hia: hem mas spik lo English.”* (Lionel)

Two remarks are in order. Firstly, students never included themselves directly among the people who “expect” English in formal situations - although other utterances revealed that they often shared this expectation and did not spontaneously perceive the diglossic practice as problematic. This suggests that it would have been felt embarrassing to apply to oneself an “inherited” mentality. Indeed, the students who were most willing to discuss the formal use of English were those who were most critical of it, had the attitudes most favourable to Pijin and defended its (limited) introduction in education.

Secondly, such expectations from the audience were generally presented as related to the social status - acquired or *desired* - of the speaker. Speakers do not passively conform to the audience’s wishes: They also use to their advantage the fact that certain values are attached to the use of English. Several informants suggested that people make their address in English in order to give weight to what they say - to make their speech sound more official, more respectable or more professional. Discussing this issue generated discomfort among many students, and they tended to joke about it rather than stating it straight out. For example:

94. *“Taem otta Black pipol otta English... mi no save tu, ot laek show off nomoa! (laughs) I mean, mi jes fani olsem... bat hem tru, ia.”* (Laura, Suva)

Noticeably, Joseph (also from Suva), who adopted a fully nationalist position with regard to Pijin, was the only informant who mentioned frankly, without jokes or circumlocutions, that using English *imparts* social status:

95. *"English hem go wetem pipol wetem status, ia. Like if, let's say, if mi graduate lo university bae mi go bak, taem mi wetem ot pipol lo Solomon Islands bae mi laek spikim nao English. (...) Pipol bae comment olsem: 'Iu man ia iu kam bak, English nao'. Bikos lo Solomon Islands, if man ia hem save English tumas, bae otta lelebet... lelebet surprised lo hem, ia."*

The relationship between social status and language use (a theme further explored in Chapter 5) was also mentioned by a couple of students who claimed that some highly-educated, upper-class people are reluctant to speak Pijin, even with Solomon Islanders, because this would entail "taking oneself down" to the level of their fellow nationals:

96. *"Professor hem speak English olowe, hem must be... over-academic. He might be associated with pipol wea no normally spikim Pijin, o hem must associated wetem otta pipol wea otta high-rank lo level lo university. Pipol wea hem highly qualified, bae iu save lukim bae oketa no normally come down lo level where... oketa kind middle-class o lower-class level lo saed lo iusim type of language olsem ia."* (William)

97. *"If Solomon Islanders ot kam bak from short time nomoa [lo overseas], ot laek fo fancy tumas! (laugh) Laek English!"* (Janet)

Both remarks were made by members of the urban upper-middle-class, thus in a relatively comfortable position to discuss the issue. Janet's quote is clearly sarcastic: She suggested that this is most likely to happen among people who had limited occasions to travel abroad but want to capitalize on the status that overseas trips confer – i.e. people who aspire to, rather than already possess, middle-class status.

They were exceptions, though. Generally speaking, it is only when the barriers to the use of English in the classroom were discussed that the social status attached to this language - and the ambivalent feelings that this association generates - was clearly brought to the fore. But let us consider first the aspect of English which was *spontaneously* emphasized by students: its international scope.

### *English as an international language*

Discussing the global aspect of English was definitely more comfortable for my informants. They recurrently stressed that it is a language spoken by most Western people and that its mastery allows one to travel, study, work and establish friendships abroad:

98. *"This is the key to go to every place around the world."* (Steven)

99. *"As long as iu go explore overseas places, that's the language iu bae iusim nao."* (Lionel)

100. *"English nao hem important, official language: if iu go out in outside world, iu save mitim diferen pipol, they never speak Pijin, they speak English."* (Sandra)<sup>23</sup>

101. *"English hem wanfala language evri pipol iusim... medium of communication, lo desfala globalization an ot things olsem ia."* (Mark)

102. *"You see, you live in a world where everything is English-orientated."* (Alison)

It should be noted that the dominance of English at the global level was presented as *total*. Other languages, such as French or Spanish, which arguably also have some international weight, were never mentioned. Indeed, the term "overseas" generally referred to developed countries where English is spoken: in particular Australia, New-Zealand, Canada and the United States. One student even neglected to mention that he had spent 3 years in PNG when I asked him if he had ever travelled abroad. He then explained: *"Mi tingse PNG no oversea country..."* and later mentioned *"Lo oversea, hao mi findim, pipol save speak English."*<sup>24</sup>

By virtue of its global dominance, English appears as the language of social success. In the first place, since it is the only written language used in schools, English is a necessity to acquire any formal educational knowledge<sup>25</sup>:

i03. *"Hem nao door. The door of education, ia."* (Kate)

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<sup>23</sup> Note in this quote the peculiar use of the term "official". It illustrates the idea, diffuse in many other interviews, that an official language is expected to be a world language, important at the international level.

<sup>24</sup> *"I didn't think that PNG was an overseas country"; "Overseas, how I find it, people usually speak English."*

<sup>25</sup> The link between literacy and acquisition of English is perceived as so tight that during an interview, whereas I had asked the informant at what age she had started to learn English, she answered by explaining under which conditions she had learnt to read and write.

104. *"If iu laek save lo evriting, iu have to skul, iu mas save hao fo rid, ia? So iu need to rid fo save diswan, diswan, diswan. Through English, ia."* (David)

105. *"Further lo education, iu have to go English nao, bifo iu save ridim wat nao insaed lo oketa buks."* (Kate)

Under the colonial system, social mobility and mastery of English have long been tightly related in Solomon Islands, and through the education system they still are. However, students' discursive emphasis was different: English was presented as the language of social mobility not because it is the language of the colonizer, but because it is an international language and that social and geographical mobility are tied. English is required to further one's studies abroad – and, if only as a first step, to complete one's degree in Suva. It is thus perceived as the key to larger opportunities, such as getting a scholarship for a Master's degree in a foreign university and a highly-valued job<sup>26</sup>.

This was the reason why virtually all the students whom I interviewed favoured the use of English in schools and became alarmed when I evoked the idea of education in Pijin:

106. *"Tingting blo mi hem nogud decision. If ot passim... I think ot mas lukluk gud lo hem!"* (Simon, FG)

In fact, it was automatically assumed that if schooling was carried out in Pijin, English would not be learnt *at all*, and this would thwart all possibilities of improving one's life. The next generation of Solomon Islanders would then be unable to communicate with foreigners, to travel, and to get access to tertiary education.

107. *"Ot no spoelem... English nao naes. Olsem hem better fo oketa, fo future blo oketa. Fo go stadi, save ridim buks lo English..."* (June)

108. *"I ting, nomoa! (laugh) Hem nogud. Kos otta pipol lo Solo laek go lo overseas tu. Go fo skul, olsem. Fo tekem nao gud job, olsem."* (Daniel)

109. *"Ot learnim Pijin, bat hao nao if otta livim English aot? Sapos ot learnim more obaotim Pijin, hao nao otta bae mitim diferen fren an tok wetem?"* (Sandra)

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in some countries, the hegemony of the ex-colonial language (French, Spanish or Portuguese) as language of power and status may be *challenged* by the current international position of English (Makihara 2004:534; Stroud 2002:257). In Solomon Islands, as in other former British colonies, it is *reinforced* by it.



It was also claimed that this would complicate their daily life, since people would be unable to read the labels on the (predominantly imported) products that they buy:

110. *"Ot things mifala used fo... tekem kam lo country, diferen pipol nao ot mekem. Product from aotsaed. So ot product ia no eni Pijin lo hem, ia? Ot garem English wod. So mifala have to... in order fo mifala understandim 'oh, diswan fo kaekae', mifala have to lanem English ia."* (Simon)

My informants were not familiar with the concept of learning a foreign language as a core subject, as this possibility does not currently exist in the Solomon curriculum; I consequently had to introduce the idea that English may be still studied as a *second* language. However, most students asserted that even in such a case, the new standard in English would be definitely lower than it currently is – largely due to the perceived interference problems mentioned in the previous section. Besides, schooling in Pijin at the primary school was viewed as a wasted opportunity since, several informants pointed out, languages are more easily learnt at an early age<sup>27</sup>:

111. *"Taem iumi kam lo primary, taem iumi smol iet, if oketa teachers ia ot teach lo English, iumi still garem active mind, ia? Fo iumi learnim English at that moment an tekem samting, fo spikim English iu save tekem kuiktaem, ia."* (Luke, FG Suva)

Several students argued that schooling could not take place in Pijin *as long as* a Bachelor degree would have to be completed overseas. Obtaining good grades in Pijin, if English is not fully mastered, would be pointless under the current system:

112. *"Nomata iu skul gud lo Pijin, bae iu kam over, bae iu English nao."* (Martin, Suva)

This is indeed a compelling argument. However, in most students' views, the interest of mastering English does not actually depend on the presence or absence of a full-fledged

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<sup>27</sup> Currently, though, very few primary schools actually strictly privilege English at the oral level.

university campus in Honiara<sup>28</sup>. Many informants mentioned that English opens the door to go study and work in a *diversity* of countries, and not exclusively in Suva. For example:

113. *"As iu stadi folom, bae iu go in different countries."* (Allan)

In students' perceptions, the high value of English seems to lie in the fact that it can be used in many (if not all) countries: It broadens communication, whereas Pijin restricts it<sup>29</sup>. It is thus the key to a world of unbounded possibilities and provides the guarantee that Solomon Islanders will not be left out from globalization and development. If the country fails to provide them with sufficient opportunities, they can seek them overseas: English brings the world within their reach.

114. *"English hem gud bikos hem international language, common language pipol save iusim internationally. So hem best bikos... Especially mifala ot undeveloped o underdeveloped bro, spikim English hemi naes fo iumi... Bikos evriting distaem hemi English naia. Pijin hem restriktim iumi fo certain boundary nomoa."* (Martin, Suva)

115. *"Distaem, iumi part blo global community naia. So hem better fo iumi mas understandim language wea iumi save spikim globally. So I think datwan nao dastawae otta introdusim English insaed lo skuls, than Pijin."* (James, FG)

As tellingly illustrated in this last quote, in students' discourse, the emphasis is largely on the international side of English, while its formal aspect tends to be downplayed: Education takes place in English because it is a global language allowing people to seek better opportunities, *not* because it was the language of the former colonizer<sup>30</sup>. Another striking expression of such emphasis on the intergroup function of English could be noticed

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<sup>28</sup> During a focus group, when I mentioned that a new campus may open in Honiara, thus "relieving" Solomon students of the obligation to go abroad to complete a Bachelor, my remark was immediately dismissed: *"Still nid fo skul lo English nomoa. Bikos kasem taem waka, bae kam akrosim staka foreigner kam in lo office olsem, bae have to spikim English naia."* ("We'll still need to school in English. Because when will come the time to work, we'll meet many foreigners who come to the office and we'll have to speak English with them").

<sup>29</sup> Note that PNG and Vanuatu, where closely related Melanesian pidgins are spoken, are totally disregarded in this reasoning.

<sup>30</sup> In this view, the fact that the formal/official language *also* happens to be the language of education appears almost fortuitous. Very few students spontaneously presented these two facts as related; during interviews, when I moved on to the formal use of English after having discussed their linguistic preferences in education, my informants often reacted as if I had completely changed the subject.

when students explained why news and official speeches usually take place in English. Many stated that this was done for expatriates, who may not understand Pijin. Here are a few examples:

116. *"Just bikos... iumi mix insaed lo country distaem, an samfala no save gud lo Pijin so... Samfala, ot oversea kam, ot intrest fo ridim tu [Solomon newspapers], dastawae ot putum lo English: nogud ot no save... (laugh)" (David)*

117. *"Bikos maybe... sometimes otta overseas media reporters, olsem, otta save kakam joinim otta... big events, olsem." (Jeffrey, Suva)*

118. *"Especially in big occasions, pipol wea go an givim speech bae hem tend to garem the mentality that oketa pipol kam ia bae oketa might no understandim Pijin, so bae hem talem speech lo English. Dastawae oketa always talem lo English, an then if foreigner hem kam..." (William)*

As can be noticed, in this last quote William distances himself from this perception, but nonetheless resorts to it because he finds no other satisfactory way to explain the phenomenon. It was indeed a comfortable rationale: Students often leaped at it if they had not spontaneously thought of it and I suggested it. Yet, it is not a very realistic explanation, as it led informants to use as point of reference national events which happen once or twice a year (e.g. Independence Day), while diglossia is a daily phenomenon. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, foreigners are relatively few in Honiara; those who may attend festive events in company with Solomon Islanders are even rarer. More than once, I was the only white-skinned person in the audience. Besides, the expatriates who do attend such events have generally been living in Honiara for a long while, are well integrated in local life and do understand Pijin. This last point was acknowledged by Janet and Sarah, who had to admit that their argument led to a dead end and that other factors - that they could not articulate - were probably into play:

119. *"J: Bat maybe, bikos mifala Solomon Islanders mifala garem Solomon Islanders ot whiteman, so maybe hem nao fo ot whiteman nao ot duim lo English, I think.*

*An oketa no save Pijin?*

*S: Bat ot understandim Pijin! (big laughs)*

*J: Mi rili no save tu, ia, man! (laughs)"*

It is indeed the hallmark of language ideologies that they make usual or dominant practices taken for granted, beyond explicit articulation. In doing so, they naturalize the linguistic *status quo* and make it all the more difficult to challenge (Makihara and Schieffelin 2007b:15). Yet, students' reluctance to dwell on the formal status of English in Solomon Islands, and their systematic tendency to emphasize its instrumental value and intergroup function, may well suggest that its hegemonic position is less accepted than one might assume.

#### **4.2.2. Consequences for students: barriers to the use of English in USP classes**

Although this fact was generally downplayed by students during interviews, certain “social meanings” are definitely attached to the English language by virtue of its formal status and its role in Solomons' colonial past. The phrase “social meanings” was used by Blom and Gumperz (1972) to refer to the social values associated with different languages in a multilingual environment. According to Gumperz (1982:66), in a bilingual context languages are perceived as “*inevitably expressing meanings of either solidarity, informality and compassion (the in-group or we-code), or formality, stiffness and distance (the out-group or they-code)*”. In other terms, opting for one language rather than the other is interpreted as “saying something” about the social relationship between interlocutors. When USP students use English in the classroom, they cannot evade these unwanted social connotations, which significantly constrain their linguistic choices.

This problem is in fact by no means limited to the university context, as explained by Luke, a student currently in Suva:

120. “Culturally, sapos iu go spikim English lo hom [Solomon Islands], bae ot tok spoelem iu nao: ‘man ia, hem go university nao, hem kam tok English lo iumi naia!’ (...) Olsem hem had fo eniwan... No olsem... American o English pipol hem common language blo oketa nao, ot save acceptem. Bat mifala Solo, nomoa: sapos iu spikim English lo dea, ot tok spoelem lo mifala nao.”

What is interesting is that the same impediment to the use of English exists at the USP SI Campus, i.e. among people who all “go university”: While my informants unanimously claimed that English should be practiced in class, Honiaran students invariably used Pijin when they had to take the floor<sup>31</sup>. Students easily acknowledged this contradiction and were very willing to discuss it. Indeed, for several informants it seemed to be the occasion to express deep frustration. Here is how David, for example, reacted when I highlighted the paradox:

121. “*Hem. Datwan nao, mi no save wat nao problem!!*”

Focus groups offered excellent settings to examine the causes of this virtual impossibility to use English in the classroom, in spite of a strong desire to practice it.

The reason which was spontaneously and unanimously given was that students are afraid to make a mistake – in grammar or pronunciation - which would allow their classmates to laugh at them. My interviewees provided vivid descriptions of the sarcastic reactions which generally arise when a student attempts to speak English, and stressed their powerful deterrent effect. Here are some telling examples:

122. “J: *Most of students no speak gud. Maybe bikos... man ia bae speak English den narawan bae hem...*

W: *Tok folom hem. Imitatim, ya?*

L: *Ya...*

J: *Otta save fraet fo speak English nao. Ot save speak nomoa, ia. Bat let’s say if ot spikim English go, den ot lelebet misprononsim otta wod, bae ot... pikinini ia bae mekfan lo oketa, naia. Bae stori ia, olsem. So hem, man ia bae fil... olsem, bae fil sem, ia?*

W: *‘Mi tok rong...’*

J: *Ya. ‘Mi tok olsem, otta man ia go laf lo mi nao...’ So that is why nao otta no... otta fraet fo spikim English.” (FG Suva)*

123. “*One thing common lo Solomon naia: sapos iu spik rong lo English o grammatical error, bae student ot laf. So... sapos olsem, ot fraet fo spik lo English nomoa.” (Martin, Suva)*

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<sup>31</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, during the first class of a course it seemed that students could present a group work in English. But if the next group started to use Pijin and the tutor did not comment on their language choice (and tutors never did), going back to English seemed difficult for the forthcoming groups.

124. *"Bikos attitude blo mifala Solomon Islanders, if mifala sit daon together den somebody hem spikim English an hem lelebet miss, bae samfala laf, so... Datfala... laf ia, hem mekem man les fo otta laf lo hem. So bae hem iusim... normal one, bae hem no mekem mistek. Bikos wanfala... attitude most mifala Solomon Islanders mifala gareem, is mifala isily... fil offended if otta man save laf o kaen olsem. Bat mifala... save isi fo laf lo otta man tu, mifala... gareem bad attitude tu."* (James, FG Honiara)

The last quote highlights two important points. Firstly, in such a context, resorting to Pijin allows students to "play it safe". Another respondent illustrated this well:

125. *"That's why mi have to... answer with Pijin so that hem mas... solid, ia? No eniwan can laf at mi, ia?"* (Steven)

Secondly, this sarcastic behaviour – albeit unanimously criticized for its counter-productive effects – is shared by a large number of students. Several informants indeed stated that it had become part of Solomon student *culture*:

126. *"Bikos lo Solomon Island, olsem, lelebet duim blo mifala, kaen olsem if iu lelebet olsem iu stand up an iu tok English naia, an somebody mekem lelebet mistek, mifala kaen... laf ia, mifala save duim nomoa, hem nao hem rong. Ya, mi lukim datwan. Dastawae nao pipol fraet fo... tok. Evriwan duim? Evriwan laf?"*

*Ya! Evriwan save mekfan olsem. (...) Hem lelebet we blo mifala hem nogud nao, I think. (laughs) Wae nao hem happen olsem? Hem had fo save...*

*Ya, mi no save, wae nao olsem?... (sorry tone)*

*Mi trae fo avoidim, bat... ot get used lo hem nao. (laugh)"* (David)

127. *"Diswan bae save normally happen lo Solomon student. Hem build olsem wanfala culture nao... gogo hem mekem evri pikinini fil intimated fo spik lo English nao."* (Joan, FG girls)

128. *"Hem had [fo changim]. Bikos hem bekam... part blo culture lo Solomon nao. Ot pipol lo Solomon nao, ot live wetem nao, ot grow wetem tu."* (Lionel)

A few other informants related this behaviour to larger cultural traits *assumingly* typical of Solomon Islanders: They laugh at other people because they are uncivil (not to say uncivilized); they are quickly deterred from carrying on their efforts because they are too sensitive to criticism. For example:

129. *"Hem usual way mifala Solomon Islanders behave nao, whenever iu mekem mistek, o whenever... like, sapos iu wokabaot folom roadpath an iu slip olsem iu fol daon, bae... sapos eni Solomon Islander hem stand up lo dea, had fo datwan hem daon an se 'oh, sore': bae hem laf lo iu! (big laughs) Hem hao mifala Solomon Islanders behave, an, ya, I think hem wanfala contributing factor. Dastawae nao mifala no spikim English, bikos mifala fraet fo mekem mistek an den pipol bae laf lo mi."* (Andrew)

Needless to say, this “culture” also manifests itself in other educational institutions. Some students have experienced the same anxiety and attempted to avoid speaking English in class since primary school. Steven provided a colourful narrative of his experience:

130. *“Johanne, hem happen olsem wantaem lo mi taem mi Standard 6, wanfala student from England hem kam to our school fo teachim English. So, during the time, situation ia hem happen: if iu have to speak lo English, bae evriwan laf lo iu, ia. (laughs) So evriwan save: no askem eni question, no answer eni question, stay quiet. Looking down, pipol fear... Fearem whiteman, ia? Sapos mi answer go lo English, otta bae laf lo mi. That English teacher hem laf lo mi bikos mi no save gud lo English. That’s why, I think fear ia hem still lo dea, an gogo mifala still Pijin, Pijin hem gohed insaed klas.”*

This utterance could be interpreted in different ways, but what interests me here is the discrepancy between the alleged causes for “fear”. Steven acknowledged straight afterwards that it is most unlikely that a professor, whether expatriate or local, would ever laugh at a student trying his/her best to practice English. “*Fearem whiteman*” is thus a rather surprising expression in this context, as anxiety about making mistakes did not actually originate in the fear that the teacher may negatively respond, but in peers’ reactions. Indeed, as an informant pointed out, the problem is not limited to the classroom but may happen anywhere if a foreigner is met in the presence of fellow Solomon Islanders:

131. *“So dastawae nao otta get fraet fo tok wetem whiteman taem staka den... Bikos... of datwan. Kos... Hem naia... lelebet rabis... nogud we blo mifala naia (short laughs), olsem kaen, if iu toktok an iu lelebet mistek, bae evriwan laf naia! ... Den luk lo iu... Dastawae nao hem mekem mifala... datwan nao hem mekem mifala fraet fo... stand up an tok, o tok wetem whiteman olsem. ‘Eh, nogud nao otta herem mi an laf lo mi!’ , hem.” (David)*

But this risk is significantly heightened in the classroom - a stressful social context, where a person is under the spotlights when he/she speaks, and where others can easily hear and assess his/her standard in English. In such a formal setting where many people, including some of the opposite sex, can witness the scene, young adults are not particularly willing to lay themselves open to ridicule. This point was underlined by Mark when he explained why

speaking English is more anxiety-producing than speaking a vernacular which is not fully mastered:

132. "Bat wae nao, wetem English oketa sem olsem fo spikim?

*...I think bikos taem ot spikim nao, insaed, mainly, insaed lo formal setting, olsem insaed lo wanfala klasrum, taem hemi formal gathering... Bat ot nara language ia ot bae spikim olsem, ot spikim aotsaed nomoa, taem... pipol ot no concentrate tumas lo oketa olsem insaed lo klasrum, taem ot tok lo English, taem evriwan bae concentrate an evriwan herehere... If hem mekem eni mistek, olsem...*

Oh, ya. So evriwan... focus on iu nomoa, so sapos iu mekem eni mistek, evriwan bae noticim tu. Ok. So bikos hem formal setting. Sapos pipol oketa aotside o ot stori wetem samfala foreigners, hem oraet? Oketa no sem fo spikim English?

*Yea, yea. Ot no sem fo spik... ot no sem, bikos... hem no staka pipol tumas nao lo dea, an, olsem, ot no concentrate tumas fo herehere wat nao bae hem talem, olsem."*

In actual fact, this mocking practice goes much beyond normativity. As several participants stated during focus groups, a student who is fully proficient in English may just as well be mocked by classmates whose standard in English is lower. "Mistakes" are a pretext for laughing at a student who chooses to use English in class. Anything may be used to ridicule his/her performance: a case of interference from Pijin, a word pronounced 'folom langgus' – fellow classmates simply wait for the chance to trip him up. Not actual competence in English, but the social meanings attached to English are here at issue: The speaker is criticized not for his (real or imagined) mistakes, but for attempting to 'act whiteman'. Let us have USP students describe how fellow students react in such case:

133. "Otta just... luk lo iu, dan laf, den glingling. (laugh) Iu no mekem eni mistek bat otta just... ot no laek nomoa fo iumi just English." (Lydia)

134. "Bae teasim iu naia, bae otta laf lo iu. Bae otta mek fani lo iu: 'hey, baka ia laek enikaen tumas, man! Wat nao hem laek English fo?'. Bae otta just fani lo hem: 'Iu blo diferen country?'" (Ruth, FG girls)<sup>32</sup>

135. "Like criticism bae big tumas, ia. (laughs) O if iu English lo klas ia ot rolim eyes (big laugh) Ot se 'wat nao man ia laek provim samfala whiteman! Evri lokol nomoa!'" (Sarah)

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<sup>32</sup> It seems that in some cases, even *tutors* may participate in such sarcastic comments. No student mentioned that it ever happened at the USP Center, but a student from SICHE asserted that she sometimes received this latter comment from professors when she tried to speak in English in class.



The issue at stake is clearly that of *distinction*. A student who opts for English is perceived as claiming to be different from – and socially superior to – his/her fellow classmates. The group discussion with Honiaran male students highlighted the difficulty for a student to be alone in opting for English, as he/she will be automatically stamped as pretentious by others<sup>33</sup>:

136. “J: I mean, mifala tritim dat iu shud spikim Pijin nomoa kos mitufala semsem. Bat iu iusim English... ‘mi no whiteman, I mean’, that kind of tingting. So pipol bae... judgim oketa as... somewan up o somewan...  
 Bikos sapos iu spikim English, minim iu somewan up?  
 S: Ya. (strong)  
 Why? Hao nao?  
 J: Bikos hem language blo... somebody from aotsaed lo Solomon, so... I mean, just the idea that... iu shud tok lo mi, olsem, normal language wea iumi iusim. If iu iusim... bae mi tritim: ‘Mi no diferan man fo iu English lo mi’.”

James further explains:

137. “Otta lukim hem no fit. I mean, let’s say, iu iusim language wea... hem... iumi shud spikim Pijin nomoa bat iu iusim nao English. So bae others... hem luk odd lelebet fo iu duim datwan. I mean, hem perception wea... most pipol save garew tu, ya: ‘Hey, wae nao iu... Iu shud iusim Pij...’ something like that. So iu mekem iuseleva, like, outstanding, o diferan from mifala. (others laugh) So, ot kaen tingting olsem nao hem save causim mifala no save garew fridom fo spikim English between mifala seleva. Bat if mifala stei wetem oketa... whiteman olsem, bae mifala traem best, at least mas... Bat, if mifala seleva, evri Solomon Islanders den mifala laek... spikim English... bae hem save... mifala save kuiktaem fo laf lo eachwan, kaen olsem.”

This perception presents striking similarities with that described in Northern Norway by Blom and Gumperz (1972:419): Using the standard language instead of the local one is viewed as a way of dissociating oneself from the local team - a community of equals – and privileging the values of a group from which they have long been separated by a “*gulf of social inequality*”.

This topic was visibly fraught with affectivity for several participants. Indeed, whereas students first tended to present the reluctance to speak English as mere shyness,

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<sup>33</sup> Note here that, in students’ utterances, “overseas” and “whiteman” are almost automatically understood as “socially upper”. See Ortner (2003:52) for an interesting discussion on the interchangeable use of class and race labels in the United States.

social pressure is heavy and sanctions are real. Simon, for example, recounted that he had painfully learnt the rules:

138. "S: *Kos iumi no used fo spikim English so samfala bae laf: 'hey! Man ia lelebet high level lelebet!'. Hem nao olsem wat mi experiencim. Samfala time, mi olsem tu ia, mi speak English den evriwan bae laf lo mi... (sympathetic laughs from others) Kos hem... hem nao mi se, hem wanfala new samting fo iumi lo secondary skul.*

Taem iu se, pipol bae tingse iu high-level, wat nao iu minim?

S: *Mi minim, olsem, 'mi save winim evriwan'. So lo dea nao, tingting nao tufala fren ia tokobaot, bae mekfan lo iu, bae laf, bikos iu laek fo speak language blo diferen man. Language blo otta Europeans o otta whiteman ia, so taem iu laek spikim datwan, otta viewim iu in a different way. Wat mi experiencim naia."*

Some other students revealed that they had never *dared* to try, for fear of social sanctions. After I pointed out that in some cases it seemed to be hard to be the only one to choose English and asked whether he had ever felt this way, Francis, who had previously claimed that speaking English or Pijin in class was just a matter of individual *choice* (arguing against the idea of language "policy" within the USP Center), confessed:

139. "*Euh... Most time mi stei lo USP Center, mi tok Pijin nomoa. Mi no... mi no fil, mi no laek experience the way... otta talem ia: mi totok, den somebody here kam, hem laf folom.*"

It should be noted that, if no one speaks it in class, differences in mastery of English - and differences in social status perceived as attached to them - cannot be assessed<sup>34</sup>. This is an important point considering that USP students have attended different primary and secondary schools – some of them (in particular Chung-Wah), expensive and strictly English-speaking, placing them on the upper part of the social scale. Laura and Rosalyn, reflecting on this issue from Suva and being themselves part of the Honiaran-born upper-middle-class, tactfully presented it this way:

140. "*Wae nao students lo USP Center oketa no trae fo praktisim lelebet English bifo ot kasem Suva?*

L: *...I ting, kaen ia bae iumi putim go bak lo... background nao, I think. Kind, from bringim up lo kasem smol, taem ot big kam olsem, olsem samfala bara no garew access fo kaen ia, English*

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<sup>34</sup> As a matter of fact, on several occasions students revealed that they had very little idea of the actual competence in oral English of their fellow classmates. An informant suggested: "*Ating ot save nomoa...*"

*nao... Bikos lo hom ia [Honiara], wanfala samting bad tumas, once iu English olsem, bae ot nara pikinini luk lo iu bae spoelem iu naia, otta sarcastic lo iu 'hey, laek English olsem...', kaen ia so...  
 R: Act whiteman!  
 L: Ya, olsem kaen whiteman! (big laughs) So, olsem, samfala pikinini bae olsem fil nogud tu... so... hem naia. Bae hem had nomoa fo duim kaen ia.  
 Even lo USP Center pipol bae duim olsem tu?  
 Both: Ya! (strong)''*

They later pointed out that children who have attended schools which privilege English, and have acquired full proficiency in it, are rapidly deterred from continuing to use it when they enter high school and the USP Center<sup>35</sup>:

*141. "R: Taem wan se olsem, narawan bae... fil bad tu... So bae hem laek English, den taem ot student bae duim datwan lo hem nomoa, den hem stat fo... no duim English more. Mi findim lo high school, olsem. Otta wea skul lo... international school, taem ot kam lo high school, ot used fo English. Den ot narawan stat fo...  
 L: Spoelem oketa.  
 R: Spoelem oketa, olsem gogo, ot livim... English."*

In practice, though, English is by no means absent from students' actual practices. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, most students, as do many tutors, "mix" Pijin and English in the classroom. The type of Pijin that they use is often heavily anglicized, to the point that in some cases it would be better described as Pijinized English, i.e. English interspersed with Pijin phrases. As noted by Ferguson, situations of diglossia frequently generate tensions which "*may be resolved by the use of relatively uncodified, unstable, intermediate forms of languages and repeated borrowing of vocabulary items from H [the High code] to L [the Low code]*" (1964:433). What happens in USP classes is a case in point: Students may use English *provided that* it is superficially framed as Pijin through pronunciation and the use of key words (e.g. 'nao') and morphological forms (e.g. verbs-*im*) which signal that their utterance belongs to Pijin, not English. By claiming to use Pijin, the speaker evades both normativity (his speech does not pretend to be "proper" English, so he cannot be mocked

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<sup>35</sup> Noticeably, in the long run, this is likely to effectively level (down) the differences in English standard among students, since the most fluent pupils are prevented from practicing it.

for making mistakes) and the accusation of ‘*acting whiteman*’ (he presents himself as a fellow Solomon Islander)<sup>36</sup>.

More specifically, at the university, *pure* English is the “they-code” which is interpreted by classmates as expressing social distance. “Mixing” is not only acceptable, but strongly expected: “Mixed” Pijin, rather than “pure” Pijin, is actually the students’ “we-code” (cf. Swigart 1994; Spitulnik 1998; Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998). In this context, mixing may well constitute a “strategy of neutrality” (Heller 1988): Through frequent code-switching, the speaker can avoid to choose a main language, which could be read by others as indexing his/her alignment with a given social group (Moyer 1998:222-223). By mixing, students avoid making a clear choice in favour of English, and therefore avoid expressing alignment with (assumingly, socially upper) “white people”.

My informants consistently stressed that the use of (pure) English at the USP Center is marked precisely because it is unusual. Students are anxious to speak it because they do not practice it frequently<sup>37</sup>; classmates mercilessly mock them when they do because they are not used to hearing other students speaking English in class. The fewer the number of students who opt for English, the more socially difficult it becomes for those who do. Currently it seems that, confronted by diffuse but powerful social pressure, they have given up. Yet, students who desire to practice English seem to be *by far* in the majority at the USP SI Campus. All my informants condemned the social pressure to which students are subjected (albeit confessing that they also participate in it at times) and expressed the wish

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<sup>36</sup> At the very least, students would start and end in Pijin, even if the bulk of speech is in English. See Ahlers (2006) on the use of a limited number of Native words as a “framing device” at the beginning and end of speech, which marks the utterance as informed by a “local” identity (i.e. expressing membership within the local community).

<sup>37</sup> A focus group participant confessed that he felt so stressed when he had to make an oral presentation in English that, the last time he was expected to do it, he preferred not to come to class: “*So wat mi duim, mi presentim... lo hom iet!*”.

that this attitude would change. They stated that mistakes are part of everyone's learning process and should not be mocked; beyond this, they feel that the accusation of '*acting whiteman*' should not apply to USP students, who *need* to improve their standard in oral English to further their studies. This point was made straight out by Andrew, a focus group participant in Honiara:

142. "*Bat, olsem, case blo students, case blo mifala student, I think hem... I think iumi shud no garew diskaen of attitude ia. Bikos iumi oketa students, iumi learn hao fo raetim English an... I think fo spikim English, iumi shud... spikim English. Hem... hem language iumi shud iusim, ia.*"

Indeed, one might assume that the university setting provides students with a reason (not to say an excuse) for using English. In this context, opting for English is not meant to be, as Basso (1979:9) puts it, a "*form of social commentary*" which calls into play a social category ("the Whiteman") and its associated values (i.e. social inequality). Yet, the use of English is nonetheless interpreted in this way – admittedly in bad faith - by other students. Clearly, then, the context does not suffice: A Solomon Islander who addresses a fellow Solomon Islander of equal status is expected to do so in Pijin, not in English. Now, when a student speaks in class, he/she addresses *de facto* classmates as well as the tutor. While a tutor, due to his/her role as professor, can legitimately – and is expected to - use English, a student cannot. Janet made this point overtly:

143. "*Olsem, sapos samfala pipol luk an iu Solomon Islander... bat if iu teacher hem OK, hem exception, hem oraet if iu English. Bat if iu student an iu laek English tu hem luk... awkward. (laughs) Bikos iu no white bat then iu... spikim English.*"

This quote highlights that, in the case of students, opting for English is perceived as playing an illegitimate role<sup>38</sup>, claiming to be *more* than one actually is. Interestingly, Janet also

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<sup>38</sup> The perception that, when a Solomon Islander speaks English, he or she plays a role was further illustrated in the household where I lived by the fact that the mother, when she employed English, always did it to give orders or advices to the children with a professorial, slightly sarcastic tone which generally suggested that she was only half-serious.

critically pointed out that if a Solomon Islander had spent several years abroad, this long stay would seem to *legitimate* his/her use of English:

144. “*Bat staka Solomon Islanders wea stei overseas, taem ot kam bak, mi no save, hem fani man, black pipol wea stei overseas an kam bak, local pipol ot no rili... warim. If hem English, ot acceptem nomoa. I ting otta mas garem idea olsem, if hem stei overseas hem shud olsem whiteman, kaen olsem.*”

Here, she articulates an assumption which was left implicit in the discourse of many informants: An English-speaker is expected to be white; a Solomon Islander who stays abroad and acquires cultural capital somehow *becomes white* as he/she becomes highly educated and fluent in English. In doing so, Janet simultaneously acknowledges and criticizes the pervasive linkage of language, race and class status inherited from the colonial period. It is this linkage – a key element in colonial ideology - which compels students to avoid using English in the classroom. And it is a rather ironic twist in history that laughing at others’ performance in English, or better said laughing at fellow Solomon Islanders who try to speak English, has come to be identified by students as a negative feature of *Solomon* culture, whereas this practice is in fact rooted in the colonizer’s ideology, and seems largely alien to local language ideologies<sup>39</sup>.

#### *Conclusion: Looking beyond Honiara’s classrooms*

We have thus seen that, in Honiara, *in spite of the university context*, using English in the absence of foreigners is reinterpreted as a mark of excessive sophistication and contempt for fellow locals - although it is clearly *not meant* in this way, and students unanimously agree that using English at the USP Center *should not* be read in this way. As the language of the previous colonial administrators, English in Solomon Islands is still

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<sup>39</sup> As noted by Gooberman-Hill (1999:26), Solomon Islanders are generally extremely tolerant and encouraging when non-*wantoks* make the effort to try speaking their vernacular. Local, pre-colonial language ideologies will be the specific focus of the last section of Chapter 5.

undeniably associated with social inequality. Students' behaviours in the classroom thus prove to be heavily constrained by social meanings that they, at first, tended to downplay during interviews. As a result, in order to avoid social sanction from their classmates, students are led to resort on a regular basis to a heavily "mixed" English/Pijin code<sup>40</sup>. Arguably, this long-term practice of Pijinized English in classrooms may have *more* detrimental effects on students' fluency in Standard English than Pijin itself.

Indeed, several informants criticized the practice of "mixing" in educational institutions, and stressed that Pijin and English should be kept clearly separate, for this reason among others. Some also pointed out that "mixing" can create ambiguity at the semantic level and complicate the learning process:

*145. "Hem shud stick lo wanfala... Bae kind muddle up, ia. Bae gogo samfala concept bae iu no minim nomoa tu, bikos iu confusim brain blo iu nomoa nao lo evri diferen meaning nao. Like, English wod hem garem diferen meaning, iu kam putum lo Pijin, iu minim diferen lo hem tu. Olsem gogo, hem... bae iu go tok wetem narawan, bae hem no understandim, bae iu confusim hem naia... So bae hem mekem evriting slowim process blo iu moa lo learning. (...) Hem ating somehow affectim tu learning process lo Solo tu, disfala mix up thing ia, mix up of language ia."* (Joan, FG girls)

More generally, a student in education stated (referring to primary and secondary education, not to the USP Center), children who learn these two languages concurrently under a mixed form may, in the end, acquire neither English nor Pijin properly<sup>41</sup>:

*146. "Staka teacher ia, ot no save tok English gud, ia? Bae oketa mixim olobaot, gogogo pikinini ot herem go, folom ot pikinini ot go rong tu."* (Walter, FG Suva)

Although tutors who "mix" at the USP SI Campus are fully competent in English and choose to do so for "strategic" reasons (explained in Chapter 3), one may wonder whether

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<sup>40</sup> Note that this problem is not specific to Solomon Islands, but also happens in countries which are not in situations of colonial diglossia. I grew up in France and experienced similar barriers to the practice of English during English classes: A student who spoke it "too well", i.e. with a proper English accent, laid himself open to ridicule and to the accusation of being pretentious if he had no "valid reason" to be fluent (i.e. having an English-speaking parent or having lived several years abroad). This social pressure powerfully deterred French pupils from trying to improve their pronunciation in English, and I believe that it largely accounts for the poor standard of many French students in oral English.

<sup>41</sup> A statement supported by the academic literature on bilingual education (e.g. Lotherington 1998:69).

this practice of mixing among teachers does not encourage students to treat Pijin and English as parts of a continuum rather than as separate languages, and does not *eventually* contribute to Solomon students' linguistic difficulties.

The case of Solomon students in Suva illustrates well the pervasive negative effects of colonial ideology with regard to Pijin on their capacity to improve their standard in English. I mentioned in the last section that these students emphasized their difficulties in adapting to the English-speaking environment of the main USP campus, and pointed to Pijin's negative "interference" effect to explain their hardships. But beyond linguistic facts, interference is largely a psychological phenomenon: The fear of it, sustained by the long-term use of a mixed code, can be at least as detrimental as its actual effects.

One may expect that, in a context of expatriation, unfettered by the social pressure they experience in Solomon classrooms, students would be free to speak English on a daily basis with foreigners, and would rapidly improve their fluency in this language. After all, all students expressed a marked desire to improve their skills in English and consistently stressed that the point of learning this language is to travel and meet foreigners, and my Suva informants held exactly the same discourse:

*147. "As student bae hem continue fo further education, bae hem kam lo taon [Suva], bae hem stay, pipol hem stay wetem, evri whiteman o... so hem nid fo spikim English." (Francis, FG Suva)*

Yet, it is hard not to be struck by the discrepancy between this discourse and their actual daily lives, shared mainly with fellow Solomon Islanders. All those I met in Suva shared a flat with fellow nationals (sometimes *wantoks*, but not necessarily); they generally gathered in a specific area of the campus (dubbed "Point Cruz") and socialized together out of university. Living together both within and outside of university, Solomon students may



spend several years in Suva without speaking English *significantly* more than they did in Honiara.<sup>42</sup> Martin acknowledged:

148. *“Most, majority blo mifala lo hia, mifala spik lo Pijin, Pijin nomoa ia. Ok, sapos iu go lo klas nomoa, ok, mifala... English, communicate lo English.”*

This discrepancy could be interpreted in many ways<sup>43</sup>, but here I simply want to point to the fear of interference as one linguistic cause for it, identified by some of my Suva informants themselves:

149. *“Wetem ot nara ones sometimes communication breakdown tu. Olsem, mi minim, bikos bae iu... no confident fo spikim English wetem ot nara frems, olsem.”* (Laura)

The fear of speaking Pijinized, “broken” English in front of foreigners still prevents many students from practicing English on a daily basis - thus from improving their fluency in English and overcoming the interference effects. In Suva as within USP classes at the SI Campus, the colonial assumption that Pijin is a broken version of English creating interference, and the related idea that Pijin is a “natural” second-best for Solomon Islanders, thwart the desire of Solomon students to acquire fluent and accurate English, and to establish longed-for inter-cultural friendships.

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<sup>42</sup> I was also told that in town, they sometimes negotiate among themselves to decide who will make the sacrifice to go and ask for a piece of information in English (see quote 38, in the first section of this chapter). Of course, in the classrooms of the Suva campus, students have to use English if they speak - but they can avoid doing it at all by using evasion strategies well-known to students in all countries.

<sup>43</sup> It is clearly beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the reasons for this situation, which would indeed deserve further investigation.

### **4.3. Confronting divergent ideologies**

Before concluding this chapter on students' attitudes toward Pijin and English, it should be considered that these attitudes do not exist in isolation. In daily life, Solomon students are confronted with divergent linguistic ideologies coming from foreigners; their own perceptions may be reinterpreted - and sometimes reshaped - according to these foreign ideologies. This is obviously the case for those who study at the main USP campus in Suva, where students from a great diversity of national backgrounds gather. However, even in Honiara, the presence of expatriates, who carry with them different views on Pijin, may lead students to question their own.

#### **4.3.1. Dealing with expatriates' linguistic ideologies in Honiara**

Most of the expatriates whom I met during my stay in Honiara had attitudes more favourable to Pijin than the majority of Solomon Islanders. This, of course, does not mean that *all* foreigners in Honiara have a positive view on Pijin<sup>44</sup>, but all those I personally knew were proficient in it, or were actively learning it, or lamented their limited competence in it. Despite its absence of official status, they recognized Pijin as the national language of Solomon Islands and treated it as such.

This personal observation seemed to be confirmed at the institutional level. The name of the RAMSI<sup>45</sup> operation is '*Helpem Fren*' and RAMSI soldiers are offered Pijin classes at Woodford International School. Currently in Courts – as I could witness myself

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<sup>44</sup> For example, and not surprisingly, the headmaster of a prestigious private school (which enforces a strict regulation on language use) stated that Pijin is basically broken English and that its use should not be promoted. Furthermore, several Solomon acquaintances asserted that many foreigners living in Honiara for numerous years had never made the effort to learn Pijin properly. But in this regard, for more recent expatriates, a significant change seems to have been taking place in the last few years.

<sup>45</sup> Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, a coalition force led by Australia and created in 2003 in the aftermath of the "ethnic crisis".

when attending Court cases - Pijin and English are placed on an equal footing, and according to one of the USP students this was a relatively recent change connected to the RAMSI mission<sup>46</sup>. At the High Court, notices to the public (e.g. asking people to turn off their mobile phone before entering the court room) include a Pijin version. All hearings require the presence of a Pijin-English interpreter, regardless of the competence of the witness in English. Typically, the magistrate speaks in English, his/her question is translated into Pijin for the witness; the witness answers in Pijin and his utterance is translated back into English. This is meant to guarantee effective communication between expatriate lawyers and Solomon witnesses, but also to ensure that *both* a Pijin version and an English version of the proceedings will be recorded.

Beyond its pragmatic relevance, this system may be viewed as a product of a “purist” linguistic ideology - prevalent among many recently-arrived expatriate workers - which conceives Pijin and English as strictly distinct languages<sup>47</sup>. In practice, its implementation does not go without problems. As these two languages are treated as fully distinct, “mixing” them is not considered an option, although it is a widespread practice among Honiarans. In one striking occurrence I witnessed at the High Court, an Australian lawyer *complained* that the Solomon witness was mixing the two languages and that, by doing so, he thwarted the translation process<sup>48</sup>. He consequently asked the Solomon Islander to make a choice – i.e., as the witness visibly did not feel comfortable speaking in

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<sup>46</sup> In fact, to be accurate, the Courts’ language policy has always been to consider both Pijin and English and use translators (a necessity for the judicial system to be effective); but with the RAMSI mission, this policy was formalized and systematized, with the hiring and swearing-in of numerous local interpreters.

<sup>47</sup> See for example my own assumptions at the end of Chapter 2. The Australian tutor at the USP Center also remarked once that she was always expecting that a Pijin equivalent would exist for every English word, and was disappointed when she had to use the English term.

<sup>48</sup> According to a friend who worked as interpreter in the Courts, the theoretical rule in case of alternation within a sentence is that Pijin bits should be translated into English and English bits into Pijin. But whether this is actually *feasible* for a simultaneous translator is matter for discussion.

“pure” English, to refrain from using it and stick to Pijin. In other terms, if the witness could not claim to be *fully* fluent in English, he had to pretend not to understand it (i.e. wait for the Pijin translation before answering) and not to speak it *at all*. This is likely to have been felt as rather hurtful by this Solomon Islander, who had adopted a heavily anglicized version of Pijin (quite similar to the one used at the USP SI Campus) that he certainly perceived as suitable for the occasion.

The discrepancy between expatriates’ and Solomon Islanders’ expectations regarding the use of Pijin and English was also occasionally evident in daily life. A USP student remarked that on several occasions he had seen foreigners answering back in Pijin while he had addressed them, and hoped to pursue the exchange, in English<sup>49</sup>. As they do so, expatriates deprive Honiaran students from the rare occasions that they have to practice and improve their standard in English<sup>50</sup>. This fact led an informant to suggest:

150. *“Ating oketa foreigners shud no lanem Pijin... bikos taem bae oketa English go lo oketa lokols ia, bae oketa traem best blo oketa nomoa ia!”* (Ruth, FG girls)

Quite interestingly, a student in linguistics stated that almost exclusively *foreign* linguists carry out research on Pijin, whereas the few Solomon ones privilege studies on vernaculars<sup>51</sup>. This interest gap was tellingly illustrated by this exchange with Steven, who quite boldly (but playfully) voiced what many of my informants certainly thought:

151. *“So iu intrest lo Pijin, ia.  
Ya, bikos mi stadi linguistics.  
Bat mifala don’t want Pijin, mifala English! Mifala hate Pijin!”* (big laughs)”

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<sup>49</sup> I have myself been guilty of such impoliteness on several occasions with USP students who desired to practice English with me. I had to do so not only to rapidly improve my standard in Pijin, but also to make myself approachable to other students who may have heard the conversation and concluded that they too would have to use English if they wanted to interact with me. I sincerely apologize to all my Solomon friends who may have been disappointed by my reluctance to speak English with them.

<sup>50</sup> Noticeably, a similar situation of “oppressive” politeness has been recurrently denounced by English-speaking people who *hope* to practice French in Montreal and desperately hear their Francophone interlocutor switch to English as soon as they notice their Anglophone accent (e.g. Fraser 2007).

<sup>51</sup> This is only half-true, as two of the earliest studies on Pijin were carried out by Solomon Islanders: Francis Bugotu (1972) and Rex Horoi (Horoi and Huebner 1979). This perception is nonetheless telling.

A highly visible type of occasion on which this discrepancy in attitudes is recurrently brought to light is official events. During formal gatherings such as festivals or funerals, white speakers generally privilege Pijin, while speeches from Solomon officials are made in English. For example, during the opening of the 2007 Youth Festival, the mayor of Honiara and the representative of the Ministry of Women and Youth made their speeches in English; then the representative of the Australian Commission made hers in Pijin.

The reasons behind this fact – that several (but not all) students had already noticed by themselves – were discussed during the interviews. A first explanation which was advanced by students was that the foreign speaker wanted to express his/her interest for Solomon Islands and desired to become integrated in the local society:

152. *“Otta whiteman ia, ating otta laek blendim wetem Solomon community so ot laek Pijin. Mi no save wae nao hem olsem, bat ya, mi noticim tu lo staka.”* (Janet)

During a focus group, a student perceptively suggested that the speaker had a perception of the situation which was not in line with that of Solomon Islanders: In other terms, he had not been properly socialized to the local culture:

153. *“Hem mas based lo own perception blo hem. Den Solomon Islanders hem based lo hao mifala save fil, hao mifala save... fo social gatherings.”* (James)

Another explanation, which was the one privileged by a majority of informants, was that the speaker wanted to make sure that he/she would be understood by everyone in the audience, including those who may not master English. In this sense, he/she looked at the composition of the audience and opted for the language accessible to the largest number.

This point led to a discussion on why *Solomon* officials did not share the same concern. It should be pointed out that intelligibility when speeches took place in English

was not spontaneously perceived as an issue by my informants. When I raised it as a potential problem, most students downplayed it by noting that English spoken by a Solomon Islander is significantly easier to understand than is English spoken by a foreigner:

154. *“Otta Solomon pipol, taem otta English, otta lokol pipol, otta pipol wea no save English, bae otta save heremsave. Bat otta whiteman, taem otta English, bae samfala lokol pipol ot no heremsave.”* (Jeffrey, Suva)

However, a non-negligible minority turned to adopt a critical view on Solomon officials’ choice. They considered that displaying high status through the use of English should not prevail over the concern for ensuring that the whole audience understands the message:

155. *“Ot officials ia, olsem nomoa otta laek fo mekem things official so... lo official language nao, English. Bat ot no consider nao ot audience, ot pipol ot stay out from... otta kam attendim olsem.”* (Martin, Suva)

As I explained previously, English was presented by students as valuable for its international scope, not for its role in Solomon colonial history; the exclusive use of English in formal contexts does not quite fit with this view, and was often rationalized by mentioning the potential presence of foreigners in the audience. Students had displayed highly ambivalent views on the formal use of English between Solomon Islanders; when it was discussed at all (it was a visibly uncomfortable topic), it was often criticized as “*show off nomoa*”. The newly-realized discrepancy in behaviour between Solomon and expatriate representatives in formal gatherings thus provoked – especially, but by no means exclusively, among students who had previously expressed positive attitudes toward Pijin - vigorous reactions and questionings:

156. *“Mifala evriwan save Pijin nomoa lo dea, ot should spikim Pijin bat ot spikim English... An whiteman hem speak Pijin! Tru man! Datwan bik... wae nao olsem? (...) Mifala garem save dat samfala nomoa save gud lo English, bat... ot still spikim something ia, man! Presentim lo English...”* (David)

157. *“These days, hem wanfala significant issue in the sense that... wae nao mifala blackman taem mifala mekem speech, mifala have to construct it lo English, ia? An taem otta whiteman kam, ot laek tok lo Pijin.”* (Lionel)

158. *“I think, taem mi go bak mi go mekem eni reform. (laugh) Mifala mas putim Pijin mas first language! (laughs) Bat hem tru, ia man, truwan...”* (Laura)

An exceptional event which happened during my stay provided the occasion of an additional challenge to students’ assumptions about Pijin and its use in formal contexts. Following the sad death of a Solomon USP student in Vanuatu, large-scale funerals took place at the Holy Cross<sup>52</sup> and virtually the whole USP Center came to pay their last respects to the dead student. A Ni-Vanuatu representative had accompanied the corpse back to Honiara and attended the ceremony; an American priest conducted the religious service. This event was enlightening for my research in several ways. All my Honiaran interviewees attended it and were thus later able to comment on the linguistic choices which were made.

The ceremony took place mainly in English: Eulogies from family members were delivered in English, as well as all speeches from Solomon officials, including the director of the USP Center. However, the Catholic priest made parts of his speech in Pijin, and the Ni-Vanuatu official made his whole speech in Bislama, as is now usual in Vanuatu<sup>53</sup>. Quite interestingly, many of my informants stated that they did not hear the speech in Bislama, or rather that they had not noticed that it was not in English:

159. *“Mi nating herem eniting olsem... I think English nao mi herem!”* (June)

The presence of Ni-Vanuatu representatives was even used by a respondent to *justify* the fact that Solomon officials delivered their speech in English (i.e. in honour of a special

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<sup>52</sup> The largest Catholic church in downtown Honiara.

<sup>53</sup> In Vanuatu, Bislama is now privileged in official speeches, even sometimes in surprising contexts. I attended the celebration of the French national day in Port Vila, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, at the French Embassy. During this event, a representative of the Ni-Vanuatu government made a long speech exclusively in Bislama, in front of an audience composed almost exclusively of French ex-colonists, expatriates and visitors – many of whom did not understand this language.

event such as the visit of foreign guests, it is polite to speak English, not Pijin) – incidentally highlighting the substantial gap in language ideology which currently exists between the two countries:

160. *“Mifala ot Solomon Islanders ot adresim datwan ot speak English, bikos of pipol outsider wea kam wetem datfala body, ot blo Vanuatu. Hem nao otta adresim datwan in English, bikos ot think hemi wanfala special occasion.”* (Simon, FG)

By contrast, those who *did* notice that the Ni-Vanuatu representative’s speech was in Bislama were greatly surprised. Steven and Lionel reported the event as follows:

161. *“S: An, even, the representant of the Government of Vanuatu, speech blo hem hemi... hemi not English.  
L: Hem Pidgin blo Vanuatu.  
S: Ya, Pidgin. An he’s quite brilliant, hem herem naes nomoa, ia. Quite brilliant. Hem similar olsem the father Christian.  
So iufala minim taem hem spik?  
S: Absolutely gud. Hem slang olsem mifala nomoa, ia.”*

This experience challenged a deep-rooted belief (sustained by the fact that, contrary to Tok Pisin, Bislama is rarely heard on TV and radio) that Bislama is significantly different from - and “purer” than - Solomon Pijin<sup>54</sup>. Importantly, this event led these students to question the fact that Solomon Islanders always privilege English over Pijin when they speak during formal occasions:

162. *“Distaem mi informed... wae nao taem evri official program iumi have to English nao... Samfala iumi Pijin nomoa bat... somehow hem olsem wanfala past thing kam nao dat iumi shud English nao. (...) Mi no save tu wae hem olsem. Bikos oketa lo Solomon nomoa duim olsem.”* (Joan FG girls)

163. *“L: Bat, iu tingse, ot shud duim speech ia lo Pijin nomoa? An hem understandable tu, bikos, most of those who are attending the ceremony, maybe some of them ot grow from village, so maybe English ot no understand tu, ia?*

*Ya, tru. Mi tingse, yesterday mi seleva mi whiteman. Priest an mi nomoa.*

*Both: Yes. (laughs)*

*L: Priest from America!*

*S: Yes, he is from America, all the far country along the continent... Bat he still speaks... daon lo iumi in Pijin... We should guilty, ia? Mi should guilty of that! (laughs)”<sup>55</sup>*

<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the information was so new to Steven that just a few minutes before we mentioned that event, he still asserted that he did not know what Bislama sounded like.

<sup>55</sup> We will go back over Steven’s interesting statement on “guilt” in the next chapter.



Here we have seen what may happen when Honiaran students are confronted with language ideologies more favourable to Pijin coming from visiting foreigners. In the last section of this chapter, we will briefly discuss the converse case: when Solomon students travel or move to a country where a different language ideology prevails.

#### **4.3.2. The effects of expatriation on students' attitudes**

In Honiara, students who had had frequent occasions to travel abroad, or who were informed about what was happening in neighbouring countries where Creole languages are spoken, had generally more favourable attitudes toward Pijin. This does not entail that they did not view it as “broken English”, as underlined at the first section of this chapter, but they expressed stronger affective ties and definitely considered Pijin as the national language of Solomon Islands. The case of William illustrates well how long and frequent trips abroad may affect attitudes toward Pijin. When I interviewed him, he had recently returned from a trip in Northern Europe, during which he had visited two aunts, both married to Europeans who used to work in Solomon Islands. He remarked that they were all more than happy to be given the opportunity to speak Pijin with him. William himself had spent several weeks abroad without the company of fellow Solomon Islanders. He stated that, being deprived of the opportunity to speak it, he had then realized how important this language was to him: It provided him with a feeling of belonging and of “ownership” which he could not claim with English, the “*language of other people*”. He also suggested that similar feelings probably accounted for the tendency of young USP tutors returning from Suva to privilege Pijin in classrooms. In the same vein, it is noteworthy that in the Internet-based version of the *Solomon Star*, many Solomon

expatriates (asking for the online availability of Solomon music) use Pijin rather than English when they write their comments.

One may expect a similar phenomenon to occur among Solomon students in Suva. Yet, an important difference is that they are by no means deprived of the possibility to speak Pijin: As I said earlier, they are numerous on the campus and often live together. My interviews thus revealed more complex patterns. On the one hand, Pijin is clearly a powerful device used to recognize fellow Solomon Islanders in the midst of the great variety of nationalities present at the USP main campus. As suggested by Joseph (and as I experienced myself), it seems automatically to create a bond of solidarity between people:

*164. "Nomata hem no save lo mi, moment mi Pijin go lo hem, hem save kam nao: 'man ia hem from Solomon'."*

On the other hand, as I already mentioned, students in Suva strongly emphasized the difficulties that they encountered in speaking English and directly attributed them to the interference created by the long-term use of Pijin; they were often resentful toward Pijin.

As a result, among my 15 Suva-based informants, attitudes were not, on average, more favourable to Pijin (only two students, Joseph and Laura, clearly supported the promotion of Pijin as national language), but they were notably more polarized than in Honiara. One important reason may largely account for this fact: My Suva informants had better knowledge of what happened in neighbouring countries, and this provided them with arguments drawn from other discourses, perceived as authoritative, to support their (either pro- or anti-Pijin) stances. All my respondents were aware of the existence of alternative education systems which privilege local languages in the Pacific<sup>56</sup> and were acquainted

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<sup>56</sup> Vernacular-medium schooling is privileged in Western Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Cook Islands, Niue and most schools in Fiji at least until the end of primary school (Lotherington 1998:68-69). This language policy aims at the maintenance of vernacular languages, but also at improving children's

with the corresponding nationalist discourses. Here is how Martin, for example, explained the situation of Bislama in Vanuatu:

165. *"Hem depend nomoa lo otta policy makers naia... sapos ot laek nationalisim language, I mean, putum insaed syllabus o curriculum lo skul. (...) Otta laek... sort of promotim language blo oketa... sort of prestigious, ia. Like... language blo mifala, blo country, olsem."*

They were consequently aware of the peculiar situation of Pijin, which has to date received no official recognition. As a result, large parts of our discussions consisted in explaining why Solomon Pijin *in contrast to* other Pacific languages did not follow the nationalist trend perceptible in neighbouring countries. This fact was rationalized in different ways, and while foreign examples were mobilized in all interviews, they were used to support totally divergent views.

A first explanation (which was shared by all respondents, including, interestingly, Honiaran students who had traveled abroad) was that the government of Solomon Islands does not currently have the *means* to promote Pijin as official language. It would be too costly to produce school materials in Pijin and replace those already available in English:

166. *"Right now, mifala no garem proper resources fo raetim evriting daon in Pijin."* (Alison, Honiara)

167. *"Datwan, hem Solomon naia! (laugh) Saed lo selen moa, financial saed mekem..."* (Franklin)

A few students also mentioned that, unlike Tok Pisin and Bislama, Pijin has no standardized orthography yet - although not necessarily using this term:

168. *"Pijin hem no garem rule, ia, fo iu raet... Iu raet olobaot nomoa. (laughs)"* (Franklin)

169. *"Bikos of wat lo standardizing naia. So datwan nao, olsem nao lelebet problem lo hem."* (Walter)

170. *"PNG wan I think otta pasim lo... Olsem lo Vanuatu otta pasim lo Parliament blo oketa that hem garem set structure fo hao otta raetim."* (William, Honiara)

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educational attainment, as for cognitively demanding school purposes proficiency in the education language is a major asset. See Lotherington (1998) for a detailed description, and critical assessment, of language education policies in post-colonial South Pacific countries (including Solomon Islands).

Divergence arose on the second rationalization. A majority of my respondents in Suva suggested that Solomon Pijin, due to its broken nature and unlike other Pacific languages, does not *deserve* to be promoted. Pijin, in their view, would not be a “cultural” language (their term), expressing Solomon “real” culture, but a foreign introduction which artificially combines bits of different languages. Contrasting Pijin with the Fijian language, which “comes from” Indigenous Fijians and is thus the rightful subject of protection and promotion measures, Jeffrey explained for example:

171. “Pijin ia, I think hem just... kolektim from enikaen language nomoa: English moa, bai samfala local language insaed tu. Hem just kam up through... somewhere else, hem just kam up nomoa taem pipol trae fo communicate with each other. (...) So hem no important, I think, fo pipol putim lo skul, ia. Bikos hem no gareme... no eni permanent group of pipol o olsem. Hem no olsem otta nara language wea hem gareme... origins blo hem. Diswan nao hem just kolektim, hem just wanfala broken... Hem no reflektim nao culture blo... Solomon, olsem.”

The same argument was advanced by other Suva respondents in very similar ways:

172. “Bikos hemi wat ia... It’s a foreign introduction, ia? Hemi no wat olsem... otta mother tongue wea mifala spikim, wea mifala grow up kam wetem. It’s a foreign introduction from... foreign people. (...) Olsem ot diferen pipol nao otta kam lo Solo, den olsem otta interact wetem pipol lo Solo an otta creatim nao Pijin ia. So hem no quite... olsem ot pipol lo dea ot kam up wetem seleva olsem.” (Joyce)

In brief, Pijin, as a “mixed” language born from cultural contact, is not the direct production of a well-circumscribed cultural group; allegedly, it then does not express people’s cultural identity, and it is therefore not eligible for State-sponsored protection.

This view is directly based on the idea that a language must have “*unmixed roots deeply embedded in land and blood*” to represent a national identity (Riley 2007:74). As noted in the first section of this chapter, it has been argued (e.g. Riley 2007; Makihara 2004; Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998) that this nationalist purist ideology, which has spread among Pacific and African elites in the context of cultural revitalization movements, partly

derives from a Western (largely idealized)<sup>57</sup> monolingual view. At any rate, purist ideologies have often been encouraged by the former European colonial powers<sup>58</sup>, and were in many cases directly fostered by European missionary linguists and religious associations - which have, in Melanesia as in other colonial contexts, played a decisive role in linguistic matters<sup>59</sup>. Yet, purism, because it tends to generate linguistic insecurities and self-denigration among people who speak “mixed” varieties, may in fact accelerate language shift in favour of the “pure” dominant language (Makihara 2004:537; Riley 2007). Among these Suva informants, the nationalist-purist ideology is indeed mobilized *against* Pijin: Since Pijin is “only a mixture”, it is no worth “saving” or “reviving” it, and Solomon Islanders should rather opt for English.

Moreover, another Solomon “specificity” - based on the same premise that Pijin is a “bastard” language - was put forward to justify its lack of recognition: again, the problem of interference that it creates in the acquisition of English:

173. *“Kos mi komparem wetem... Japan ia, olsem, common language blo oketa, hemi no... go link wetem English, ia? So taem gogo ot lanem ot go lo English bae hem flow, ia? Whereas Solomon, since Pijin hem broken English, olsem iu lanem full time gogo iu go skul moa lo English, bae hem rong naia.”* (Martin)

In this reasoning, the cases of Bislama and Tok Pisin, which have been granted official status in spite of similar “broken” origins, can hardly be accounted for. They were never spontaneously evoked by these respondents, who showed discomfort when I mentioned them. In order to avoid criticizing the decisions of the PNG and Ni-Vanuatu

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<sup>57</sup> See Irvine and Gal (2000) on the political and ideological “erasures” which have been necessary to view European countries as monolingual.

<sup>58</sup> For example, in the Marquesas, the promotion of 'Enana, the local language, is financially subsidized by the French government *provided that* it is kept “pure” (Riley 2007:83).

<sup>59</sup> See in particular Handman (2007) on the tendency among PNG SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) linguists, inheritors of a European religious-based institution, to discount Tok Pisin as being no one’s “heart language”, i.e. as not matching the classical scenario of *conflict* between local and colonial languages in contact situations.

governments, students generally resorted to the argument that these languages, unlike Solomon Pijin, were at least “real” Pijin:

174. “*Otta broken English tu, lo samfala part. Bat oketa... otta diferen tumas. Staka terms blo oketa, ot no kolsap lo English. Like ‘sikirap’. Bat lo Solo, ot se ‘bush’ nomoa, hem more close lo English. (...) Blo oketa ia, otta se hem Pijin den hem Pijin nao! Ot wod ot bifo kam ia, ot no chanchangim, ot stap nao.*” (Jeffrey)

By contrast, Joseph, who resolutely argued for the full recognition of Pijin as the official language of Solomon Islands, quite predictably referred to the case of PNG to assert the feasibility of his ideas:

175. “*Olsem lo PNG, Tok Pisin distaem hem official language. Ot skul lo Tok Pisin, den otta broadcasting blo oketa bae hem lo Pijin tu.*”

As we saw in the first section of this chapter, Joseph does view Pijin as a full-fledged language, expressing Solomon Islanders’ common national identity. According to him, since Pijin is *primarily* a Melanesian creation (a point which allows him to partly evade the “purist” counter-argument), it does fit the language/identity nationalist model, and thus deserves the State’s protection and promotion.

Thus, depending on *which* foreign examples were privileged, the nationalist framework could be applied either to call for the promotion of Pijin, or to justify its marginalization. Among Solomon students in Suva, the colonial ideology directly meets nationalist ideologies which currently prevail in the Pacific. But, because these nationalist ideologies are, like the colonial ideology, largely based on tenets of linguistic purism, they do not automatically benefit Pijin. As noted by Hannerz (1992), the outcome of such encounters between cultural influences is never pre-determined: The colonial prejudice against Pijin may be either challenged, or simply reformulated in new terms.

Let us briefly repeat the main points of this chapter before going further in the analysis. We have seen that USP students' attitudes toward Pijin are still largely influenced by the colonial language ideology that conceives Pijin as a broken version of English, detrimental to the acquisition of the latter. The stock-phrase "Pijin is broken English" remains part of Solomon "commonsense", although the idea that Pijin is a language "with no rules" directly clashes with students' experience of this language (and, often, with the teachings they received in Linguistics at the USP Center). Devoid of clear content, this expression is partly reinterpreted in a diachronic perspective, as referring to the increasing "mixing" of Pijin and English. In students' divergent views on the nature of Pijin – i.e. Pijin *was never* a "real" language, or *used to be* so but is not anymore, or *still is* and should be "fixed" before it is too late – we noticed the competition of different language ideologies, which often coexist and compete within the minds of single individuals. We have also seen that, despite a general emphasis on the instrumental value of English on the international scale (i.e. as "linguistic capital" in today's globalized world), discursively dissociated from the colonial legacy, English remains strongly associated with social inequality. This was evidenced by the social pressure that Solomon students experience in USP classrooms, where they are compelled to resort to a heavily mixed code, rather than practicing Standard English as they feel they should. Finally, we have seen that contact with foreign language ideologies, often purist and nationalist, met by chance in Honiara (in the Ni-Vanuatu case) or dominant in an environment of expatriation (in Suva), may lead Solomon students to reinterpret Pijin's current lack of official status – but not necessarily to challenge it.

## Translation of verbatim quotes (Chapter 4)

1. *"Pijin, for us Solomon Islanders, it's very easy to understand and very easy to learn. Like... it's one language of ours, of us Solomon Islanders, Pijin."*
2. *"Pijin I learnt... I didn't really learn Pijin, it just came out as something I speak."*
3. *"Children, when they grow up, they mingle around with their age group, children who speak Pijin, so it's easy... By staying with them they will just hear some Pijin, they will learn how to speak it."*
4. *"People just live with Pijin around. Since you were born, you're surrounded by it. That's why it's very easy to learn for children."*
5. *"The small children when they are 2-3 years-old, close to the house, they start to speak a little bit of Pijin together and then Pijin comes out."*
6. *"When children grow up and you speak Pijin to them, after a while somehow this language is transmitted to them. I guess because all Solomon Islanders – or most Solomon Islanders – when they grow up, Pijin is like naturally inside of them."*
7. *"It's our language. I mean, the common language we usually use in this country. It's in our blood!"*
8. *"Pijin, I started to learn it only when I went to secondary school. When I was at primary school, I could only understand it. When I went to secondary school, we all mixed together so I started to really learn it there. And English too, at secondary school."*
9. *"Pijin, I started to speak it when I entered high school, at Suu. Before that, I wasn't really confident to speak it."*
10. *"You don't need a classroom to learn Pijin. (...) You just sit under a tree or play, and you know it."*
11. *"Pijin, you're born with it inside of you, in Solomon Islands. You're born with Pijin and your vernacular. But for the English language, you need to go to schools."*
12. *"Just like our vernaculars, Pijin we'll be able to learn it easily. Because in Honiara, everyone speaks it, so when a child is born, automatically he just speaks it. So he won't need to study it at school because he is... brought up inside of this... automatically he will speak it, Pijin. So, in the case of Solomon Islanders, it's no need to school in Pijin. I think he must school in English because... it's not a language of his. So he must learn it formally."*
13. *"Studying Pijin it's not useful. Because students go to school to learn English, not Pijin."*
14. *"The two are almost similar. It's just English, after all, Pijin."*
15. *"It's just the same, actually. Because the largest part of the Solomon Island Pijin language, it's English, English words inside. Only a few words are slightly different from English."*
16. *"It's only the way to write it which is a little bit confusing. But when you speak it, it's almost like English. For some words, only the spelling is different."*
17. *"It's easy to understand, but there are many differences between them, I think."*
18. *"Solomon Pijin, that one is just broken English. Like, the type of Pidgin from PNG and the other one, it's different. They are really different from Solomon Pijin, some of their words, the words in them."*
19. *"I think they're just similar... Only a few words actually make a difference. But Pijin and English they are still the same... Even if you don't know Pijin, you'll still be able to understand it."*
20. *"It's one version of English, but it's a broken one."*



21. "We put English into short terms. (...) For example, 'tekem kam': in English it should be 'bring it to me' or something like that, but we just say 'tekem kam'."
22. "It's just that the way we pronounce it, it may follow our languages. It's our mother tongue which disturbs a little bit how we pronounce the words. 'I think', in Pijin, we would just say 'ating': shortcut!"
23. "Pijin it doesn't really sound like it should, following English standards. Sometimes our pronunciation is a little bit out of tune, compared with English."
24. "Like, 'iu go lo wea', 'where are you going': it's like opposite, we just reverse the... sentence or this kind of things, sort of mixing round. That's why I say it's broken English!"
25. "Any English sentence, it will just be mixed round when you turn it into Pijin. I mean, in English the sentence is just straight, but in Pijin it's a bit different."
26. "[When you speak in Pijin] you don't speak according... you don't speak straight in English. You speak anyhow. You break the rules, the grammatical rules, so you just speak anyhow."
27. "That's what people usually say, that it doesn't have any grammar. Like, English has a grammar: past tense, past participle and future..."
28. "Pijin doesn't have any proper grammar, tenses, this kind of things."
29. "It's broken English because, I think, it doesn't have like subject-verb-argument, this kind of things. It's just all mixed round. ... Sometimes you have it, inside one sentence, but... it's not a structure like in English, where one comes first, the other next... like they are just placed anyhow inside the sentence."
30. "The reason why Pijin is called broken English, it's because Pijin doesn't have a rule. You just speak, you just say something, you just speak it. No rule to govern how you do it, no conventions to guide you in the way you should speak Pijin."
31. "It doesn't have like a grammar, rules... rules that you can learn. Like English it has rules, certain rules that you can learn to speak English. Pijin doesn't: it's just messy."
32. "Then how have I been able to learn Pijin?  
L: ... That's a... That's a, I mean, reality.  
That's the reason why we have no idea, because me, I haven't studied languages!  
S: We know Pijin... but we don't have a clue regarding its grammar or this kind of things, we just speak it."
33. "If they are schooled this way, it will be too hard afterwards, when they speak English they will go wrong. Totally wrong. Because Pijin is broken English."
34. "The more they learn Pijin, the more they'll want to speak Pijin, the more likely it is that they'll write following Pijin too, when they write in English."
35. "So people should not learn how to write Pijin? Why isn't it useful?  
Because... if they study Pijin like that, they'll learn it and they will know it well but... I think by the time they try to learn English, it will really make problems."
36. "It's not really necessary... It's useful, but it will confuse their brain even more..."
37. "Pijin becomes a barrier too, when you speak English, because it's broken, ya? It's broken English, so sometimes when they speak English, in sentences some grammatical errors happen. Most students, including me, we'll have this kind of problem. We try to interact more in English, but we just speak Pijin and this sort of... creates a barrier."
38. "It's because of Pijin that they speak English like that. That they don't speak it well, ya? Because... Pijin is a little broken, that's the thing. That's what prevents them from speaking English well. (...) Because some students have even told me that when they go to town, they find it hard to ask for things in shops. In English. So they will have to force each other: who will go speak, who will go ask for that thing. So this means that... it's Pijin which really affects their capacity to speak English."

39. "So you think it's hard to speak both Pijin and English well?

*It's easy... just easy!"*

40. "This Pijin is a kind of... broken English. So when comes the time you try to... speak English, it's a bit hard to use the right sort of English. Because Pijin really spoils it all! So when you say something in English, it's really like of the broken type!"

41. "Solomon Islanders can understand English fluently, like perfectly. But, then, sometimes Pijin creates interference, so when they speak it's a bit... Because Pijin is broken English, so it will come and disturb the way they speak. Sometimes they will use, like, any phrase from Pijin..."

42. "Like in Solomon Islands, some people consider that... Pijin spoils English.

Some people say this, but personally do you agree with them or not?

*I agree!"*

43. "Our ancestors, when they just arrived, they found English hard. That's why this Pijin, broken English came out! So Pijin derives from, it stems from English."

44. "Somehow the people who went to work at that time, when they came back, they tried to speak English. But what they spoke, it was only broken English. That's Pijin."

45. "I guess, when... our ancestors, they heard them speak English, then because of our accent, like, we couldn't speak English well. We just put it into short forms, cut the words. So that's how, I believe, Pijin came about."

46. "Maybe the white people, when they came to Melanesia, they wanted to interact with people so they tried to make it, like simplify it so that they could talk with Melanesian people. Local people adopted it then modified it, modified it, modified it until today."

47. "When they came back from there [the plantations in Australia and Fiji], they tried to imitate the way white people spoke. But they couldn't, so what they came up with is this broken English."

48. "Nowadays Pijin is a bit changing, ya? In the sense that we make it closer to English."

49. Quote in English

50. "Nowadays Pijin is mixed with English, that's why people call it 'broken English'."

51. "Today, children mix English with Pijin. It's not really Pijin. (...) So now it's broken, this broken Pijin, broken English."

52. "Before, people say that it's this Pijin from New Guinea that people used, that people mainly used in Solomon Islands. But then English started to come in, and the two joined together, like they combined, and they formed this Solomon Pijin. So this Pijin, it's Pijin-English."

53. "At the time of the Labour trade, they went to work in Fiji, like when they tried to speak in English, some Pijin came in, and what they came out with was this Pijin-English."

54. "Pure Pijin, it's the one which comes from the time it originated. It's the straight one."

55. "Real Pijin, it's like full Pijin, no langgus inside or no mix. No mix with English or langgus, full time only Pijin."

56. "Before people still spoke... just Pijin alone, on its own."

57. "In PNG that's the pure one, the kind of Pijin that they speak. They don't mix it with English."

58. "Real Pijin, it's like the one they learn in New Guinea. That's the real Pijin. Our Pijin in Solomon Islands, it's English-Pijin, it's half-breed. If you really listen when people speak it, you will hear English words, mixed inside this Pijin. So it's broken Pijin-English."

59. *"Bislama and PNG Pijin, they are quite similar. For Solomon Islands it's more like an English one... I would say it's an English version of these two pidgins!"*

60. Quote in English

61. *"People at SIBC, they usually use very old Pijin: 'wanem', 'plande', 'melewan'... This SIBC Pijin, it quite sounds like the original Solomon Pijin."*

62. *"B: Like, one example in Pijin, they used to say... like they used to say 'sicra'. But today you would hardly ever hear people use this term. They would simply use 'sea'.*

*You're laughing! Joyce, why are you laughing?*

*J: It's the first time I hear that word, 'sicra'..."*

63. *"I think, if[at SIBC] they used the original type of Pijin, most of us young people wouldn't get it well."*

64. *"We, the new generation, we don't know old Pijin. Like, my grand-parents, they know it. (...) If I communicate with an elderly person, if he speaks his kind of Pijin, I will have a little bit of trouble understanding him well. Like my mind will have to work it out. (...) I will understand, but I wouldn't be able to reply in this old language. I'm not fluent, for speaking it."*

65. *"This former kind of Pijin, it's the real... like really straight Pijin, the one they call broken English. But nowadays it's sort of like... just English. It's becoming English. But the thing is that that kind of English starts to become... like really broken English now."*

66. *"I think, if the Government makes Pijin like... if it passes a law to make it the language to be used in Solomon Islands, like in Parliament and in the education system... if it makes it like the official language of Solomon Islands, I think it would be good, because... I mean, students would be able to learn effectively."*

67. *"[The students in Suva] they have a hard time, that's true. But this problem is not related only to Pijin, it's a problem related to any new language which is new to us."*

68. *"It's a bit hard to know English when you don't even know well your own languages, the ones you usually use."*

69. *"I don't think that it would spoil... The two are different. (...) Pijin should not be broken English. Because it's different... different from English. I think, 'broken English' you mean when people mix Pijin with English. That's it: when they mix it they would call it 'broken'. But it should not be broken English."*

70. *"They borrowed some words from English, then some words from their vernaculars. As they borrowed words from both languages, Pijin was created."*

71. *"It's a combination of... other languages from inside the country with English."*

72. *"If you live in an English-speaking environment, you'll be able to become fluent. But in the context of Solomon Islands, it won't... Pijin will really affect your English."*

73. *"I like the former kind of Pijin. Because it... it comes from where it started. But it's hard now to keep... its wordings. Because, as time goes, some change must happen inside the language. So I don't know how to... a way to try maintaining that kind of Pijin, that's what we should... seek. Because I like the original wordings, they sound... respectable."*

74. *"I did some readings, because I'm interested in this kind of things. So that's.. that's how I got the idea that Pijin has started to... get lost. Original Pijin shouldn't be like that, ya? And I think we should go back to it, refine it. To real Pijin. That's the originality with which we grew and with which we live."*

75. *"It's a broken language in the sense that... the pronunciation is similar, but the way to write it is different."*

76. *"They should learn it at school. Like the children at primary school, at least for one subject, they'd learn how to write Pijin. They'd learn the grammar of Pijin... if there is any grammar at all! I mean, ya, I mean it should have a grammar by now..."*
77. *"I say... Pijin has a grammar, there is some structure in it, because if you speak Pijin and you go against the structure of the sentence, it will mean something different, or it will sound like something else. You'll speak to me, and I won't understand what you're trying to say, because you don't follow the structure of Pijin or... the sentence in Pijin. It means something different! I mean, this, if you want to speak in Pijin. Pijin has a grammar! It has a grammar!! But one would have to... study Pijin to pick it out. That's what I said... Pijin must have... That's true, it comes from English, but by now there is some structure in it. If you miss that structure, you speak a totally different language! You will just speak like those men who are crazy. Because the sentence that you tell doesn't make sense. Inside the perspective of Pijin."*
78. *"At the primary school where I went, in my province, we used only langgus. Only the teacher, when we interacted with him or when he talked, he would use English. That's why I think that I started to speak Pijin at that time."*
79. *"[Before, in the provinces] at primary school, people didn't feel like... speaking Pijin or English. But this starts to improve, ya? Like, many young children, I heard them, they start speaking Pijin."*
80. Quote in English
81. *"Pijin is changing, because it's getting a bit mixed with English. That's what I see. Like, in langgus too, our vernacular, it's changing a bit too because... it's getting mixed up, mixed with Pijin, and even some English words are getting in."*
82. *"But English, it's only at school or at the office that people speak it, or when they meet friends from different countries, like foreigners. But with locals, it's Pijin that people speak."*
83. *"It's not our language, so we find it hard."*
84. *"Pijin is just the common one... But if you want something to sound nice, you go for English."*
85. *"When you speak in English, I feel what you say is really meaningful, it's like I'm using the right terms, something like that. But when I use Pijin sometimes it doesn't mean exactly what I try to say."*
86. *"Because there are many words in English. Pijin it's... it's not enough, I mean, we can't tell exactly what... but in English they have many words, we can look them up in the dictionary then 'oh, that's the word which fits'."*
87. *"I think, we treat English like it's formal and official, because that mentality has been passed down since colonial times, when they used mostly this language during all the gatherings or big events, or whatever... It's English that they always used. Then it became like... an idea or a social perception which was just... transmitted from these first generations to us."*
88. *"Maybe that kind of... colonizing effect remains! Like people haven't got rid of this colonizing effect yet. Like they still... say, 'we need English, English, and leave Pijin as our second language, that's English that we must always use for all the big events.'"*
89. *"It just depends on... the high-level people, at Parliament. Maybe none of them came up with that idea."*
90. *"It has to do with... who used to look after us in Solomon Islands. It's the British who used to look after Solomon, and most of the education system, the schools, it's the British who brought them. (...) Then, no one changed it."*
91. *"Like, if someone uses Pijin, the others will think that this man is not... that he is informal. They will say 'why does this guy use Pijin during such an occasion?' Like it's not suitable to speak in Pijin when... big gatherings happen. It's English that people always expect."*

92. *"Like in Parliament, if members of Parliament use Pijin, I often hear some people complain 'why does this man use Pijin? He should not... he's a Member of Parliament, he should speak in English'. (...) People really expect their leaders to speak in English."*
93. *"Maybe someone who is high-rank, someone special like a Minister, maybe he has to speak in English so that people view him like 'oh, he's a bigman'. There are expectations on him, expectations from the people in the audience: he must speak in English."*
94. *"When Black people use English... I don't know, maybe they just want to show off! I mean, I'm just joking... but that's true."*
95. *"English goes with people with status. Like if, let's say, if I graduate at the university and I go back, with people in Solomon Islands I will feel like speaking English. (...) And people will comment in this way: 'Hey, you come back, and now you speak English'. Because in Solomon Islands, if someone speaks English really well, other people will be a bit... a bit impressed by him."*
96. *"A professor who speaks English all the time, he must be... over-academic. He might be associated with people who don't normally speak Pijin, or he must be associated with the highest-rank people at the level of the university. People who are highly qualified, you'll notice that they wouldn't normally come down to the level where... like the middle-class or lower-class level regarding the type of language that they use."*
97. *"If some Solomon Islanders come back from a short stay [overseas], like they really want to show off! Like, speak English!"*
98. Quote in English
99. *"As long as you go exploring overseas places, that's the language that you will use."*
100. *"English it's really an important, official language: if you go out in the outside world, you'll meet different people, and they never speak Pijin, they speak English."*
101. *"English is a language that everyone uses around the world... like a medium of communication, in this globalization and this kind of things."*
102. Quote in English
103. *"That's the door. The door of education."*
104. *"If you want to know everything, you have to go to school, you have to know how to read, ya? So you need to read in order to know this, this, this. Through English."*
105. *"To go further in education, you need English, so that you can read what is inside the books."*
106. *"According to me it would be a bad decision. If they pass it... I think they should think very carefully about it first!"*
107. *"They shouldn't spoil... In English it's better. It's better for them, for their future. So that they can go study, be able to read books in English..."*
108. *"I think, definitely not! It would be a bad thing. Because Solomon people too want to go overseas. Go studying, this kind of things. So that they can take good jobs."*
109. *"They would learn Pijin, but what if they leave English out? If they learn more about Pijin, how will they be able to meet friends from other countries and communicate with them?"*
110. *"The things that we use, they are imported from other countries, it's other people who make them. Like, they are products from abroad. So these products don't have any Pijin on them, ya? They are written in English. So we have to... so that we can understand 'oh, this is food', we have to learn English."*

111. *"When we are at primary school, when we are still small, if our teachers teach us English, we still have an active mind, ya? To learn English at that moment and really get something out of it, to speak English you can pick it up quickly."*
112. *"Even if you get good grades in Pijin, once you come over here, it's English that you'll have to use."*
113. *"As you study further, you will go to different countries."*
114. *"English is good because it's an international language, a common language that people use internationally. So it's better because... Especially for us undeveloped or underdeveloped people, speaking English is nice so that we... Because everything is in English now. While Pijin restricts us to certain boundaries."*
115. *"Nowadays, we are part of a global community. So it's better for us to understand the language that we can use globally. So I think that's for this reason that they introduced English at school, rather than Pijin."*
116. *"It's just because... we are mixed inside the country now, and some people don't know Pijin well so... Some people, they come from overseas, they are interested in reading [Solomon newspapers] too, that's why they make them in English: it would be too bad that they don't know..."*
117. *"Maybe because... sometimes some media reporters from overseas come to attend the... big events."*
118. *"Especially in big occasions, people who go and give a speech will tend to have the mentality that some people who came attend it might not understand Pijin, so they will make their speech in English. That's why they always make it in English, and then if any foreigner happens to come..."*
119. *"J: But maybe, because in Solomon Islands there are some Solomon Islanders who are white, so maybe it's for these white people that they do it in English, I think.  
And they don't know Pijin?  
S: But they understand Pijin!  
J: True, I really have no idea why, then!"*
120. *"Culturally, if you go and speak English in [Solomon Islands], people will carp at you: 'this guy, he went to university, and now he comes and speaks English to us!'. (...) So it's hard for everyone to... It's not like for... American or English people, it's their language, the one they usually speak, so they accept it. But for us Solomon Islanders, they don't: if we speak English there, they just really carp at us."*
121. *"That's the point. I really don't know what our problem is!! "*
122. *"J: Most students don't speak it well. Maybe because... when one starts speaking English, someone else will...  
W: Pass comment. Imitate him, ya?  
L: Ya..  
J: So they get afraid of speaking English. They know how to speak it. But let's say, if they say something in English, and they slightly mispronounce some word, the other children will laugh at them. It will happen like that. So the guy will feel... like, feel ashamed.  
W: 'I don't speak well...'  
J: Ya. 'I say something, and the others laugh at me...' So that is why they don't... they are afraid of speaking English."*
123. *"That's one common thing in Solomon Islands: if you say something wrong in English, make some grammatical error, the other students laugh. So... because it happens like that, people get afraid of speaking English."*
124. *"Because our attitude, we Solomon Islanders, is that if we seat together and somebody says something in English and makes a mistake, some people will laugh, so... And that... laughing thing, it makes people not feel like being laughed at. So they will use... the normal one, so that they don't make any mistake. Because it's an... attitude that most of us Solomon Islanders have, we easily... feel offended if people laugh like that.. But we are also... quick to laugh at others too, we... have a bad attitude too."*

125. *"That's why I have to... answer with Pijin so that it will be... solid, ya? No one can laugh at mi, ya?"*
126. *"Because in Solomon Islands, like, it's something we usually do, like if you stand up and say something in English, and you make any small mistake, we tend to... laugh, we do this all the time, and that's the problem. Ya, I've noticed this. That's why people get afraid to... talk.  
Everyone does it? Everyone laughs?  
Ya! Everyone makes fun of others like that. (...) It's a kind of bad manner that we have, I think.  
Why does this happen? It's hard to know...  
Ya, I don't know, why it is like that.  
I try to avoid doing it, but... it has become like a habit."*
127. *"This will usually happen to Solomon students. It builds like a culture... then now it makes all the children feel intimidated to speak in English."*
128. *"It's hard [to change]. Because it has become... part of Solomon culture. People in Solomon, they live with it, they grow up with it."*
129. *"It's how we Solomon Islanders usually behave, whenever you make a mistake, or whenever... like, imagine you walk along the road and you slip and you fall down, they will... if any Solomon Islander is around, he wouldn't bend down and say 'oh, sorry for you': he will just laugh at you! That's how we Solomon Islanders behave, and, ya, I think it's one contributing factor. That's why we don't speak English, because we are afraid to make a mistake and that people laugh at us."*
130. *"Johanne, this happened to me once when I was in Standard 6, one student from England came to our school to teach English. So, during that time, that situation happened: if you have to speak in English, everyone will laugh at you. So we all knew: you don't ask any question, you don't answer any question, you stay quiet. Looking down, people fear... Fear the whiteman, ya? If I answer something in English, the others will laugh at me. That English teacher he would laugh at me because I don't speak English well. That's why, I think that fear is still here, so we continue using Pijin, Pijin goes on inside the classroom."*
131. *"It's for this reason that people get afraid to talk with white people when there are many people around... because of that. Because... that's what I said... it's a... bad way of ours, like if you talk and you make any mistake, everyone will start laughing! ... An stare at you... That's why it makes us... this thing it makes us afraid of... stand up and talk, or talk with white people. 'Eh, what if they hear me and laugh at me!,' this thing."*
132. *"But why English in particular people feel ashamed to speak?  
...I think it's because they speak it inside, mainly, inside a formal setting, like inside a classroom, during a formal gathering... While the other languages they will speak them just like that, outside, when... people don't concentrate too much on them like it happens in the classroom, when they speak in English, when everyone listen... If he makes any mistake...  
Oh, ya. So everyone... is focused just on you, so if you make any mistake, everyone will notice it. Ok. So it's because it's a formal setting. If people are outside and chat with some foreigners, then it's all right? They are not ashamed of speaking English?  
Yea, yea. They are not ashamed to speak... Because... there are not many people around, and, like, they are not too much focused on listening to what people say."*
133. *"They just... look at you and laugh, and giggle. You haven't made any mistake but they just... they just don't want us to speak English."*
134. *"The will tease you, they will mock you. They will make fun of you: 'hey, this guy, who does he think he is! What for does want he to speak English?'. They will just make jokes: 'You're from another country?'"*
135. *"Like people will really criticise you. Or if you speak English in class, they will roll their eyes. They'll say 'what does this guy want to prove? There are no white people, everyone is just local here!'"*

136. "J: I mean, we consider that you should simply speak Pijin because we are of the same kind. But you use English... 'I'm not a White, I mean', that kind of reasoning. So people will... judge them as... someone up or someone...

Because if you speak English, it means that you're someone up?

S: Ya.

Why?

J: Because it's the language of... people from outside of Solomon Islands, so... I mean, just the idea that... you should address me, like, in the normal language that we use. If you use... I will think: 'I'm not a different man for you speak English to me'."

137. "They consider that it doesn't fit. I mean, let's say, you use a language which... is... we should simply speak Pijin but you use English instead. So the others will... it looks a bit odd if you do this. I mean, it's a perception that... most people usually have: 'Hey, why do you... You should use Pij...' something like that. So you make yourself, like, outstanding, or different from us. So, it's this kind of reasoning which makes that we don't have the freedom to speak English among us. But if we stay with... white people, we will do our best to try, at least... But, if we are all just Solomon Islanders, then we try to... speak English, it will... we will be quick to laugh at each other like that."

138. "S: Because we are not used to speaking English so some people will laugh: 'hey! This guy is a bit too high level!'. That is what I experienced. A couple of times, me too, I speak English and everyone laughs at me... Because it's... as I said, it's something new for us at secondary school.

When you say that people will think that you're high-level, what do you mean?

S: I mean, like, 'I know everything better than the others'. So here you have that reasoning that our two friends mentioned, they will make fun of you, they will laugh because you want to speak the language of different people. The language of the Europeans or the white people, so when you want to speak that one, they view you in a different way. Based on my experience."

139. "Euh... Most of the time I was at the USP Center, I spoke only Pijin. I didn't feel like... I didn't want to experience the way... they said: I talk, then somebody hears me and laughs."

140. "Why don't students at the USP Center try to practice English a little bit before they come to Suva?

L: ...I think, to explain this we have to go back to... their background, I think. Like, to their upbringing when they were small, when they grew up, like some really don't have access to English... Because in [Honiara], one thing which is really bad is that when you speak English like that, the other children will stare at you and carp at you, they will be sarcastic toward you: 'hey, this guy wants to speak English...', this kind of things...

R: Act whiteman!

L: Ya, like the white people! So, because of that some children will feel bad... so... that's it. It will just be hard for them to do it.

Even at the USP Center people would do that?

Both: Ya!"

141. "R: When someone says this, the child will... feel bad too... So he will want to speak in English, but once the other students would have done this to him, he'll start to... give up using English. I noticed this in high school. Those who had gone to... the international school, when they entered High School, they were used to speaking English. But the others would start to...

L: Carp at them.

R: Carp at them, so eventually they relinquished... English."

142. "But, in the case of students, in our case as students, I think it's... I think we should not have this kind of attitude. Because we students, we are learning to write in English and... I think to speak in English, we should... speak English. It's... it's the language that we should use, ya."

143. "Like, if some people see you and you're a Solomon Islander... but if you are a teacher it's OK, it's an exception, it's all right if you use English. But if you are a student and you want to speak English too it looks... awkward. Because you're not white but then you... speak in English."



144. *"But many Solomon Islanders who have been living overseas, when they come back, I don't know, it's funny man, for the Black people who have lived overseas and come back, local people are not really... bothered. If they speak in English, they just accept it. I think they have somehow the idea that if they have stayed overseas they must have become like white, kind of."*
145. *"He should stick to one... It will kind of muddle up people... You will end up not getting certain concepts right, because you confuse your brain with all the different meanings. Like, an English word has a certain meaning, if you put it in Pijin, it may mean something different. So like that, it will... you will talk with someone else, and he won't get you right, you will just confuse him... And this will make your learning process slower too. (...) Maybe it affects too in some way Solomon people's learning process, this mixing up thing, this mixing up of languages."*
146. *"Many teachers can't speak English well. They will mix it all along, then the children listen to this and as a result the children go wrong as well."*
147. *"As a student will further his education, he will come to [Suva], live here, and the people with whom he'll live will all be white people or... so he'll need to speak English."*
148. *"Most of us here, we speak in Pijin, only Pijin. Ok, when we go to class, at that time only will we... use English, communicate in English."*
149. *"With the other ones, sometimes communication breaks down. Like, I mean, because you don't... feel confident to speak in English with other people."*
150. *"Maybe foreigners shouldn't learn Pijin... because if they speak English to the locals, then the locals will really try their best!"*
151. *"So you're interested in Pijin...  
Ya, because I study linguistics.  
But we, we don't want Pijin, we want English! We hate Pijin!"*
152. *"These white people, maybe they want to blend with the Solomon community so they want to speak Pijin. I don't know why it's like that, but ya, I noticed it too for many of them."*
153. *"It must be based on his own perception. Then for us Solomon Islanders, it's based on the way we feel, the way we usually do... for social gatherings."*
154. *"Solomon people, when they speak English, local people, the people who don't know English, they will be able to understand. But white people, if they speak English, some local people won't understand it."*
155. *"These officials, they just want to make things official so... they do it in the official language, English. But they don't consider the audience, the people who... just came to attend the thing."*
156. *"All of us knew Pijin there, they should have spoken Pijin but they spoke English... And the white man spoke Pijin! That's true, man! That's big... why is it like that? (...) We are cognizant of the fact that only some people know English well, but... they still speak it anyway, man! Presenting in English..."*
157. *"These days, it's a significant issue in the sense that... why do we Black people, when we make a speech, have to construct it in English? And then when white people speak, they want to do it in Pijin."*
158. *"I think, when I go back I will go make some reform. We must put Pijin as first language! But it's true, man, it's true..."*
159. *"I didn't hear anything like that... I think it's English that I heard!"*
160. *"The Solomon Islanders, they did it in English because of the people from abroad who accompanied that body, those from Vanuatu. So they made it in English, because they thought that it was a special occasion."*
161. *"S: And even the representative of the Government of Vanuatu, his speech was... it was not in English."*

L: *It was in Vanuatu Pidgin.*

S: *Ya, in Pidgin. And he's quite brilliant, it sounded really nice. Quite brilliant. Just like the father Christian.*

So you understood well when he spoke?

S: *Absolutely well. He speaks just like us."*

162. *"Now I'm informed... why during all official programs we have to use English... Some of us speak only Pijin but... somehow it's like a past thing which makes that we should use English. (...) I don't know why it's like that. Because it's only in Solomon Islands that people do that."*

163. *"L: But, you think, they should have done their speech simply in Pijin? And this would be understandable too, because, most of those who were attending the ceremony, maybe some of them they grew up in the village, so maybe they don't understand English, ya?"*

Ya, it's true. I think, yesterday I was the only white person, along with the priest.

Both: *Yes.*

L: *A priest from America!*

S: *Yes, he is from America, all the far country along the continent... But he still speaks... down to us in Pijin.. We should feel guilty, ya? I should feel guilty of that!"*

164. *"Even if he doesn't know me, as soon as I speak Pijin to him, he knows: 'this guy is from Solomon'."*

165. *"It just depends on the policy makers... if they want to nationalize the language, I mean, to put it inside the syllabus or curriculum at school. (...) They want to... sort of promote their language... make it sort of prestigious. Like... it's our language, the language of our country, this kind of things."*

166. *"Right now, we don't have the proper resources to write everything down in Pijin."*

167. *"This is Solomon Islands! So the money side, the financial aspect makes it..."*

168. *"Pijin doesn't have rules, for the way to write it... You just write it anyhow."*

169. *"Because of the standardizing process. That's what creates problems for writing."*

170. *"For the PNG one I think they passed... Like in Vanuatu they passed it at their Parliament so that it has set structure for the way to write it."*

171. *"That Pijin, I think it's just... a collection from any kind of languages: English, but some local language are inside too. It just came up through... somewhere else, it just came up as people tried to communicate with each other. (...) So it's not important, I think, like for introducing it at school. Because it doesn't have... any permanent group of people or something like that. It's not like the other languages which have... origins. This one is just a collection, it's just a broken... It doesn't reflect Solomon culture."*

172. *"Because it's a... it's a foreign introduction, ya? It's not like... the vernaculars that we speak, with which we grew up. It's a foreign introduction from... foreign people. (...) Like, different people came to Solomon Islands, they interacted with Solomon people and they created this Pijin. So it's not quite... as if the people there had developed it by themselves."*

173. *"Because if I compare with... Japan, like, their common language, it's not... related to English, ya? So when they learn it then they move to English, it will just flow, ya? Whereas in Solomon, since Pijin is broken English, like if you learn it full time then you go study more in English, it will be wrong."*

174. *"They are broken English too, for some parts. But they... they are very different. Many of their terms are not close to English. Like 'sikirap'. But in Solomon Islands, they just say 'bush', it's closer to English. (...) Their Pidgin, they say it's Pidgin then it's really Pidgin! They didn't change the original words, they are still there."*

175. *"Like in PNG, Tok Pisin is an official language now. They go to school in Tok Pisin, and their broadcasting is in Pidgin too."*

## **CHAPTER 5: BEING A SOLOMON STUDENT: TREADING A DELICATE PATH BETWEEN SOCIAL MOBILITY AND NATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

### **5.1. Students' attitudes: a combination of divergent discourses**

USP students' discourses on Pijin and English seem highly complex - and at times contradictory - because they all integrate, at distinct levels and following diverse combinations, different concerns: individual social mobility, national solidarity and the political/economic development of Solomon Islands as a country. Different ideologies, discourses and reference frames - pragmatism, cosmopolitanism, post-colonialism, nationalism – underlie them and are alternatively mobilized to support their stances. All these elements could be said to be present in each informant's account, but they were either emphasized or left in the background. In this final part of the dissertation, I will explore how these different perspectives are combined and hierarchized in students' discourses.

At the end of each interview, I asked what the respondent(s) thought would happen to Pijin in ten years, and whether the expected evolution was assessed positively or negatively. This question proved highly useful because it forced informants to make choices and prioritize their concerns. As a result, it polarized positions: Evoking the risk that Pijin may be superseded by English often aroused nationalist feelings which had been left undercover, or, on the contrary, revealed that claims of attachment to Pijin could be no match for more pragmatic considerations.

#### **5.1.1. Taking a stand on the future of Pijin**

What do students predict will be the situation of Pijin in ten years? Consistently with his view of Pijin as a full-fledged Solomon language not less worthy than English,

which should be promoted in education, Joseph was the only one to assert that it would soon reach official recognition and supersede English in all aspects of Solomon life. A sizeable minority of students stated that, with or without official status, Pijin would remain the main language in Solomon Islands, but would continue to incorporate English phrases. Such gradual change was in this case perceived as relatively marginal and not a threat to the language itself, as Pijin, according to them, is too deeply rooted in the country to disappear. Steven stated for example:

1. *“Mi no wari fo Pijin, bikos I know that majority, I mean, 90% blo Pijin, hem still on iet, ia? (...) Had fo hem get lus.”*

By contrast, a large majority of informants contended that Pijin would draw significantly closer to English<sup>1</sup>. People may still view it as Pijin, but in reality the language would rather constitute a vernacular version of English, with a slightly distinctive pronunciation and the punctual use of a limited number of Pijin words as markers of local identity and membership (see e.g. Garrett 2005).

2. *“Bae hem slowly stat... English mix fogud nao. So maybe Pijin lo dea, bat otta basic wod nomoa, like ‘iu hao?’”* (Alison)

3. *“Except fo small things nomoa, bae hem left. Otta kaen wod olsem wea hem no garew eni... English alternative nao. Bat otta wod wea garew eni other... alternative lo English ia, I think ot bae iusim English wod blo hem.”* (Mark)

In such a case, “real” Pijin will be definitely lost, as lamented by Lionel:

4. *“In ten years time, maybe gogogo original Pijin blo Solomon bae gogo bae extinct nao...”*

This fate, whether considered regrettable or not, would be due to increased access to education (in English), to the desire of an increasing number of Solomon parents to teach English in priority to their children, and to the presence of expatriates in Honiara.

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<sup>1</sup> Put in linguistic terms, this entails that it would become more and more acrolectal, and would eventually closely resemble English

As noted by Riley (2007:71), the pervasive use of code-switching is often assumed to eventually entail the total displacement of one language by another (language shift). Yet, this teleological evolution is by no means automatic: A mixed code can instead emerge and stabilize (also Makihara 2004; Swigart 1994). The outcome is notoriously hard to predict<sup>2</sup>.

But *if*, as the majority suggest, Pijin is progressively displaced by English as the main language of Solomon Islanders, would this be considered positively or negatively? This question forced students to take sides and to reveal their real priorities and levels of allegiance. During focus groups and double interviews, it often sparked off animated debates. Broadly speaking, respondents positioned themselves in two opposite camps: the “anti-Pijin” who stated that the replacement of Pijin by English was desirable, and the “pro-Pijin” who condemned it and argued for the maintenance of both languages as distinct. I will first present the arguments invoked by the proponents of the respective camps, highlighting the “hard-line” position in each side so as to make the contrast clear. Subsequently, I will examine the complexities and tensions inherent to each stance, which the great majority of students acknowledged and negotiated.

### 5.1.2. The “anti-Pijin” position

Let us start with the “anti-Pijin” stance. About 3/5 of my informants declared that the progressive replacement of Pijin by English would be a *good* thing. They asserted that this would enable Solomon students to study more successfully, both in Honiara (since

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<sup>2</sup> The prediction that Pijin would be over time replaced by “proper” English has been advanced (and hoped for) since the beginning of British colonization (see Keesing 1990) but has been to date contradicted by the facts: While more Solomon Islanders are proficient in English, Pijin has actually reinforced its position, both in Honiara and in the rural areas (Jourdan 2007a:34). Discussing the future evolution of Tok Pisin, Smith (2002:209-210) states that there is little ground to assert that Tok Pisin is undergoing a process of “decreolization” under the current renewed contact with the lexifier language, i.e. becoming post-Creole continuum, as had been predicted by a number of scholars: His data reveal a clear discontinuity between Tok Pisin and PNG English as distinct systems.

books and assignments are in English) and in more advanced educational programs abroad. This would also make communication with foreigners easier. This view is in clear continuity with students' general emphasis on the instrumental value of English as international language, as illustrated here:

5. *"Nomata iumi lusim ia hem oraet nomoa, bikos... English ia bae tekem ples blo hem. Bae hem just gud naia! Fo otta man otta suskul ot just sasave gud. Bikos, kaen evri buk ia ot raetim go lo English nomoa ia, so bae hem just mekem, olsem, otta minim otta Europeans moa, ia. I mean, knowledge blo oketa."* (Jackson, FG Suva)

6. *"Taem iu whiteman iu kam lo Solo, bae evriwan save... olsem, ot no fraet fo spik wetem iu, kos language blo iu ot save spik wetem iu. So hem gud fo Pijin lus nomoa."* (Roger, Suva)

In its most radical version, the "anti-Pijin" stance contends that the disappearance of Pijin would simply lift a barrier in education and wider communication, without any drawbacks: For intercommunication between Solomon Islanders from different ethnolinguistic groups, English could just as well do the job, and with more advantages. This drastic view, held only by a small minority, was especially (but not exclusively) that of students born in the provinces and who had learnt Pijin as a late second language. Pijin was then virtually presented as an imposition (from history and from the town life) which constituted an obstacle to their social mobility, limiting them to the national stage. Between their vernacular (to which their affective allegiance goes) and English (the language of social success), it appeared as an unnecessary halfway house, blamed for the interference it allegedly creates in the acquisition of English<sup>3</sup>.

7. *"Iumi get rid lo Pijin ia, bikos Pijin hem sort of... hindrance, ia? So iumi get rid lo hem, wetem first language nomoa mother tongue, an second language nao English."* (Martin, Suva)

8. *"Hem no matter nomoa, whatever happen lo Pijin ia. If English hem kam, hem no mekem eni difference lo mi, kos langgus lo dea nomoa."* (Luke, Suva)

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<sup>3</sup> Keesing remarked that, in addition to the colonial prejudice, Pijin became also viewed as a symbol of residual colonial subordination and an obstacle to progress (1990:158). This opinion seems indeed to underlie the "hard-line" anti-Pijin position presented here.

Indeed, students who grew up with their vernacular and still master it may be in a relatively comfortable position to claim their preference for English, and their desire for social mobility, without risking casting doubts on their allegiance to local culture.<sup>4</sup>

To justify their position, these students often tended to present the evolution from Pijin to English as a *natural* one related to the increasing literacy rate in Solomon Islands:

9. *"Datwan ia ot form nomoa fo communication hem flow nomoa dattaem ia. Bat distaem iumi skul so... hem folom devol blo hem."* (Timothy, FG Suva)

10. *"Bae otta pipol bae ot bekam moa fo spikim nao English, bikos more bae otta go fo educatim themselves. Bikos, olsem, bae mifala no stay lo datfala same level all the time."* (Joyce, Suva)

11. *"Iumi go advance, ia? Iumi no nid fo... tekem in Pijin as hem language blo iu, bikos iumi nidim nomoa original language hem English. Pijin hem no necessary."* (Lawrence, FG Honiara)

This view, which has an obvious evolutionary cast, was heavily drawing on the colonial language ideology that conceives Pijin as a form of "pre-English". Since Pijin was born accidentally from a failed attempt to speak English (a conception shared by many students, as we saw in Chapter 4), it should not be deemed disturbing, according to this minority, that it "returns" to English<sup>5</sup>:

12. *"Fo mi, hem oraet nomoa. Bikos something hem just... come in accidentally, so bae hem lus accidentally, hem oraet nomoa!"* (James, FG - provoking loud laughs)

13. *"Hem gud nomoa, bikos [Pijin] hem English, ia? Hem English nomoa. Starting blo hem, olsem taem pipol trae fo spikim English nao, otta Pijin nomoa... So hem oraet nomoa fo hem lus, fo hem change bak into English."* (Jeffrey, Suva)

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<sup>4</sup> This point is informed by Barnèche's analysis of young Kanaks' language practices and attitudes in Nouméa (2005:307). She notes that the few who master their vernacular seem to be less reluctant to acquire and use standard French (vs. the vernacularized "kaya" version) than those who do not master it, as their Melanesian identity cannot be as easily challenged by this additional competence. Now, remember that 24 of my 44 informants grew up in the provinces with a vernacular as first language and started to actively use Pijin only in their teens; contrary to urban-born informants who were raised concurrently with Pijin and a vernacular and sometimes ended up having only limited command of the latter, they did master their vernacular (or at least one of them, for those coming from a mixed family).

<sup>5</sup> Quite interestingly, several "anti-Pijin" students advocated education in Pijin as more effective, while at the same time hoping that Pijin would "naturally" turn into English. The advantages of mother-tongue education and that of English schooling (opening doors for further education) would then be combined in this "ideal" scenario, without requiring too much effort on the part of Solomon students.

Importantly, this position also expresses an ideology of social progress which presents English as the *only* language of modernity. Needless to say, for these students the loss of “real” Pijin was not a concern. Some indeed suggested that the blending of English into Pijin had already reached a non-return point, and that going back to “real” Pijin now would be the *unnatural* process.

### 5.1.3. The “pro-Pijin” position

In spite of daily social discourses which disparage Pijin as a language, defenders of Pijin actually accounted for a significant minority – about 2/5 - of my informants. Most often, they had downplayed their attachment to this language until the discussion on its future forced them to take a stand. Here it should be stressed that, while most anti-Pijin “hard-liners” were born in the provinces with Pijin as second language, some other province-born students who had similarly acquired Pijin at primary school showed *equal* allegiance to their vernacular and to Pijin, as distinct but complementary levels of belonging, and were among the most resolute defenders of Pijin.

Let us examine the arguments that these “pro-Pijin” students advanced to advocate the maintenance of Pijin in the future. They first argued that Pijin is part and parcel of their identity as Solomon Islanders, an identity to which they are strongly attached. To relinquish this language would entail renouncing their national distinctiveness and losing the sense of where they come from. In many ways, and regardless of the fact that they may (and most did) have a ‘*langgus*’, they applied to Pijin the same reasoning as to vernacular languages, considering that it embodies and signals their cultural identity:

14. “*Bae iu lusim nao real... who you are. Olsem, bae iu float go lo nara identity blo diferen pipol naia. Whereas hem should be second nomoa, English ia. Somehow hem lukolsem very naes strategy nao oketa ranem [i.e. replacing Pijin by English to facilitate people’s studies], bat mi disagri.*” (Wendy, FG girls)



15. *"Bae hem nogud. Kos hem background blo iu, ia. It bekam part of you. So iu need to save, be aware of datwan. Kos hem part blo iu, ia, hem language blo iu, ia! Iu need to save: iu grow wetem, iu stay liu nao."* (Lionel)

Noticeably, when this point was made, emphasis was often suddenly placed upon the contribution of Solomon vernaculars to Pijin's genesis. Pijin was then no longer presented as mere deviant English, but, at least in part, as a Melanesian creation:

16. *"Bikos hem... hem olsem, idea blo mi seleva nomoa, blo mi seleva nomoa, olsem... Pijin hem part lo... hem part lo society blo mifala nao, so... so, ya (laughs from others) identity blo mifala (big laughs). Kos hem second language, wea... hem combination of English an samfala... lokol terms. Terms blo mifala, language blo mifala. So... bae mi tekem olsem, part blo mifala hem ba. So sapos hem lus bae hem nogud! (laughs)"* (Andrew, FG)

Consistently, English was presented as an irreducibly different language, which could not properly replace Pijin as the language of intercommunication between Solomon Islanders:

17. *"Mi les fo... Pijin hem lus. (laughs). Kos, Pijin I think, hem wanfala... if iu go lo... especially insaed lo Pacific, if iu Pijin ot save identiyim 'oh, desfala man hem from Solomon'. An hem gud tu fo insaed lo country. Kos mifala lo Solomon mifala garew staka language. Pijin ia hem combinim mifala, kos hem isi fo mifala save tekem kuiktaem. Than English. So, hem wanfala language wea hem combinim evri language blo Solomon. Which is, man blo West mi save communicate wetem through Pijin. So... in ten years time, hem gud fo mifala... no lusim! (laughs)"* (Simon, FG)

18. *"Hem nao rabis, ia. Bikos bae mi sore, if Pijin lus. Bikos... language mi iusim tu, ia! I mean, language ia hem remindim mi dat 'oh, ya, mi from Solomon, mi garew language mi spikim tu', apart from mother tongue blo mi. Den, if hem lus olsem, hem minim dat... mifala inferior lo English nao! I mean, mifala watkind pipol! Bikos mi lukim Pijin, hem wanfala identity blo mi tu, ia. If hem lus, minim dat mifala... mifala no garew eni common language. So mifala... English nomoa, which is hem totally different, from samfala pipol..."* (Laura)

Pijin is thus perceived by these students as having a strong social value in terms of national belonging and distinctiveness. This position, which seems to match the one described by Keesing as the emergent "*minority nationalist ideology regarding Pijin*" (1990:163)<sup>6</sup>, was generally paired with a concern for preserving "real" Pijin from anglicization. This concern can be viewed as part of a more general concern for the loss of

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<sup>6</sup> See also Jourdan's argument on Pijin as a "stepping-stone" to national consciousness in Solomon Islands (2004[1995]). Note, however, that this "nationalist" position may be *more or less* conceived and articulated as political. Among students, it ranged from fully apolitical affective attachment toward Pijin to (in very few cases) linguistic nationalism, with a whole variety of intermediary positions. It is thus in a broad sense that I use the term "nationalist" in this discussion.

*kastom*, particularly acute in the capital-city (Gooberman-Hill 1999:45): At least to *some* extent, for these students “real” Pijin had become part of national *kastom*, and should be protected as part of the country’s national heritage:

19. “*Lo saed lo... culture, o kastom, o wat nao iumi shud se? (...) Bikos hem common language nao mifala shud kipim. Real Pijin, truwan nao, bikos hem Pijin blo mifala lo country, lo Solomon Islands.*” (Daniel)

The second argument of the pro-Pijin students was that the maintenance of Pijin is a matter of national solidarity. They stressed that if English displaced Pijin in urban areas (where the evolution is expected to occur first), the social gap between Solomon Islanders who receive formal education and rural dwellers who do not would be significantly widened:

20. “*Sapos olsem mi iusim English ia, bae mi se... oketa pipol oketa atendim formal education, oketa selfish. Ya? In terms of... freedom of expression, ia? Bikos, sapos, like mi, sapos mi mi stei lo village an mi no save hao fo spikim English, an English ia hem bekam, hem bekam oral language ia, bae hem... bae mi had tumas nao fo kam lo taon nao! Bikos mi no save hao fo spikim English. The only language mi save nao is Pijin. Bae mi se ot pipol nao ot selfish.*” (Andrew, FG)

21. “*If Pijin hem disappear an English nomoa, bae hem nogud in the sense that, when iu go bak lo hom olsem, bae hao nao bae pipol... Like fo mi: if mi no save lo Pijin bat mi save nao lo English, mi never spikim Pijin nao, bae mi go kasem lo hom, bat ot great-grani blo mi no save spikim English, bae otta no understandim wat nao mi talem. Lo English. So mi mas lanem both. So taem mi go bak lo hom, mi save speak Pijin an bae hem save.*” (Sandra)

In other terms, Pijin is perceived as making a link between the ‘*moden/urban*’ and the ‘*lokol/rural*’ components of Solomon society - simultaneously getting over the geographical, generational and the educational gaps between Solomon Islanders. This is an important point, with thorny implications in terms of social differentiation, which will be discussed further in the second section of this chapter.

#### **5.1.4. Solomon students’ dilemma: pragmatism vs. national allegiance**

During focus groups, the anti-Pijin position - overtly favouring the dominance of English to the expense of Pijin in the future – often aroused (half-playful) indignation.

Conversely, the pro-Pijin stance - defending Pijin as the national language of Solomon Islands, and acknowledging one's affective attachment to this language – provoked loud laughter from other participants (as can be noticed in quotes 16 and 17, from Andrew and Simon, recurrently interrupted by laughs). Due to two concurrent assumptions, both widely accepted – that Pijin is *de facto* Solomons' national language, but that it is “just broken English” – both positions were socially uncomfortable. Students appeared caught between two attitudes: pragmatically privileging social mobility, or giving priority to national solidarity. It is the way they negotiated this tension that I will now discuss.

### *The anti-Pijin “guilt”*

For the “anti-Pijin” hard-liners described at the beginning of this section, affectivity toward Pijin appeared extremely limited. However, the large majority of “anti-Pijin” students did not have such a stark stance: They did claim to lament the disappearance of Pijin, but considered the gains greater than the loss. They acknowledged Pijin as part of Solomon national culture (albeit to a lesser extent than vernaculars) and considered that, as such, it should *ideally* be protected. Nancy, who viewed the replacement of Pijin by English as all in all desirable, clearly articulated this tension:

22. “Wat nao iu tingse bae happen wetem Pijin in 10 years?  
*If evriwan hem get educated, hem laek learnim English, English naia an Pijin bae hem lus, so...*  
 Iu tingse hem gud olsem o hem nogud?  
*Hum... Hem gud an hem nogud. (laughs)*  
 So wae nao hem gud?  
*Fo helpem oketa students, hem helpem oketa fo... saed lo schoolwork blo oketa, fo understandim gud English an hao ot duim, fo helpem oketa fo waka tu.*  
 An wae nao hem nogud?  
*Hem nogud bikos... hem wanfala language lo hia tu, so mifala mas maintain (light laugh), kipim language blo mifala.”*

In other terms, even if they did not endorse it, most students acknowledged the existence of the pro-Pijin “nationalist” discourse, and generally did not deny its relevance.

Even the “anti-Pijin” hard-liners were *aware* of it and took it into account – if only to dismiss it. In Suva, they emphasized that this reasoning (the political implementation of which was described by Martin as “*nationalizim language*”) should not apply to Pijin, because it is not a “cultural” language rooted in Solomon culture (cf. Section 4.3.2). Among Honiaran “anti-Pijin” students, its influence was more subtle, but also notable. The defence of Pijin as Solomon national language frequently arose as the position they felt they *should* morally endorse as Solomon Islanders, even if they privileged more pragmatic considerations. For example, Steven, in the quote presented at the end of the previous chapter, joked that he should feel guilty not to defend Pijin as his national language. James insisted that in the future Pijin would become a distinctively Solomon version of English, *not* Standard English. These remarks, choice of arguments, as well as the diffuse social pressure which seemed to make students feel embarrassed to declare overtly their preference for English during focus groups, hint at the existence of a relatively well rooted nationalist counter-ideology with regard to Pijin. The nationalist discourse which presents Pijin as an integral part of Solomon Islands’ national heritage is not, as such, a *public* discourse: It has very little visibility in daily life<sup>7</sup>. Yet, its influence among students should not be underestimated.

*The pro-Pijin complexities: dealing with the colonial ideological legacy*

If the “anti-Pijin” position was often slightly embarrassed, the “pro-Pijin” one was virtually always conspicuously tormented. The case of these students, who argued for the

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<sup>7</sup> Out of the context of interviews, I hardly ever heard this discourse explicitly voiced in Honiara. The exact source and channels of diffusion of this ideology (professors? TV? radio? migrants?) remain rather obscure to me and would certainly deserve more systematic investigation.

maintenance of Pijin (ideally in its “real” version), is especially enlightening as it lays bare the contradictions in which many Solomon students are currently entangled.

A first contradiction - at the linguistic level - is worth being highlighted: As could be noticed in the quotes throughout this thesis, condemning the blending of English into Pijin did not stop students from practicing it. This fact was especially striking in double interviews where one informant had a “pro-Pijin” discourse and the other an “anti-Pijin” one. The type of Pijin Joseph employed to advocate the official recognition of this language was at times not less heavily anglicized than the one his co-interviewee used to claim her preference for English. Similarly, Lionel used just as many English phrases to lament the extinction of “real” Pijin as his cousin Steven did to dismiss it as a “past thing”.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond this discrepancy between discourse and linguistic behaviours, the major difficulty of the pro-Pijin position lies in the coexistence of conflicting attitudes<sup>9</sup>. These students considered that Pijin had become, to *some* extent, a “real” language and should be protected as part of Solomons’ national culture; they claimed that they could hardly imagine, and would deeply regret, its disappearance. However, in parallel, they also definitely favoured education in English as a necessity for both individual social mobility and national socio-economic development. Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 4, many students still hold, regardless of their affectivity for Pijin, the prejudice that it is a broken version of English which has a detrimental effect on the acquisition of “proper” English. At first, pragmatically defending English in schools did not seem to conflict with their affective attachment for Pijin: The two dimensions were treated as separate. However, when the future of Pijin was discussed, this stance on education visibly generated

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<sup>8</sup> This paradox will be (partly) explained in the next section, in relation to social differentiation.

<sup>9</sup> With the notable exception of Joseph, who resolutely viewed Pijin as a language distinct from English, minimized the problem of interference and consistently advocated its introduction in schools.

dissonance, as it appeared clear to many informants that English schooling played a determining role in the blending of English and Pijin.

Faced with this dilemma, a small minority took decision in favour of Pijin: Pijin and English should be equally learnt at school, from the primary level, as fully separate languages. This was for example the case for Wendy:

23. *"I think, ot shud passim desfala original Pijin thing. I mean, fo official language naia. Bikos... bae mi lanem English nomoa tu, ia. So, save gud lo original Pijin ia, fo identity blo mi, real Solomon Island Pijin."* (Wendy, FG girls)

In her view, the problem of interference between Pijin and English would be solved if Solomon people stopped mixing them<sup>10</sup>:

24. *"Bikos lo Vanuatu oketa no mixim, ia ba? Bislama blo oketa ia. Ot no mix wetem English, den taem oketa kam tok lo English... hem stret nomoa. Den iumi save duim nomoa... I mean, like this Solomon Pijin ia, bae iumi save duim nomoa tu, ia. Hem doesn't matter nomoa dis broken Pijin.. like, iumi save original Pijin blo iumi, taem English kam, bae iumi save cope nomoa..."*

However, the other "pro-Pijin" students could not settle the issue. They wished that *some* action be taken to maintain and promote Pijin, but away from schools. This was for example Lionel's suggestion<sup>11</sup>:

25. *"Fo kipim Pijin, fo hem stay, ating Govman hem shud existim wanfala institution wea, basically, fo lanem Pijin nomoa. Fo eniwan hem garew intrest, hem go nao. (...) Bat hem shud wanfala independent institution, apart from formal education. I think hem the only way fo preservim language blo iumi nao, bikos if we no longer iusim, hem lus! An if hem lus, had fo bringim bak."*

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<sup>10</sup> Several students in education mentioned that Pijin was planned to be soon introduced in the Solomon curriculum for primary school. Although this fact was treated as relatively marginal during interviews (even by the few respondents who knew it), it is indeed an important development. A "Vernacular in Education" policy is currently under consideration at the Ministry of Education: From 2009 on, vernaculars in the provinces, and Pijin in Honiara, may become the medium of education from Standard 1 to 3, with English studied as a second language, and Pijin formally learnt as a subject. One of the main goals of this policy is to help children distinguish Pijin from English, and, in the end, improve their skills in English (source: Benedict Esibaea, director of the Primary Education Level at the Ministry of Education).

<sup>11</sup> Quite funnily, he had laughed at his "anti-Pijin" cousin's semi-ironic suggestion to put written Pijin in libraries, as *"a souvenir from Solomon Islands"* (i.e. virtually as a cultural artefact in museums); yet we may wonder whether the difference would actually be so great. Following Calvet (1979:149), one may argue that such *limited* teaching of a dominated language as an "historical monument" to be saved, would in fact confirm and reinforce its subordinate condition, rather than challenging the hegemony of the dominant language: The dominated language would then be deprived of social dynamism and future.

At most, they contended that “real” Pijin should be learnt as a subject – not to say as a foreign language – in schools, but in a curriculum otherwise in English. This would be meant both at preserving a small amount of time for the practice of Pijin, and at teaching young children “proper” Pijin.

26. *“I think... if fo stopem Pijin fo hem no bekam English, I think ot mas introducim Pijin olsem wanfala subject insaed lo skuls. If ot no... introducim datwan insaed lo skuls, bae... mi lukim high possibility fo Pijin hem turn lo English.”* (James FG)

27. *“Mi laek English, evri subject should be taught in English, bat ot shud at least make one Pijin klas tu, I think. For during that time nao ot Pijin.”* (Janet)

28. *“Otta shud... kos Pijin, mifala evriwan born kam, mifala save nao, mifala save spikim. Bat olsem, saed lo... wat ia, grammar, fo lanem gud olsem, otta shud promotim datwan. Olsem otta pikinini lanem fo raetim an save gud lo Pijin, olsem real Pijin. (...) Bikos pikinini distaem nao ot bara... mix tumas nao. So ot shud putim kam eni subject lo Pijin, fo ot pikinini lanem.”* (Laura, Suva)

### *The ambiguities of students’ nationalism*

In the case of these pro-Pijin students, the residual effect of the colonial language ideology, combined with the great instrumental value granted to English, thwarts their nationalist feelings and leads them to be adverse to the promotion of Pijin as national language. The combination of colonial and nationalist ideologies manifests itself in another important context that we have already discussed (see Section 4.2.2.): students’ behaviours in the classroom. The virtual obligation to use Pijin, rather than English, was often presented by informants as a form of national solidarity (desired by some, imposed on all), not to say of nationalism. Andrew articulated it clearly:

29. *“Hem bikos mifala fil... mifala belong to Solomon Islands (light laughs from others), an Pijin nao hem language blo mifala, ia. Hem olsem second mother tongue blo mifala, ia. An whenever mifala spikim Pijin, hem mekem assis blo mifala belong to Solomon Islands nao. An whenever iu speak English olsem, man... (Simon conspicuously parts his arms) olsem distance, ia.”*

The paradox of this “nationalist” behaviour is that it is rooted, as explained previously, in the colonial language ideology, which links language, race and social status in a way which

definitely gives English and white people the upper ground. Analyzing a similar case among young Kanaks in Nouméa, Barnèche notes (2005:77-79) that this creates a situation where the local identity is construed as a “negative identity”<sup>12</sup>: One is heavily penalized by the group if suspected of trying to distance oneself from the local identity, while this identity is *concurrently* devalued. The same point could be made regarding Solomon national identity among students.

Nationalism in Solomon Islands is primarily conceived by its leaders as a means to hold together a population extremely diverse at the ethnical level (Jourdan 2004[1995]: 113); it is not firstly constructed in opposition to an ascribed “other”. However, the European “other”, as a stereotypical social category inherited from the colonial period with ascribed attributes of superiority, is still conspicuously present. All references made by students to Solomon national culture were systematically negative, implicitly or explicitly contrasted with an idealized Western culture in which people would always be punctual, polite, would never fight, would always stick to their promises and would always work cooperatively. *Positive* nationalist feelings were never voiced among my USP informants<sup>13</sup>. Jokes about “Solomon time” were an everyday occurrence, and when I highlighted an aspect of Solomon life that I liked – such as the extreme kindness and open-mindedness of many Solomon Islanders – my friends automatically downplayed it or turned it negatively. Quite frequently, national self-derision in USP students’ jokes verged on self-denigration<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> This concept was originally developed by Camilleri (1990), with regard to immigrant populations in France. I privilege Barnèche’s analysis here because she adapted it to a context of study much more relevant to my own research.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew’s utterance (just quoted) was in fact the *closest* to qualify as “positive nationalist feelings”, and provoked embarrassed laughs among all focus group participants.

<sup>14</sup> The idea that news and speeches had to be in English because some foreigner *may* be there and *may* not understand Pijin (voiced by many of my respondents, see Section 4.2.1) could also be viewed as a form of excessive politeness toward outsiders and concurrent disregard of fellow Solomon Islanders - considering that a much greater number of them were likely to listen and not to understand English.



The idea that Pijin is a “broken” language can be viewed as one example of more general internalization of marginalizing racist theories by Solomon people (Keesing 1990; Stritecky 2001:138). Indeed, disparaging remarks on Pijin, on Solomon culture and on Black people seemed to partake of a single reasoning, and were often made concurrently. Note, for example, this presentation of Pijin as a shortened version of English by a focus group participant:

30. “*Hao mifala putim, English into short terms, wea mifala understandim, mifala black pipol.*” (Gabriel, FG Honiara)<sup>15</sup>

Note also this remark from Sarah, who states that people do not need to be literate in Pijin because it is an identity-language “just for locals”, i.e. marginal on the global scale:

31. “*I think, tingting blo mi olsem, hem no matter nomoa [if people are not literate in Pijin]. Bikos Pijin, hem fo lokols nomoa, hem olsem identity fo Solomon Islands so... like, spikim Pijin oketa save, bat raetim, bae hem.... hem no matter nomoa.*”

Solomon Islands is a country constantly devalued by students *at the level of discourse*. And yet, in Suva, I shared with my Solomon friends sincere feelings of homesickness. We all missed ‘*hom*’ – the strange spell of Honiara, a city with little charm, inadequate infrastructure, but which captures the hearts of those who stay long enough. At the USP Open Day, my friends bought T-shirts from the Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival displaying Solomon national colours - quite an expense for Solomon Islanders, and expatriate students in particular. They wore them proudly. I was struck by the discrepancy between their disparaging jokes and their hearty attachment for Solomons.

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<sup>15</sup> The parallel with the situation described by Barnèche is striking. Linguistic incapacity is presented as determined by ethnic identity (2005:79): “*On peut pas bien parler... on parle simple... c’est mélanésien.*” (“We can’t speak properly... we speak simple... the Melanesian way”). Conversely, Kanak youth are severely penalized by their peers if they speak “too well”, as this is interpreted as an attempt to “*faire le Blanc*” (“act whiteman”).

*By way of conclusion: Taking a stance on the country's future*

I already pointed out that the age at which Pijin was learnt does not determine attachment to Pijin in any simple way. Some students who grew up with Pijin as main language could nonetheless, because they definitely privileged pragmatic considerations, resolutely assert that its replacement by English would be desirable. Conversely, some students born in the provinces, who had learnt Pijin relatively late in life in a formal context (at the primary school) and did not use it as their main language until recently, were among the most ardent defenders of Pijin. In fact, having learnt Pijin as a second language seems to polarize, rather than to determine, attitudes toward it. One may advance that, while they were all introduced to Pijin as (*de facto*) national language at school, some adopted it affectively as a second mother tongue, while others did not and maintained clearly stronger allegiance to their vernacular and ethno-linguistic group.

In this regard, personality – an elusive and highly impractical variable – seems to play a major role. Striking differences manifested themselves for example between two cousins, Steven and Lionel, who had grown up and acquired Pijin in very similar conditions: Steven's reasoning was exclusively turned toward the future, whereas Lionel felt that it was paramount to understand and respect one's background. Thus, when Steven claimed his indifference to the possible loss of "real" Pijin and other "past cultural things", he provoked Lionel's indignation:

32. "S: *Tingting blo mi, Johanna, I think, we'll never look back nao I think. Evriting past I think oketa forgetem these things. I mean these days people no adapted to... all the things wea are from older days I think are past nao. Pipol don't want... that missing things past nao, we live modern, ia. We don't care about the cultural things...* (laughs)  
L: *Diskaen of thinking hem...*" (stifling his irritation)

The "anti-Pijin" and the "pro-Pijin" stances illustrated by Steven and Lionel involve different conceptions of the future of their country: one turned toward the future, the other

rooted in the past and present. For those who defended the recognition of Pijin as official language, this recognition would simply bring the national Constitution into line with the current reality of the population – and several of my informants indeed wondered why the Government had not done it yet:

33. *“If iu luk distaem, I think Pijin nao most pipol spikim ia, not English. So I feel I would rather go for they put both English an Pijin as official languages.”* (William)

34. *“Language hem samthing go wetem population, ia. So if iumi lukluk lo population dat ot educated an population dat ot no educated, lo Solomon Islands very few nomoa bae ot educated and bae ot iusim English. While the rest bae ot iusim Pijin.”* (Joseph)

On the other hand, the students who hope that Pijin will eventually be superseded by English argued for the maintenance of English as the sole official language of Solomon Islands: They considered it an *ideal* to be reached in the near future, and officializing Pijin would jeopardize this desirable evolution. They dismissed the objection that it may create a social gap, by stating that with time, hopefully, *all* Solomon Islanders (including those who live in rural areas) would become fluent in English through formal education. Curiously, they frequently presented this point as if English was *not yet* the official language of education in Solomon Islands, and had not been so for decades:

35. *“Mi ting, hem shud English nao. Hemi... hemi official language... At least iumi trae fo adoptim nao English.”* (Martin, Suva)

36. *“Bae hem evriwhere nao if ot introduce lo skul, like getem skul lo hem.”* (Jeffrey, Suva)

It is in reference to this ideal that the national leaders' choice of privileging English as official language and language of education was understood by these students. It often led them to ascribe surprising priorities to the Solomon government, as illustrated by this exchange with Sandra:

37. *“If ot mekem Pijin official language, tingting blo mi olsem, even ot students ia, ot students wea no save abaotim English, no save gud English, oketa bae tekem scores, oketa bae learn much more. Bikos oketa no save nao lo English, so taem oketa learnim lo Pijin, oketa garem more knowledge an understanding naia.”*

So wae nao Government hem no duim olsem? Sapos hem isi winim fo students, wae nao Government hem no mekem decision that evriwan bac tekem exam lo Pijin?  
*Ya... Bikos, I think Government hem no duim bikos Government hem luk beyond that. Bikos English nao hem important, official language. If iu go out in outside world, iu save mitim diferan pipol, they never speak Pijin, they speak English. So Government hem luluk lo English. Pipol mas learnim English, ia? Fo communicate."*

Thus, rather than increasing literacy rates within the country, the national government would promote the use of an international language enabling people to seek opportunities *abroad*. These students, who reason with a global (as opposed to national) frame of reference in mind, do not perceive any risk of conflict between national and individual interests<sup>16</sup>: They “look beyond”, viewing Solomon Islands less as a self-sufficient country than as a potential member of the global, developed, English-speaking community.

The issue of the future of Pijin enabled me to highlight the coexistence of divergent ideologies in students’ attitudes and to broach the discussion on larger issues in which all Solomon students are enmeshed. The opposition between social mobility and national solidarity constituted a salient axis around which their discourses revolved. In the next section, I will explore further how social differentiation, in a culture which traditionally emphasizes equality and solidarity, manifests itself in students’ discourses on Pijin. Finally, to close this chapter, I will suggest that post-colonial and pre-colonial language ideologies may sometimes fruitfully combine in the views of certain pro-Pijin students, to sustain a more egalitarian view of the relationships between languages - and peoples.

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<sup>16</sup> To be fair, it should be noted that, even among the most “nationalist” students, the risk of “brain-drain” was never considered as such. Firstly, because the Solomon curriculum currently *requires* students to complete their university degree abroad; secondly, because it was generally assumed that Solomon Islanders would eventually return to their country after having acquired financial and cultural capital overseas (and, based on what I have heard and seen in Honiara, they often do). Spending some years abroad is therefore never interpreted as a betrayal of one’s country, but as a *passage obligé* to contribute to its development.

## **5.2. The subtle force of social differentiation**

Class differentiation is a thorny issue in Solomon Islands. The country is traditionally known as a “classless” society, based on the *bigmen* leadership system (I heard this point made again during a Politics class that I attended at the USP Center during my stay). Students’ rationalizations of their anti-English behaviours in the classroom suggest the large extent to which the egalitarian ethos is still embraced. However, universities are by nature middle-class settings, inaccessible to the huge majority of Solomon Islanders due to their harshly selective registration system and their expensive fees. USP students are *de facto* part of an elite group in the country.

Before going further, I have to specify a distinction to which I will resort throughout this section: the difference between middle-class and upper-class students. I stated in Chapter 2 that all my informants, as USP students, could be said to be members of at least the middle-class, but that about one third of them should actually be considered upper-middle-class. This distinction was mainly based on their family background (i.e. belonging to an urban middle-class family where the father works, or used to work, as a high-level civil servant). The upper-middle-class urbanites - who are the category specifically described by Gooberman-Hill (1999) - stood out among my informants through their extremely trendy style in clothes, their outgoing attitudes, and (as we shall see) their peculiar attitude toward “mixed” Pijin. The fact of having been “overseas” is also a factor which increases students’ perceived class status<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, studying in Suva seemed to

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<sup>17</sup> Gooberman-Hill (1999) notes that having studied abroad is an important marker of middle-classness. Indeed, when I asked Honiaran students at the beginning of the interviews whether they had ever traveled abroad, a negative response (by far the most frequent) was almost systematically accompanied by an embarrassed laugh.

provide some sense of distance and superiority over the students still in Honiara<sup>18</sup>. Although not all of them were born as urbanites, my Suva informants tended to mobilize the same *type* of arguments (i.e. using examples from foreign countries, displaying familiarity with the “nationalist” discourse) as upper-class Honiarans involved in international networks through their professional or social contacts<sup>19</sup>. Admittedly, the distinction between middle- and upper-class students is not a sharp one, and is better conceived as a continuum; nonetheless, there were some interesting differences in discourses between students depending on their class situation. This was particularly clear in the case of students who combined *several* sources of social status (i.e. who had a middle-class family background, had traveled abroad and worked for NGOs or as teachers) - a small minority (half a dozen) that I will label “upper-class” students, and who were virtually all born in the capital-city.

Several recent analyses emphasize the appearance of class stratification in Melanesian countries (Foster 1995 and Errington and Gewertz 1997 and 1999 on PNG; Gooberman-Hill 1999). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the deteriorated economic situation in Solomon Islands puts pressure on the new-born middle-class. In PNG, Errington and Gewertz (1999:7-8) point to the saturation of public service and the economic decline since 1994 as a factor which prompts the happy few who already achieved a middle-class position to “fix” it as distinct from the poor, through the creation of new forms of distinction based on cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1991) – educational and linguistic - rather than material goods. Gooberman-Hill (1999) indeed highlights the ‘*moden*’/’*lokol*’

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<sup>18</sup> From Suva, ‘*hom*’ becomes Honiara and the occurrences in which this term was employed suggested that it carried a notion of “backwardness” that it often has in Honiara in relation to the provinces.

<sup>19</sup> Since the possibility for expatriation largely depends on cultural capital, and imparts additional cultural capital, it is actually little surprising that the upper-class and expatriate discourses be closely related: the two categories largely overlap.

opposition as sustaining the Honiaran middle-class discourses and practices. This categorization is both geographical and social: The marking of social boundaries, i.e. the disparagement of people as *lokol* by the middle-class, is often expressed in reference to lack of education (1999:145). We shall see throughout this section how this dichotomy underlies students' discourses, despite their general cautiousness not to resort to it.

### **5.2.1. Linguistic syncretism and class distinction**

The '*moden/lokol*' dichotomy highlighted by Gooberman-Hill has a linguistic counterpart. Competence in the legitimate language, which depends on one's family environment and education, has been highlighted by a vast literature in sociolinguistics as a major site of "distinction" (Bourdieu 1982, 1984, 1991; also Labov 1966; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Gumperz 1982; Myers-Scotton 1993; Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998 to cite only a few). As noted by Jourdan (2007a:36), and as this thesis extensively illustrates, many educated Solomon Islanders intersperse Pijin with English to such an extent that it creates a linguistic continuum where boundaries are difficult to define. Familiarity with English, manifested through the practice of code-switching and "mixing", is an important marker of social distinction in Solomon Islands, as it displays people's proximity with highly valued social worlds: higher education, international jobs and social networks.

The variety of Pijin that USP students, as other members of the Honiaran middle-class, use can be described as a "mixed urban code". As defined by Swigart (1994:178), an urban variety is "*a code used by speakers who share more than one language and who wish to use both in order to communicate more fully*". The fact of "mixing" is then a mark of

trendy urban sophistication, which indexes people's membership to the urban elite - educated, middle-class, "modern", with a dual local *and* cosmopolitan identity.

In an urban context, code-switching can actually be the norm, an unmarked feature of urban speech considered normal and expected; by contrast, it is the *absence* of mix which is perceived as awkward<sup>20</sup> (Spitulnik 1998:50; Swigart 1994:177; Makihara 2004; Riley 2007). Consider for example this exchange during the group with Honiaran girls:

38. "Mixim bae hem oraet? Staka professor duim olsem...olsem haf sentence lo English, haf lo Pijin... go bak lo English, go bak lo Pijin... Olsem hem here naes o... hem here karangge?

J: *Hem here mix... Hem here mixture naia...* (laughs)

W: *Like fo distaem... hem usually olsem nomoa. After all, this instance, bae hem here normal nomoa, I mean, bae hem here oraet nomoa... Bat fo... I mean... separatim nao bae hem here abnormal nao. I mean, hem here karangge nao if bae iumi... iumi ting fo passim difala Pijin... [making "pure" Pijin the official language] Bat fo normal life distaem, sapos hem mix up... bae hem here normal naia!*

J: *Pipol garew tufala wea fo mix... sometimes oketa chiusim English insaed lo Pijin...Olsem mi duim tu, ia. Staka time mi duim. Olsem, evriwan duim lo Honiara distaem. Bat samfala pipol sometimes oketa speak English...olsem oketa go... olsem between lo tufala, olsem! "*

"Mixing", then, is not necessarily a middle-class preserve: In many post-colonial countries, *some* contact with the official language (through others' speech, TV and radio) is hardly avoidable even among unschooled people, and the use of code-switching may not require full proficiency in the two codes. However, the "mixed" code may come under different variants (in lexical, syntactic and stylistic elaboration, and density of elements from the prestige language) which depend on level of bilingualism, i.e. on class and education (Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998:85-86). Among highly-educated bilinguals, the colonial language may actually provide the matrix, in which numerous phrases from the local language are embedded (Swigart 1994:176). British Received Pronunciation (RP) phonology can also be retained in the most upper-class version of an urban variety

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<sup>20</sup> In such a case, it is the general pattern of mixing which has social meaning, whereas the exact moment when the speaker shifts from one language to the other is not deemed important and goes largely unnoticed (Spitulnik 1998:50; also Poplack 1988).



(Spitulnik 1998:46). As will be illustrated later in this section, both phenomena did manifest themselves in the speech of my upper-class informants – besides the fact that two of them opted for doing the whole interview in English. Here we see what Irvine and Gal (2000) call a phenomenon of “recursivity”, from colonial to in-group social differentiation: As a version of the local language heavily mixed with the prestige language is used (consciously or not) for internal social differentiation, the social hierarchies of colonial diglossia are reproduced recursively *inside* the local society (Makihara 2004:536).

But urban mixed varieties find themselves in an ambiguous situation. As indexing trendiness, sophistication, modernity and a cosmopolitan orientation, they are socially prestigious and widely used. Yet, they are also criticized as corrupted by comparison with the “pure/perfect” (rural or “old”) variety of the local language (Swigart 1994; Spitulnik 1998). This ambivalence was obvious in USP students’ labelling of the urban variety of “mixed” Pijin that they speak as “broken Pijin” or “Pijin-English”<sup>21</sup>. It seems to be due to the competition of the “syncretic” ideology, prevalent in the urban context, with “purist” ideologies which assert the higher legitimacy of “pure” codes over “mixed-up” ones (Riley 2007:72; Makihara 2004). These purist ideologies, to which I have already alluded in the last chapter, have developed in many countries among intellectuals and political leaders in the context of indigenous movements for local languages’ revitalization (Swigart 1994:181; Makihara 2007). *Officially*, they have the upper ground; yet, often, at a deeper level and in the larger society, the strict separation of the two codes is rejected and the mixed codes are strongly, if *covertly*, prestigious (Riley 2007:79).

In Honiara as in the contexts described by Makihara (2004), Swigart (1994), Spitulnik (1998) and Riley (2007), mixing is so usual that it goes largely unnoticed. People

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<sup>21</sup> See my discussion on the perception of the current evolution of Pijin in Section 4.1.2.

may condemn the practice *in theory*, but in daily conversations they would not make negative comments on people's use of it<sup>22</sup>. Precisely because it is unmarked in the social context that they inhabit, people can - and frequently do - mix *while* criticizing it (Swigart 1994:181; Spitulnik 1998:41). This explains why pro-Pijin students, as I noted earlier, could profusely resort to "mixing" even if they criticized this practice. Observing a comparable phenomenon among students in Northern Norway, Blom and Gumperz note that people do not need to be strictly consistent in their behaviours, and may want to highlight different social identities to which they can legitimately claim (1972:421). During group interviews, Norwegian students unconsciously tended to resort to linguistic forms taken from Standard Norwegian – the language of education - when they wanted to give weight to their arguments, asserting in this way their status as intellectuals; yet, in parallel, they vigorously criticized the practice of switching (1972:430). In the same way, USP students, as Solomon Islanders, may want to express their loyalty to their national identity; nonetheless, they are also students, members of the educated middle-class, and may use metaphorical switching to allude to their double condition.

Precisely because they are officially disparaged, mixed codes often have a "subversive cool" which can be appropriated by the urban youth (Riley 2007:81; Swigart 1994:182). Indeed, among several upper-class USP students who grew up with Pijin as first language and proudly asserted their urban upbringing, the "broken", flexible nature of Pijin was distinctly valued. "Mixed" Pijin was presented by these informants as a new hybrid, rapidly evolving language which allows young Solomon urbanites to express freely their

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<sup>22</sup> There is one important exception, though: As noted by Swigart (1994:185) on the case of Senegal, the practice of mixing in *formal* contexts is generally much less accepted. Several USP students indeed stated that in Parliament debates it looked untidy and laughable for "*big men*". Moreover, as already mentioned, the practice of mixing was also often criticized in schools, for this reason among others.

worldview and communicate with each other without normative constraints. One might argue that the negative prejudice against Pijin as a “broken” language was then reversed and revalorized as an essential feature of the language of young, modern, open-minded and trendy urbanites:

39. *“Mifala save iusim new Pijin wea hem katem short evriting! Olsem teenager Pijin o wat?”*  
(Sarah)

40. *“Lo mi hem naes nomoa! Bikos bae mi save... Pijin Pijin wetem eniwan, I mean, broken Pijin ia, broken English.”* (Lydia)

41. *“Hem new culture lo language. Bifoa, iu tok stret. Distaem... (...) Fo mi, whatever language, Pijin mi garem distaem, mi proud lo hem, ia. Even if hem mixed wetem English, hem still Pijin, at least hem garem that essence... mixture blo Pijin insaed. Hem mekem hem different, hem language itself.”* (Alison)

In this regard Solomon Pijin, as “broken” Pijin, was preferred to “purer” Melanesian Pidgins such as Tok Pisin:

42. *“Blo PNG bae mi understandim, an Bislama maybe tutri wods hem similar, bat Pijin hem pure broken English nao.”* (Alison, clearly enthusiastic)

An important part of what is loved about this “broken” Pijin is the fact that it can integrate new creations from the youth. New “slangs” derived from English, Pijin and vernaculars are constantly incorporated in urban Pijin – and, noticeably, words from other people’s ‘*langgus*’ can perfectly become adopted by all youth, regardless of their ethnic background:

43. *“Taem iu mixim wetem langgus hem bara naes tumas! Olsem, bae iu expressim olsem wat iu laek duim nao olsem bae hem bara naes nao. Olsem iu expressim bae hem bara herem naes nao. So nomata iu iusim wod from different langgus, hem gud tu? Ya. (assertive) Hem insaed evriwan iusim nomoa.”* (Laura)

In this process, the urban youth creatively appropriate the language, in a way which is perceived as crosscutting both ethnic and class boundaries. This conception of “mixed” Pijin (in contrast to Standard English) shares some interesting similarities with the way young urban Kanaks in New Caledonia view their “*français kaya*”, as described by Barnèche (2005:218-221). Nouméa youth have developed and appropriated a distinctive

version of French which, while depreciated as deficient and sloppy, is praised as associated with values of freedom, solidarity and creativity (in contrast to the standard version of French, seen as constraining and uselessly pretentious).

These upper-class students often revealed great affectivity for Pijin when confronted with the idea that it may one day be superseded by English. Here is such an occurrence, in which Alison explains what she loves about “her” language:

44. “Mi fil, olsem iu laekem Pijin, olsem iu garem samfala affection fo Pijin...  
Yeea... (emphatic, melting tone, followed by light laughs)  
*Oh, mi laekem Pijin bikos... I think bikos hem broken Pijin... I mean broken English, hem mixed Pijin, an I think, taem mi tok wetem eniwan hem save understandim Pijin, mi fri fo... expressim miseleva. (cheerful) An mi think hem here naes! (laughs) I mean, mi toktok obaotim spikim Pijin, ok? Hem nao mi se... hem beautiful one. Mi no save fo describim bat... hem mekem hao mi expressim miseleva hem kam out an...*  
So iu fil fri...  
*Ya, mi fil fri. Like, if mi expressim mi lo English, hem, evriting insaed lo mi dat mi laek talem obaotim lo English hem no kam aot. Like, mi no save... a lot of words mi no save iusim ot wods. Bat lo Pijin, Pijin hem fani, hem nao mi se: iu save describim eniting, for instance if mi Pijin distaem fo desfala open field, mi bara balance, mi fil cool! (laughs)*  
Ok! (laughs)  
*An, ‘mi bas distaem’, distaem hem new language mifala save iusim fo... heu, ‘bas’ hem ‘best’, bat mifala se ‘bas’. Hem just... unique an...” (enthusiastic)*

In their valuation of their “mixed” Pijin, the Honiaran middle-class youth make use of the old colonial labels “Pijin-English” and “broken English” to fill them with new positive meanings<sup>23</sup>. The notion of “broken English” is thus reappropriated and transformed into a specifically local, creolized product. This could be taken as an example of Hannerz’ process of maturation, mentioned in Chapter 1. In fact, according to Swigart (1994:186), so do all urban mixed varieties, in that they constitute a *creative* process of appropriation of the colonial language: Through the strategic juxtaposition of the “*we-code*” and “*they-code*” (Gumperz 1982) in code-switching, English is reused for local purposes. People

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<sup>23</sup> Although, certainly, they may also by the same token contribute to perpetuate the social saliency of these labels, and the colonial linguistic hierarchy expressed through them.

appropriate the symbolic capital associated with the dominant language, in a way which contributes to breakdown the previous colonial diglossia (Makihara 2004:537).

But, as emphasized by Swigart and others, this process of appropriation is also *reflexive*. The use of the colonial language has obvious class connotations, and excessive resort to it arouses criticisms. This is illustrated by the critical appraisal of affected use of RP English phonology in Zambia, where upper-class locals who try to speak like Europeans are disparaged through the label of “*chongololos*” (Spitulnik 1996:175). In Senegal, the exclusive use of French, without inserting at least *some* measure of Wolof, also marks people as “*assimilés*” (Swigart 1994:179). Students’ criticisms of the use of “pure” English with fellow Solomon Islanders (most strikingly, as we saw, in the classroom) resonates with Hannerz’ point on the ambivalent feelings toward the “been-tos” in Nigeria (1992). Members of the educated middle-class, hoping to go study overseas to acquire additional cultural capital, Solomon students develop a critical view of the “been-tos” while preparing *themselves* to become “been-tos”.

#### *Reading Pijin’s diversification in social terms*

But while the exclusive resort to English is socially hardly acceptable between Solomon Islanders according to students, Pijin, through its diversification in “mixed” varieties, plays an important role in the process of social differentiation. Jourdan thus observes that, although linguistic choices in Honiara still have a largely open-ended and playful aspect (2007a:45), an increasing differentiation of urban Pijin along “class” lines is currently taking place, with the development of a norm for “good” and “bad” Pijin in Honiara (2007b:101). She argues that, on a national scale, two different norms coexist and compete to evaluate people’s linguistic competence: the urban (‘*moden*’), and the rural, less

influenced by English. Among young middle-class urbanites, the ‘*moden*’ would be clearly dominant, and is used to situate people on the increasingly differentiated social scale; the rural variety becomes associated with unsophisticated, uneducated people. By contrast, the presence of neologisms and English interference in urban speech is perceived as incorrect by older and rural people, and its expansion as national norm is contested (2007b:102). This double norm signals an important cleavage between age, urban/rural and social groups according to Jourdan (2007b:103).

Among my informants, only a small minority of upper-class born-and-bred urbanites (about 1/6), who proudly proclaimed their urban upbringing, clearly match Gobberman-Hill’s and Jourdan’s analyses: They did overtly resort to the ‘*lokol/moden*’ dichotomy (if only jokingly or to defend the “rights” of non-educated people, as we shall see), and asserted the superiority of the ‘*moden*’ version of Pijin:

45. “*Pijin lo taon ia, hem here gud lelebet, ia! Lo hom, hem typical, ia!* (big laughs) *Hem olsem late 60’s Pijin naia! An langgus hem insaed tu!*” (Sarah)

46. “*Hem more fancy, bikos most lo oketa wods hem just prononsim like English... hem lelebet fancy type of Pijin.*” (William)

For the rest (i.e. the huge majority) of my informants, the situation was more complicated. They were generally very cautious when assessing differences between varieties of Pijin – if they acknowledged differences at all, beyond generational ones<sup>24</sup>. Some pointed out that Pijin in the provinces was closer to “*Pijin bifo*”, but by the same token they implied that it was closer to “*real Pijin*”. The tension between competing norms in Pijin (most obvious with regard to SIBC Pijin), which partly reflects the competition of the “syncretic” and “purist” ideologies, was evident in my respondents’ discourses. Most of them were born in

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<sup>24</sup> When I asked what could be said to be “good Pijin” and “bad Pijin”, my question frequently provoked embarrassment – if it was understood at all, as these phrases were not familiar to most students. Very often, they were simply interpreted in terms of speaking it fluently or not.

the provinces, or had spent a significant amount of time there; all had among their relatives people who may fall, in one way or another, under the *lokol* category and speak “rural” Pijin. They were cautious not to disparage them.

Many respondents indeed stressed that “*evri Pijin hem best nomoa*” as long as it enables people to communicate efficiently. Through this answer, they defended the right of rural people to speak their own version, but also their own right to speak “broken”, heavily anglicized Pijin – in other terms, a socially differentiated version of Pijin<sup>25</sup>. Note in particular, in Andrew’s ardent defence of all varieties of Pijin, how class differences through language are admitted *as* they are condemned:

47. “*Lo context blo mifala lo Solomon Islands, hem no matter sapos accent blo iu hem... either hem blo whiteman o hem blo... lokolman. It’s the message nomoa hem important. Nomata iu prononsim Pijin wod wea hem sounds more like... hem kaekae bitalnat tumas so... hem rili barava herem olsem hem bara langgus wod nao, hem oraet: it’s the message hem very important.*”

In this section, I will thus highlight discursive processes of social differentiation that were not conspicuously claimed, but subtly evoked. Most often, as in Andrew’s quote, they were implicit, and at times clearly involuntary.

### 5.2.2. Pijin for whom? The paradox of solidarity

As stated in Chapter 4, many students feel that the language that they speak is closer to English than to “old” Pijin and other Melanesian Pidgins, which they tended to present as foreign languages. When I probed on distinctions between versions of Pijin, the “rural” version (influenced by vernaculars at the phonological and lexical level) was similarly presented as more difficult to understand than urban, heavily anglicized Pijin. This was

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<sup>25</sup> Admittedly, this answer cannot be straightforwardly or exclusively interpreted in “class” terms. Acceptance of linguistic divergence and emphasis on effective communication are definite traits of a pre-colonial “cosmopolitan” language ideology, which will be exposed in the next section. Yet, the fact that this point was especially stressed by upper-middle-class students suggests that a social interpretation of it may well be relevant: Arguably, these students make in this case a “class” use of this local ideology.

done in subtly normative way. “*Falom accent*” (i.e. using one’s vernacular phonology) was perceived as a deviation from the ideal pronunciation in Pijin<sup>26</sup>. Students also pointed out that the use of vernacular words in Pijin jeopardizes inter-communication between Solomon Islanders from different linguistic groups:

48. “*It would be sort of bad Pijin if people use words from their langgus. Because how can I from the Temotu province, define a word from the Malaitan province?*” (Nelson)

In this sense, anglicized Pijin was deemed more “*multicultural*” - all the more that it broadens the possibilities of communication to foreigners too.

Interestingly, then, the use of English words was not perceived as an obstacle to communication, as it is assumed that all educated Solomon Islanders are proficient in it:

49. “*Mixed wetem English hem naes nomoa. Hem isi fo understand.*” (Lydia)

The most educated people were even alleged to be *more* proficient in English than in Pijin. This was clearly stated by William with regard to news:

50. “*English news hem no mainly fo foreigners bat... different people with different backgrounds lo education. Kos staka lo otta Solomon Islanders wea otta highly-qualified, they better understand news in English than in Pijin.*”

This brings us back to the linkage between language and class status (mediated by race) which is, as we have seen, rooted in the colonial ideology. According to this “evolutionary” ideology, as people become educated - both at the individual and at the national levels - they are expected to *move* from Pijin (“broken” English) to (“proper”) English. The idea that highly educated Solomon Islanders may speak English *instead* of Pijin, rather than becoming bilingual, was indeed suggested by several informants. For example, the director

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<sup>26</sup> Noticeably, while English pronunciation appeared as an ideal norm *by opposition* to ‘*langgus*’ pronunciation, this did not entail that expatriates were perceived as having the best pronunciation: Several students mentioned that “*whiteman accent*” in Pijin sounds funny too to Solomon ears. One might say that Anglophone foreigners were perceived as following themselves their vernacular phonology and, regardless of the fact that this vernacular was English, this was wrong too.



of the USP Center was suspected by some students of not speaking Pijin *at all*, i.e. of having lost his proficiency in Pijin, as he (allegedly) uses exclusively English in daily life. As for students, they find themselves in an intermediary situation. They cannot claim to be part of the English-speaking “elite” - as fellow classmates roughly recall them. But they are nonetheless well educated people, and claim English as “their” language *by contrast to non-educated* Solomon Islanders.

This fact was clearly brought to light when the usefulness of news, books and speeches in Pijin was discussed. We have already mentioned that speeches in English were rationalized as intended for expatriates, in line with students’ emphasis on the international, rather than formal, aspect of English. Yet, this does not entail that Pijin versions (i.e. speeches in Pijin by expatriates, the Pijin news on SIBC and the Pijin translation of the Bible) are conversely meant for *all* Solomon Islanders, including *themselves*. Rather, it was consistently asserted that they were intended for low-educated Solomon Islanders who do not master English. Here are some telling examples:

51. “*Wae nao SIBC ot mekem lo Pijin, bikos SIBC nao hem national broadcast, so ot pipol lo rural areas ot herehere kam tu. So one lo English ot no rili understandim, so hem gud olsem.*” (Janet)

52. “*First mekem lo English, fo ot expatriates save wat the news is all about, then ot mekem lo Pijin, for mekem those people who no save English ot save understandim.*” (Lionel)

53. “*Otta prodiusim Bibles fo oketa lokols ia, ot no save rid English den rid Pijin. Bikos staka no understandim English: ot save rid, bat otta no rili minim wat nao... Dastawae otta have to raetim Pijin.*” (Kate)

When this issue was discussed, students shifted their perspective from the fact that Pijin is the common language of the majority of Solomon Islanders (themselves included) to the view (rooted in the colonial ideology) that only illiterate people really *need* Pijin. This shift is tellingly illustrated in the following quote, where Martin - who in every other regards

held a resolutely “anti-Pijin” position - argues in favour of the creation of a version of TV news in Pijin:

54. “*Ot due fo... mekem improvement lo hem, Onenews ia. Garew vision olsem SIBC, ia? Olsem bae hem gud, bikos... pipol... I think most... samfala ol man ating, bae oketa... save nomoa Pijin, whereas... English bae ot no save. Especially those wea illiterate, ia? Ot save nomoa... Pijin bae hem fitim... Those wea ot educated lelebet, ot save English. (...) Mi tingim, ating, Onenews... hemi shud double, tufala.*  
Double? English an Pijin, ok. Bat... English ot duim fo hu?  
*English ot duim fo those... those wea oketa save rid o... kaen olsem, ia? An Pijin ia olsem fo... taem oketa stori kam Pijin olsem, ot pipol... illiterate pipol ot save tu ‘oh, wat nao it’s going on’.*  
Ok, so Pijin version fo non-educated pipol, ok. (he agrees)”

Here, we see the relevance of Pijin in oral news radically reduced in terms of both numeric and social importance - from ‘*pipol*’ to ‘*most*’ to ‘*samfala ol man ating*’ who would be ‘*illiterate*’. The quote also illustrates that this reasoning directly leads to the idea of a country which would be diglossic according to the education level: Pijin versions should exist as a *stopgap* for uneducated people.

It was indeed on this ground that schooling in Pijin (*in parallel to* general schooling in English) was also occasionally advocated:

55. “*Maybe samfala ot bae no go further lo studies fo save gud English, so bae oketa iusim Pijin.. So ot mas lanem Pijin tu, fo ridim an raetim.*” (Nancy)  
56. “*Ot shud mekem [education] lo Pijin tu, bikos staka lo Solomon Islands ot no rili educated.*” (Janet)

This leads us to a highly interesting fact: Literacy in Pijin was generally presented not as a competence, but as an *absence* of competence in English - a second best reserved to low-educated people. My informants remarked that, when they happen to be faced with a double version of a text, they would read the English version for information and simply have a look at the Pijin one for fun – since, as explained in Chapter 3, reading in English is faster and requires less effort. But through this remark, they generally pointed less to their limited competence in Pijin than to their greater proficiency in English. Consider for

example this quote from Kate, who praises a book of *kastom* stories which displays a version in English, one in Pijin and one in her vernacular:

57. *"So hem naes fogud: iu no understandim English? Iu save go ridim Pijin. Den if iu no understandim Pijin, den iu ridim nao desfala... last wan."*

This gradation is surprising because literacy in Pijin and literacy in *langgus* are likely to be less widespread<sup>27</sup> than literacy in English, as the only language consistently taught at the written level in all primary schools.

Since they cannot read Pijin - they do not learn it at school -, notices and books in Pijin must logically be directed to *other* people, and these other people must logically be *uneducated* Solomon Islanders<sup>28</sup>. As highlighted by John and Jean Comaroff (1992:36), processes of cultural transformation work in complex ways; in particular, due to the play of larger social forces, missionaries' actions have often had outcomes totally disconnected from their actual "intentions". Here, it might be argued that the Churches' efforts to develop literacy in Pijin *out of* the formal education system lead to a fully unintended consequence: creating a "social other" in the eyes of the students.

Quite interestingly, many students asserted that rural people, contrary to them, can read and write Pijin better than English, but could not explain how these "illiterates" had acquired competence in written Pijin<sup>29</sup>. A focus group participant suggested that it was learnt at the primary school, although in practice Pijin is introduced at the *oral* level only:

58. *"I think, samfala local pipol, wea otta born... ot save ridim Pijin bat ot no save understandim taem hem written lo English. Olsem, ones wea skul kasem primary level nao. Taem otta lukim otta Pijin wod ot save understandim."* (Lawrence)

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<sup>27</sup> Although literacy in vernaculars does exist, in primary schools and mission schools, in many villages.

<sup>28</sup> This perception seemed to be reinforced by the allegedly widespread display of public notices in Pijin in the provinces. Interestingly, my informants generally tended to overrate the quantity of written documents available in Pijin, referring to "other books" while they had themselves seen only the Bible in Pijin.

<sup>29</sup> A few respondents mentioned that old women in the provinces receive literacy classes in Pijin from religious organisations, but none asserted that it was true for young children.

To some extent, competence in written Pijin seemed to be viewed as natural, quasi-innate and without requiring formal learning, in the same way as the acquisition of oral Pijin is deemed to be. Yet, *for themselves*, they considered reading and writing Pijin difficult, and had actually developed competence in Pijin *through* literacy in English, as explained by Andrew:

59. "Mi save raetim Pijin, bikos English an Pijin hem kolsap semsem nomoa, ia. So whenever mi tingim wod, expression mi laek expresim lo English, mi save tu expresim lo Pijin. That's how mi lanem hao fo raetim Pijin. Kos expression mi save iusim lo English, mi save iusim in form of... Pijin language, Pijin spelling."

This paradox seems to confirm the highly ideological nature of this perception of Pijin literacy as second-best competence.

#### *The ambiguities of upper-class discourses*

Thus, in students' discourses, reasons of national solidarity were invoked to support the idea that Pijin should be used in news and speeches – but not for themselves, for *others*. The concern for providing 'lokols' with a language and literacy adapted to their "condition" entails sharp social differentiation - if involuntary and well-intentioned. This is what I call the "paradox of solidarity". Fraser remarks that, far from downplaying inequalities, affirmative remedies tend to support class differentiation by targeting the poor as a category – targeted "*not only for aid but for hostility*", as "*inherently deficient and insatiable*" (1997:25). The case of Papua New Guinea, as described by Errington and Gewertz (1997, 1999), illustrates well her point. These authors examined the role of the Rotary Club as a major setting where differential social identities are affirmed (1997:335-337). They argued that, through fundraising events aimed at helping the "poor", the middle-class elite group distances itself from the "grassroots", while positioning itself as a moral community. These events construct a "class other" to be helped, but this "other" is

*concurrently* stigmatized and blamed for its unreasonable demands (as *uneducated* people). Conversely, as *educated* people, the middle-class elite presents itself as knowing better than the “grassroots” what it is good for them (1999:3). I have to stress that, among my Solomon informants, such social distance was by no means as sharp as was described in the PNG case. Neither was it disparaging toward the “uneducated” people. Nonetheless, it seems to partake of the same general reasoning.

More generally, as we saw in the previous section, the concern for social cohesion was one of the main arguments of pro-Pijin students to advocate the maintenance of this language in the future. It was *in particular* the argument advanced by upper-class students, who all had pro-Pijin positions. The views of upper-class students on Pijin were outstanding for two reasons: Firstly, because they integrated divergent discourses and frames of reference in a way which carried to an extreme point the contradictions present in other students’ discourses; secondly, because the outcome of this integration of discourses ended up highlighting class differentiation in a striking manner.

Among upper-class students, contradictory discourses seemed to pile up and combine rather than challenging each other. This phenomenon was epitomized by Walter, a student in Linguistics and Education in Suva. Let me quote three extracts of his speech before commenting them:

60. “*Iumi shud putim lo saed English olsem wanfala subject olsem science o maths. Iumi no putim olsem samting hem influencim the whole curriculum, nomoa. Iumi mas kipim aside, kasem end lo university. Bikos mi understandim dat once ot putim olsem, bae hem better, ia. For example like Japan, o Taiwan, o even France, Italy, otta man ia putim English samting aside olsem science o maths, ia? So, same application ia, once iumi putim, iu save lo hem bae iu smart lo hem, ia. Bikos ot concentrate lo hem.*”

61. “*Samfala samting mi lukim lo hem: why learn datfala language [English]? Hem nao: that’s my identity, no need fo mi westim time learning English nomoa. So if I would the director, bae mi no putim policy olsem. Iumi mas soem identity blo iumi nao. Pijin nao hem identity blo iumi lo Solomon. O language blo iumi. English hem foreign language, ia? So... bae hem nao olsem: hem no necessary nomoa, no need. As long as you understand and you can write it, that’s it. And you can spikim formal communication lelebet, that’s it. No need fo iumi spik olsem oketa... English*

*pipol ia, ot Americans o otta... whoever ia. No need. I mean, that is not for our benefit, that is for the whole benefit fo their... soem power blo oketa ia. So mi, olsem, mi agri wetem wat bro ia talem, dat iumi no... encouragim English insaed lo university ia."*

62. *"Iumi luk lo literacy lo country ia nomoa. If iumi lukim dat literacy lo country ia, more than 60% oketa atendim formal education, ok, iumi save gogo English nomoa. Evriwan taking part nao. (...) Bat at this point of time, wea country illiteracy hem nao one of the highest lo Pacific iet ia, babae mi no agri wetem English iet, ia. Kos otta national member lo country, otta no save English. Otta Pijin nomoa, ia. (...) Until iumi lukim dat hem time, iumi iusim Pijin. Den babae iumi save aotim Pijin den English hem bekam our national language."*

In the first quote, Walter argues that schooling should take place in Pijin, and English be learnt only as a subject, thus voicing the mother-tongue education discourse dominant in his discipline<sup>30</sup>. In the second quote, he adopts a strongly anti-English position which draws on post-colonialist and nationalist discourses, emphasizing unequal power relations and resistance, in order to argue against the imposition of language regulation at the USP Center. In the last quote, he argues that the current literacy rate in Solomon Islands should lead the Government to recognize Pijin as national language, considering the low literacy rate in Solomon Islands. This last reasoning is conspicuously democratic, but at the same time clearly biased in favor of English: He asserts that Pijin should be replaced by English *as soon as* the national literacy rate allows it. Thus, at different moments of the focus group, Walter voiced different discourses learnt in the university context; yet, they did not fundamentally shake the influence of colonial ideology. He still contended that Pijin was a "broken" language which "*no garem structure*", and that ideally in the future English should replace Pijin as the national language of Solomon Islands<sup>31</sup>.

The combination of colonial and nationalist ideologies was a recurrent element in upper-class students' discourses. They often supported the idea that Pijin becomes the national language of Solomon Islands, but maintained strong negative prejudices toward

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, before the focus group begins, he had also stated that the absence of standardization in Pijin was at the root of "all problems".

<sup>31</sup> Note that Walter implicitly reasons as if English was not *currently* the official language of Solomon Islands. So did many of my respondents - thus revealing the firm grip of Pijin as *de facto* national language.

Pijin – which, as broken English, would be good “only” for fellow locals. This is further illustrated by this quote from Nelson:

63. *“I believe, we need to change that Pijin into becoming more perfect in using English, but we can maintain the Pijin as part of our own way of communicating, with our own people.*

So do you mean that there would be two kinds of Pijin?

*Two kinds of Pijin: one is English one, and the other is more like Pijin broken English one. What we call Pijin English one. Because the Pijin English one, we would rather use it as our national language. For the international language that we need to really use, from now and the near future, is the English one. We really need to teach those little kids how to speak English.”*

This reasoning amounts to promoting as *national* language a *disparaged* language, and this leads to further difficulties. I already mentioned the dissonance that generally arises among “pro-Pijin” students when the issue of education is broached; the discrepancy was at its utmost expression among these upper-class students, who overtly endorsed the discourse which advocates mother-tongue education (as more efficient for all students) but simultaneously strongly valued English - a language in which they are fluent themselves and proud to be so. Thus, several of them argued for schooling in Pijin at one point of the interview, but shrank back at other moments (e.g. reducing it to one Pijin course), considering that English should be given priority. Indeed, quite understandably, they may not feel like diminishing the status of a language that they have worked hard to master, and which largely marks their upscale social position.

The idea that Pijin is “*gud fo lokols nomoa*” has another implication. Several upper-class informants tended to treat Pijin not only as a broken version of English, but as a *simplified* one intended to illiterates. Sandra proposed an account of the birth of Pijin according to which Pijin would have been created by educated Solomon Islanders to communicate their knowledge to uneducated fellow locals:

64. *“Tingting blo mi nomoa, ot creatim Pijin, ot pipol blo Solomon wea go lo university an otta kam bak, otta mekem language ia fo hem isi fo communicate wetem diferem pipol.*

So iu minim, Pijin hem olsem simple English? Simplified English?

*Ya. Hem simplified fo oketa grassroot pipol oketa no save lo English. Ya. Isi fo oketa save wat nao pipol wea stadi an oketa kam talem fo oketa.”*

In other terms, following a typical colonial model (cf. Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998), English was used for *horizontal* communication between the elites, and Pijin for *vertical* communication with the uneducated local masses. An upper-class student who worked in an NGO expressed a vision of Pijin which shares unsettling commonalities with Sandra’s account. He insisted that Pijin should not contain “hard” words but exclusively simple ones accessible to “grassroots” people (noticeably, he was among the few to employ this phrase)<sup>32</sup>. In particular, he criticized SIBC Pijin on *this* ground, whereas other “pro-Pijin” students rather criticized it for being “broken” Pijin, bastardized by the heavy presence of English:

*65. “SIBC hem more like putim in English wods insaed lo Pijin, rather than rili brekem daon oketa English wod, lo more simplified wod wea hem stap lo Pijin. Somewan hem no garem access lo formal education bae hem no garem clear understanding lo otta wods ot iusim.” (William)*

William explained that it is now the policy of most NGOs to convey their message in a language that can be understood by people without formal education. But it is very clear that, for him, the kind of Pijin intended to help (and educate) the “grassroots” has very little to do with the one *he* speaks as an educated upper-class urbanite, which arguably uses English as matrix language.

### **5.2.3. The covert attractiveness of written Pijin**

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that urban-raised middle-class students often praise the broken and flexible nature of Pijin, which they feel they can freely fashion; they tend to be less concerned about the loss of “real” Pijin than pro-Pijin students who learnt it

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<sup>32</sup> Note that he was the only informant who used at some point of his speech the term “class” – although to oppose the English-speaking elite to lower and middle classes (he included himself in the middle-class).



as a second language in the provinces. In fact, some upper-class urbanites frankly suggested that knowing how to speak “proper” Pijin is simply not a concern for middle-class people, since they master English:

66. *“Otta pipol ot get... educated, ot no rili wari fo spikim proper Pijin nomoa.”* (Janet)

The same reasoning obviously applies to literacy, as a second-best competence: For those who are literate in English, being able to write Pijin “properly” is not supposed to matter.

Yet, despite their rather disparaging discourses on Pijin literacy, *virtually all* my respondents had actually acquired *some* competence in written Pijin by themselves. They were surprisingly attentive to written pieces of Pijin through which they came across (e.g. religious pamphlets or advertisement in newspapers), had got acquainted in this way with Pijin spelling and put it into practice in limited but often regular occasions. Many used it in letters to relatives in the provinces, and virtually all used it in e-mails to friends - either as main code or in short inserts, to convey a friendly note (although without necessarily sticking to Pijin spelling, since English spelling is better known). A student also mentioned transcribing popular songs in Pijin.

67. *“Hem fani: mifala Solomon students, if mifala raet lo samfala Solomon Islander lo nara country, lo Internet mifala raet lo Pijin, e-mail ia. Hem normal lo mifala.”* (Alison)

68. *“Whenever mi iusim e-mails, like places mi laek fo mekfan olsem, bae mi save iusim Pijin. No full one, samfala part nomoa, fo talem go eniting fo hem save gud, o eni fani, eni joke olsem.”* (Mark)

Even students who voiced strongly negative attitudes toward Pijin and considered its formal learning at school useless and damaging (due to the perceived risks of interference), such as Mark, had made the effort to get basic knowledge of it. When I pointed out this contradiction, he eluded it by stating that “everything is good to know”:

69. *“Mi lukim nomoa olsem... eniting hem gud fo save lelebet, part lo hem, olsem.”*

On the other hand, the absence of practice appeared by no means related to negative attitudes toward Pijin. Indeed, several of the most resolutely “pro-Pijin” students - including Joseph who advocated Pijin schooling - were part of the minority who claimed to never write Pijin (about 1/5 of my informants)<sup>33</sup>. They all lamented their incompetence, and expressed some desire to learn. For example:

70. “Iu tingse hem useful fo save raetim Pijin o nomoa?  
*I ting... hum... I ting hem very useful, ia.*  
 Useful fo wat?  
*Fo save nomoa... I mean, iu talem nomoa, bat iu no save nomoa spelling blo hem. Nogud iu save nomoa wod ia bat iu no save nomoa spelling blo hem.”* (Allan)

A telling case which illustrates a spontaneous desire to write Pijin *in spite of* adverse social attitudes is that of Sandra, who never writes in Pijin because she tried once when she was a child and her efforts were ridiculed by a friend:

71. “So sometimes hem happen dat iu trae fo raetim lo Pijin o?...  
*Wantaem, mi duim: mi trae fo raet lo Pijin, bat hao mi putum wod ia, hem no stret.* (laughs)  
*Olsem, diferen person hem ridim ia hem se ‘wat nao iu trae fo duim ia?’* (laughs)  
 An fo which occasion iu trae fo duim olsem, iu trae fo raet lo Pijin?  
*Mi laek raet nao fo Joyce ia [a relative]. Taem mi stei lo hom, mi jes raet kam. Olsem, mi laek fo raet lo Pijin. Bikos usually mi save raet lo English. Den mi se ‘hao nao bae mi raet? Bae mi raet lo Pijin?’, den mi se ‘Mi trae raetim lo Pijin’. Gogo mi finis nao den mi givim fo nara fren blo mi hem ridim, hem se ‘Wat nao iu trae fo duim lo hia?’* (laughs) *Hem sound fani’. So mi livim nomoa, mi raetim English!’*”

In the end, all students at least acknowledged that, even if it was useless for school, knowing how to write Pijin was useful “*in other ways*”. Underlying this desire to be literate in Pijin seemed to be the idea that, when one is fluent in a language, one should *logically* be able to write it as well: Not being able to do so was somehow perceived as a vexing anomaly which should be corrected.

Interestingly, my informants were not only relatively knowledgeable in written Pijin (considering that they had learnt it by themselves) but surprisingly normative – even those

<sup>33</sup> Among them are included several students who considered that the punctual use of Pijin words in e-mails could not be called “writing Pijin”. Indeed, not all students had the same conception of what it comprises.

who do not practice it, a fact which suggests that they are more acquainted with the Pijin spelling system than they sometimes believe to be. Many admitted that, especially when they write e-mails to friends, they often resort to English spelling because it makes the task easier and faster, but this practice was implicitly presented as faulty. For example:

72. *"Other cases mi save iusim otta English wods nomoa, bat... structure blo sentence ia hem Pijin. Bat if mi folom formal, o normal way of raetim Pijin, taem mi se 'you' hem bae 'iu'."* (James, FG)

Indeed, a respondent claimed that she gave up writing in Pijin, because the constant temptation to resort to English, and the mixed result it produced, was frustrating: *"Evritaem ia samfala English wod ia laek kam insaed"* ("Each time I tried, some English words tended to come in").

It was very clear that they had internalized a specifically Pijin norm – the standards set by the SICA, endowed with the moral authority of the Church - to an unexpected extent considering their very limited exposure to written Pijin. Their normative, purist stance with regard to written Pijin – in stark contrast with their low normativity and valuation of syncretism in spoken Pijin - manifested itself clearly when they commented the samples that I had transcribed<sup>34</sup>. Here are a few other examples<sup>35</sup>:

73. *"Iu lukim? Hem Pijin English. Iu se iu raetim Pijin, bat den English hem spel sometimes. English hem kam in nomoa, lo desfala Pijin."* (Kate)

74. *"'Lime' shud be 'laem', ia?"* (David)

75. *"'Question' ia, bae mi raetim 'questin'."* (June)

76. *"'Betelnut' ia ot spelem lo English: hem shud 'bitalnat'."* (Laura)

The normative power of the written text was striking. It was in fact not limited to spelling, but also applied to morphology. When reading the texts aloud, students tended to

<sup>34</sup> The written sample comprised a popular song from Nate and an extract from SIBC news (see Appendix).

<sup>35</sup> During focus groups, participants also remarked that *'dastawhy'* should be written *'dastawae'*. The original form of this word in Pijin was in fact *"dastawe"*; this illustrates the current anglicization of Pijin phonology, but also the fact that normativity is largely focused on spelling and not pronunciation.

pronounce full forms - which they hardly ever hear, let alone use, themselves: ‘olketa’ was often pronounced ‘oloketa’ and ‘blong’ as ‘belong’. A group participant commented:

77. *“Hao iu ridim Pijin ia, hem diferen, samfala no folom hao nao iu tok. I mean, iu slang taem iu folom pronunciation blo iu.”* (Joan, FG girls)

Written Pijin was perceived as more conservative, thus closer to original Pijin than the version that people speak<sup>36</sup>. As a matter of fact, texts such as the Bible establish an authoritative norm of “proper” Pijin which applies not only to the written level, but also extends to the oral domain: The Bible and other translations were taken as example of “real” Pijin by several informants. For example:

78. *“Olsem, taem mi ridim buk lo Pijin, olsem Bible, samfala wording ot putum insaed, some Pijin wod mi shud iusim, bat distaem hem no longer used nao! (...) Example, the word ‘middol’: the really Pijin word, it’s ‘melewan’. Bat hem no longer used now. These days, pipol use ‘middol’ nomoa. Bat wod ‘middol’ ia hem no reflektim rili Pijin. Hem English wod.”* (Lionel)

79. *“Some pipol otta... even mi tu, mi Pijin bat hem no olsem wanfala buk lo Pijin, e-ve-ry sin-gle wod otta raetim hem falom nao Pijin language. (...) So Pijin distaem hem olsem hem changed. From the real Pijin otta pipol otta raetim [lo Bible].”* (Sandra)

A process of “objectification in writing” (Bourdieu 1991:46) takes place, and leads written language to be identified with correct language and to acquire some force of law (1991:49). It is highly interesting that this happens among students *despite* the fact that written Pijin is not used in schools. As a form of *de facto* standardization, authoritative written texts such as the Bible or dictionaries do create a norm<sup>37</sup> – and it is arguably by comparison with this norm (which partly overlaps with “old” Pijin) that many young people feel that they speak “broken” Pijin.

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<sup>36</sup> A student pointed out for example that older people may imitate the youth’s “broken” habits when they speak, e.g. use ‘wat’ instead of ‘wanem’, but would stick to “proper” Pijin forms when they write.

<sup>37</sup> See Smith (2002:212) on the major influence upon the standardization of PNG Tok Pisin of religious texts, which have an “aura of respectability about them such that the linguistic forms they contain are given a certain legitimacy”. On the authority (and unintended effects) of translated religious texts in PNG, see also Schieffelin (2007) and Handman (2007).

The desire to be able to write “proper” Pijin led a significant number of my informants (over 1/3) to support the idea of having one Pijin course at school, despite their fear of interference. This was meant to be able to put their speech into a written form, but also, since the written forms are viewed as containing “proper” Pijin, to be more knowledgeable in “real” Pijin. Virtually all these students considered that “real” Pijin, rather than the anglicized version that they actually speak, should be taught in schools. This “real” Pijin could be defined in different ways, but in any case it was its *distinctiveness* from English that was emphasized. Some informants thus advocated the adoption of SIBC Pijin as comprising more words from “old” Pijin, while others preferred popular singer Nate’s version as closer to the way Solomon people actually speak:

80. “*Blo SIBC nao. Bikos datwan nao bae hem more... olsem real Pijin. Bae hem lelebet... diferen lelebet. From English.*” (Jeffrey, Suva)

81. “*Diswan blo Nate hem much better, hem more Pijin: hem bae givim identity lo pipol lo country: ‘oh, mifala garew own language blo mifala, hem no semsem olsem English, hao mifala raetim’. (...) Olsem hem garew own flavour blo hem.*” (William)

This emphasis on distinctiveness suggests again the unexpected extent to which the nationalist ideology which conceives Pijin as a defining part of Solomon national identity may actually be rooted among USP students. Beyond the persistent attractiveness of English, the influence of the purist nationalist ideology prevalent in the Pacific region led several students to suggest that Pijin as a national language should be devoid of the influences of *both* vernaculars (as jeopardizing communication between nationals from different ‘*langgus*’) and English - an idealized view in which Solomon Pijin would be “*seleva lelebet*” and could be a better candidate for the nationalist ideology. In this regard, as illustrated in William’s quote, orthography is viewed as a stronghold of distinction from

English: The main source of difference between the two languages is perceived as being located in, and in fact largely restricted to, spelling<sup>38</sup>.

On the other hand, if, through religious texts, written Pijin is exclusively associated with the purist “old” version of this language, it may become totally divorced from the syncretic Pijin that young urban Solomon Islanders actually speak - and, arguably, it already largely is. In such a case, as noted by Smith in the case of Tok Pisin (2002:212), the written religious norm may have in the end very little influence on the evolution of Pijin as a spoken language.

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<sup>38</sup> See Schieffelin and Doucet (1998) for an enlightening discussion of the importance of orthographic choices in post-colonial contexts, based on the case of Haitian Creole.

### 5.3. Counter-current: the resilience of an “egalitarian” language ideology

The colonial language ideology that disparages Pijin, and the post-colonial nationalist one which values it, did not enter into a cultural vacuum; neither are they alone in shaping Solomon students’ attitudes and practices. Social ideologies may develop independently of those promoted by the State. Jourdan argues that the priority given by many Honiaran parents to Pijin over vernaculars, as the language most useful to succeed in town, is fostered by a language ideology which constitutes social change toward “modernity” as a moral imperative (1985; 2007a:37)<sup>39</sup>. The same “pragmatic” ideology also clearly benefits English among Solomon students. However, it would be a mistake to interpret their willingness to learn English as purely motivated by social and material gains, or, to use Bourdieu’s term (1991), exclusively in terms of “*linguistic market*”. Similarly, it would be a mistake to oppose an “egalitarian nationalist” stance adopted by some to an allegedly “elitist cosmopolitanism” espoused by others. Both linguistic attitudes are to be framed in a larger context, which I would call the Solomon cosmopolitan ethos.

Cosmopolitanism can be defined in different ways (see e.g. Calhoun 2003:538-540), but it is as *a state of mind which values diversity* that I use the term here. Following Hannerz (1992:252), I conceive it as “*a willingness to engage with the Other*”. Gooberman-Hill (1999:225,177) highlights cosmopolitanism as an important middle-class value in Honiara. However, she insists that this cosmopolitan orientation should not be mistaken for a blind fascination for Western countries: It benefits *all* foreign cultures (e.g. Africa), including other cultures *within* Solomon Islands. In his dissertation, Berg stresses the “*immense ascribed cultural diversity in Honiara*” (2000:31, my emphasis). The city is

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<sup>39</sup> See Kulick (1992, 1998) on the similar shift from vernacular to Tok Pisin as motivated by the positive association of the latter with modernity, Christianity and education in PNG.

imagined as a mosaic, which includes not only white expatriates, but also a great number of distinctive Solomon groups; all groups are assumed to have a distinct culture, which is worth learning about. Cosmopolitanism among middle-class Honiarans thus involves curiosity for, and acceptance of, *all* others' *kastom* - from foreign countries, but also from other ethno-linguistic groups (Gooberman-Hill 1999:144). Indeed, the most compelling evidence of this cosmopolitan ethos is that inter-ethnic marriage is widespread in the city. In 1985, already half of its inhabitants married outside of their ethnic group (Jourdan and Keesing 1997: footnote 23), and this tendency has been growing (Gooberman-Hill 1999:64).

This cosmopolitan ethos has a clear linguistic counterpart. Knowing several languages is highly valued in Honiara - and this applies to foreign languages *as well as* to local ones. Solomon students who could speak or understand several vernaculars were visibly proud of their linguistic competences. On numerous occasions in Honiara, when I mentioned that my mother tongue was French, people told me that they would have liked to learn this language too, and asked me to teach them some basic words. This interest in foreign languages was never presented as materially interested. Rather, the benefits are social: Learning the others' language is conceived as opening the door to the establishment of friendly relationships. A usual way to initiate friendship is indeed to display curiosity and knowledge of the other's *langgus* or *kastom*. I witnessed many times people establishing new friendly relations by proudly uttering a few words from the other's vernacular. Similarly, in the house where I lived, when I got accepted as a '*sista*' by the family's visiting *wantoks*, I was asked to teach them a few words in French and was taught a few words in South Malaita language in exchange.



This current social practice seems directly in line with the pre-colonial linguistic ideology of “balanced” or “reciprocal” multilingualism described by Jourdan (2007a), in which all vernacular languages occupied an equal position and were learnt by neighbouring groups. Indeed, the whole cosmopolitan ethos may arguably have its roots in this pre-colonial ideology. According to Jourdan (2007a:32):

*“It could be argued that this linguistic practice has at its heart a concern for reciprocity that extends beyond the linguistic sphere, a concern that we find often associated with exchange networks and clanic obligations. Reciprocal multilingualism, or balanced multilingualism as I like to call it, (...) is the linguistic incarnation of balanced reciprocity. We can also argue that reciprocal multilingualism may stem from a more encompassing ideology of egalitarianism between ethno-linguistic groups: By learning the language of the other, we recognize the other.”*

This ideology entails being open to the other - to other cultures, and to other languages – without imposing hierarchical relations. It prevails between Solomon vernaculars, and may arguably play in favour of a view of English and Pijin in terms of *complementarity* rather than *competition*.

It is also in regard to this “cosmopolitan” language ideology that students’ attitudes toward English should be understood: English is favoured by students as the language of maximal practicality, as permitting to go and discover an unlimited number of countries and cultures, to establish social relations with members of an unlimited number of different peoples. Multilingualism and code-switching - in many countries, but most conspicuously in Honiara - definitely have a playful and friendly aspect (Jourdan 2007a:45), and cannot be accounted for exclusively in “instrumental” terms.

Conversely, this ideology of “reciprocity” may well explain the fact that, despite their strong prejudices against Pijin, most USP students considered *normal* that expatriates

learn Pijin when they settle in Solomon Islands, as the language that all Solomon Islanders speak<sup>40</sup>. For example:

82. “*Hem gud fo [foreigners] spikim lo hia, where Pijin hem originated, fo spikim wetem pipol insaed lo country. Olsem, mifala educate in case gogo mifala lo oversea, mifala bae iusim English nao fo spik wetem oketa. Hem happen semsem wetem ot RAMSI: ot kam lo hia, ot lanem Pijin fo spik wetem pipol lo Solomon.*” (Allan)

83. “*I think, ot laek fo mekem pipol no fil out of place lelebet. Olsem, language pipol lo Solomon Islands save spikim, ot save spikim so, fo otta... hao otta integrate insaed lo society.*” (Mark)

Learning the local language – even if this language is “just” Pijin - is viewed as a mark of respect for local people and of goodwill in the establishment of relationships.

In this perspective, goodwill and effective communication prevail over other considerations; this may partly account for the very low level of linguistic normativity that many Solomon Islanders manifest in Pijin. Normativity is also relatively limited with regard to vernaculars: As I already mentioned, Honiarans are extremely tolerant and encouraging toward others who try to learn their *langgus* (Gooberman-Hill 1999:26), and linguistic divergence also seems to be deemed widely acceptable in the provinces<sup>41</sup>. As suggested by Meeuwis and Blommaert (1998:94), linguistic purism, as well as the idea that languages are necessarily in *competition* in multilingual contexts (competition assumed to end in the “victory” of one language over the others) may be largely imported Western ideologies, derived from a European monolingual bias. By contrast, in Solomon Islands as in Zaire, multilingualism and linguistic divergence, as well as the existence of crossover languages between neighbouring groups, were in all likelihood not perceived as problematic<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, several students also pointed out that foreigners had probably hard times when they first tried to speak Pijin, just like Solomon Islanders do when they attempt to speak English.

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Maranda, personal communication (January 18<sup>th</sup>).

<sup>42</sup> This may indeed be suggested by a look at the ethnolinguistic map of Malaita: Vernaculars of directly neighbouring groups are often to a large extent mutually intelligible – hence a difficulty in establishing the

Here it is interesting to note that the colonial devaluation of Pijin as broken English (“no rules”, thus no mistakes possible) and the “cosmopolitan” ideology (focused on communication, tolerant with divergence) may well have reinforced each other to sustain the low normativity of many Solomon Islanders in Pijin. Language ideologies of diverse origins sometimes meet, and these unexpected points of convergence are definitely worth consideration. Among Solomon students, the pre-colonial ideology of reciprocal multilingualism and the nationalist language ideology also occasionally converge to sustain a more equal view of the relationship between Pijin and English. None of the two students whom I quoted above had a nationalist stance on Pijin (in fact they both had a fairly strong “anti-Pijin” position). Yet, their utterances could just as well have fitted a “nationalist” discourse: In PNG, Kale (1990:191) notes that the increasing pride toward Tok Pisin as national language has been paired with a decreasing tolerance toward foreigners who cannot speak it.

The valuation of Pijin as national language may also combine with the “cosmopolitan” emphasis on broader communication to reject the colonial linkage between language, race and class, and in the end *favour* the practice of English. It may indeed be no accident that Joseph and David, the two most “pro-Pijin” students who conceived Pijin and English as distinct languages not hierarchically related, were those who criticized most vigorously the social barriers to the practice of English in the classroom - just as it may be no accident that the two professors who privileged most consistently English in class were those who expressed favourable attitudes toward Pijin. Let me briefly go back to students’ behaviours in the classroom to clarify my point. The sarcastic comments reported by my

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exact number of vernacular languages in Solomon Islands (figures vary from 64 to 85 in the literature), as some may be counted either as distinct languages, or as dialects of a single one.

informants as provoked by the use of English were of two different kinds – albeit often mixed, since “overseas/white” is virtually automatically understood as “socially upper”. Some emphasized conceitedness (e.g. “*enikaen tumas*”), whereas others stressed that English is a foreign language out of place between Solomon Islanders (e.g. “*Iu blo different country?*”). The students who had the attitudes most favourable to Pijin stressed this second reason to explain why English is not spoken during classes: not because it is “too much”, but because it is alien. They emphasized that Pijin is the common language of Solomon Islanders, and that they would never *feel like* speaking English with fellow nationals. They thus clearly viewed the ideal situation as one of *bilingualism*: Pijin with Solomon Islanders (regardless of their social status), English with foreigners. And precisely because they refused the class connotations attached to English, they were those who most heartily regretted that students be prevented from improving their competence in English *as a second language* - a foreign language highly useful in their studies and for wider communication.

In other terms, not only may the maintenance of the colonial prejudices against Pijin not benefit the learning of English in the Solomon post-colonial context but, through the language/race/class linkage, it actually seems to *impair* it. This suggests that the authorities of the USP Center may have some interest in having a clear discourse on the reason why English should be used in classrooms – i.e. not because it is a formal language, intrinsically more valuable than Pijin and placing its speakers *above* the community of Solomon Islanders, but because this foreign language of high instrumental value happens to be the medium of communication of the USP regional system.

## Translation of verbatim quotes (Chapter 5)

1. *"I don't worry for Pijin, because I know that the majority, I mean, 90% of Pijin, is still on, ya? (...) It would hardly get lost."*
2. *"It will slowly start to... get really blended with English. So maybe Pijin will still be there, but just the basic words, like 'iu hao?'"*
3. *"Except for small things, it will have gone. Like the kind of words which don't have any... English alternative. But for the words which have any other... alternative in English, I think people will use the English word for it."*
4. *"In ten years' time, maybe the original Solomon Pijin will be extinct..."*
5. *"If Pijin gets lost it's just all right, because... English will take its place. And this will just be nice! For the people who study, they will just know better. Because all these books are written in English, so it will just make them, like, understand the Europeans more. I mean, their knowledge."*
6. *"When white people come to Solomons, everyone will be able to... like, they won't be afraid of speaking with them, because they'll be able to speak their language. So it would be good that Pijin get lost."*
7. *"Let's get rid of that Pijin, because Pijin it's a sort of... hindrance, ya? So let's get rid of it, with just our mother tongue as first language and English as second language."*
8. *"It just doesn't matter, whatever may happen to this Pijin. If English replaces it, it doesn't make any difference to me, because our vernacular will be there anyway."*
9. *"They formed that language just so that communication flows at that time. But now we are educated so... it follows its own fate."*
10. *"People will speak more English, because more will go and educate themselves. Because, like, we won't stay at that same level all the time."*
11. *"Let's move forward, ya? We don't need to... adopt Pijin as our language, because what we need is just the original language, that is English. Pijin isn't necessary."*
12. *"For me, it would be just fine. Because it's something which just... came in accidentally, so it will get lost accidentally, that's just all right!"*
13. *"It would be just fine, because [Pijin] it's English, ya? It's just English. Its starting, like when people tried to speak English, they just spoke Pijin instead... So it's just all right if it gets lost, if it changes back into English."*
14. *"You will lose the real... who you are. Like, you will float to another identity which is that of different people. Whereas it should only come second, English. Somehow it looks like a very nice strategy that they're running [i.e. replacing Pijin by English to facilitate people's studies], but I disagree with it."*
15. *"It would be bad. Because it's your background. It has become part of you. So you need to know, be aware of it. Because it's part of you, it's your language! You need to know it: you grew up with it, you would be rootless without it."*
16. *"Because it's... ok, it's just my personal opinion, like... Pijin is part of... it's part of our society, so... so, ya, it's part of our identity. Because it's a second language, which is... a combination of English and of some... local terms. Of our terms, our languages. So, like... part of us is in it. So if it gets lost it will a bad thing!"*
17. *"I don't want... Pijin to be lost. Because, Pijin, I think, it's one... if you go to... especially inside the Pacific, if you speak Pijin people can identify 'oh, this guy is from Solomon'. And it's good too for inside the country. Because we, in Solomon Islands, we have a lot of languages. This Pijin unites us, because it's easy to pick up quickly for us. More than English. So, it's a language which unites people from all our*

languages in Solomon. That is, someone from the West I can communicate with him through Pijin. So... in ten years' time, it would be good that we... don't lose it! "

18. "That would be rubbish. Because I would be sad, if Pijin disappeared. Because... it's a language that I use too! I mean, that language reminds me that 'oh, ya, I'm from Solomon, I have my own language too', apart from my mother tongue. Then, if it gets lost, it would mean that... we are inferior to English people! I mean, what sort of people would we be! Because I view Pijin as an identity of mine, too. If it's lost, it means that we... we don't have any common language. So we just speak... English, which is totally different, from other people..."

19. "On the side of... culture, or kastom, or what should we say? (...) Because it's a common language that we should keep. The real Pijin, the genuine one, because it's our Pijin, the language of Solomon Islands."

20. "If we use English like that, I'd say... these people who have attended formal education, they are selfish. Ya? In terms of... freedom of expression, ya? Because, if, like mi, if I live in the village and I don't know how to speak English, and English has become... the oral language, it will... it will be really hard for me to come to town! Because I can't speak English. The only language that I know is Pijin. So I'd say these people are selfish."

21. "If Pijin disappears and there is just English, it will be bad in the sense that, when you go back to your village, how will people... Like for me: if I don't know Pijin but know English, if I never speak Pijin, I will go to my village, but my grand-parents don't know English, so they won't understand what I say. In English. So I have to learn both. So that, when I go home, I can speak Pijin and they will get it."

22. "What do you think will happen with Pijin in 10 years?"

If everyone gets educated, wants to learn English, it will be English and Pijin will get lost, so...

You think it would be good like that or not?

Hum... It would be good and not good. (laughs)

So why would it be good?

To help the students, it will help them for... with their schoolwork, to understand English well and what they do, to help them for the jobs too...

And why would it be bad?

It would be bad because... it's a local language too, so we should maintain, keep our language."

23. "I think they should pass this original Pijin thing. I mean, make it the official language. Because... I will learn English anyway. So, knowing well the original Pijin, for my identity, real Solomon Island Pijin."

24. "Because in Vanuatu they don't mix it, ya? Their Bislama. They don't mix it with English, then when they have to speak in English... it's just straight. So we could do the same... I mean, like with this Solomon Pijin, we could do just the same. It doesn't matter this broken Pijin thing... like, if we know our original Pijin, when English comes, we'll be able to cope with it..."

25. "In order to keep Pijin, so that it goes on existing, maybe the Government should create one institution which, basically, would be dedicated to the learning of Pijin. So that anyone who is interested in it can attend it. (...) But it should be an independent institution, apart from formal education. I think that's the only way to preserve our language, because if it's no longer used, it will be lost! And if it gets lost, we won't be able to bring it back."

26. "I think... if they want to prevent Pijin from becoming English, I think they would have to introduce Pijin as one subject in schools. If they don't... introduce it at school, I envisage... high possibility that Pijin turn into English."

27. "I favour English, every subject should be taught in English, but they should at least make one Pijin class too, I think. So that during that time people can use Pijin."

28. "They should... because Pijin, we all know it from the time we were born, we all know how to speak it. But, like, regarding... what, grammar, or to really know it well, they should promote that. That children learn how to write it and learn Pijin well, like the real Pijin. (...) Because children nowadays they really... mix it too much. So they should introduce any subject in Pijin, so that the children learn it."

29. *"It's because we feel that... we belong to Solomon Islands, and Pijin is our language. It's like our second mother tongue. And whenever we speak Pijin, it makes us feel that we all belong to Solomon Islands. And whenever you speak English like that, man... it creates like distance, ya."*
30. *"We put English into short terms, that we can understand, we Black people."*
31. *"I think, according to me, it just doesn't matter [if people are not literate in Pijin]. Because Pijin is just for locals, it's like an identity for Solomon Islands, so... like, they know how to speak Pijin, but writing it it's not.... It just doesn't matter."*
32. *"S: In my opinion, Johanna, I think, we'll never look back. All the past things are forgotten I think. I mean these days people are not adapted to... all the things which were from the older days, I think, they are past now. People don't want... that missing past things, we live modern. We don't care about the cultural things...  
L: This kind of thinking it's really..."*
33. *"If you look at it, currently, I think it's Pijin that most people speak, not English. So I feel I would rather go for they put both English and Pijin as official languages."*
34. *"Language is something which goes with the population. So if we look at the population which is educated and the population which is not educated, in Solomon Islands only very few will get educated and will use English. While the rest will use Pijin."*
35. *"I think, it should be English. It's the... it's the official language... At least we try to adopt English."*
36. *"It will be everywhere if they introduce it at school, like if people are schooled in it."*
37. *"If they make Pijin the official language, according to me, even those students, the students who don't know English, don't know English well, they will get good grades, they will learn much more. Because they don't know English, so if they study in Pijin, they will have more knowledge and understanding.  
So why doesn't the Government do it this way? If it's easier for students, why doesn't the Government make the decision that everyone will take the exams in Pijin?  
Ya... Because, I think, the government doesn't do it because the government looks beyond that. English is really the important, official language: if you go out in the outside world, you'll meet different people, and they never speak Pijin, they speak English. So the government attends to English. People have to learn English, ya? To communicate."*
38. *"Mixing it's all right? Many professors do that...like, half a sentence in English, half in Pijin... go back to English, then Pijin... Like this, it sounds nice or... it sounds weird?  
J: It sounds mix... It just sounds like mixture... (laughs)  
W: Like, nowadays... it's usually like that. After all, this instance, it would just sound normal, I mean, it will just sound all right... But if... I mean... it's separating them that would sound abnormal. I mean, it would sound weird if we... like if we passed this Pijin... [making "pure" Pijin the official language] But for normal life these days, if it's mixed up... it just sounds normal!  
J: People use the two to mix... sometimes they opt for English inside Pijin... I do this too. Very often I do it. Like, everyone do it in Honiara nowadays. But some people sometimes, they speak English...it's like they go... between the two!"*
39. *"We speak a kind of new Pijin which shortens everything! Like teenager Pijin or what?"*
40. *"To me it's just fine! Because I can... speak this Pijin with anybody, I mean, this broken Pijin, broken English."*
41. *"It's a new culture of language. Before, you spoke in a straight way. Now... (...) For me, whatever language, whatever Pijin I speak, I'm proud of it. Even if it's mixed with English, it's still Pijin, at least it has that essence... mixture of Pijin inside of it. It makes it different, it's a language in itself."*
42. *"PNG Pidgin I can understand it, and in Bislama maybe a few words are similar, but Pijin is pure broken English."*

43. *"When you mix it with langgus it's really nice! Like, you can express what you want to do, in a way which is just really nice. The way you express it, it really sounds nice.*

*So even if you use a word from a different langgus, it's ok?*

*Ya. It's part of it, everyone can use it."*

44. *"I have the feeling that.. that you like Pijin, like you have some affection for Pijin...*

*Yeea... Oh, I like Pijin because... I think because it's a broken Pijin... I mean a broken English, it's a mixed Pijin, and I think, when I talk with anyone who can understand Pijin, I'm free to... express myself. And I think it sounds nice too! I mean, I'm talking about speaking Pijin, ok? As I said... it's a beautiful language. I don't know how to describe it but... it makes the way I express myself really...*

*So you feel free...*

*Ya, I feel free. Like, if I express myself in English, not everything that I have inside and would like to express in English would come out. Like, I don't know... a lot of words I wouldn't be able to use them. But in Pijin, Pijin is funny, as I said: you can describe anything with it, for instance if I use Pijin now in this open field, I'm really balanced, I feel cool!*

*Ok!*

*And, 'mi bas distaem', it's a new phrase that we use for... heu, 'bas' is 'best', but we say 'bas'. It's just... unique and..."*

45. *"Pijin in the city, it sounds a little bit good! In the provinces, it's typical! It sounds like late 60's Pijin! And langgus comes inside too!"*

46. *"It's more fancy, because most of the words are just pronounced like English... it's more kind of a fancy type of Pijin."*

47. *"In the context of Solomon Islands, it doesn't matter if your accent is that of... either that of white people or that of... a villager. It's only the message which is important. Even if you pronounce Pijin in a way which sounds more like... someone who chews too much betelnut so... like it really sounds like langgus, it's all right: it's the message which is very important."*

48. Quote in English

49. *"When it's mixed with English it's just nice. It's easy to understand."*

50. *"English news are not mainly for foreigners but... for different people with different backgrounds in education. Because many of the Solomon Islanders who are highly qualified, they better understand news in English than in Pijin."*

51. *"Why on SIBC they make it in Pijin, because SIBC is a national broadcast, so the people who live in the rural areas they listen to it too. So the one in English they don't really understand it, so it's good like that."*

52. *"They make it first in English, so that the expatriates can know what the news is about, then they make it in Pijin, so that those people who don't know English can understand it."*

53. *"They produce Bibles for the locals, who can't read English but read Pijin. Because many people don't understand English: they can read, but they don't really understand the... That's why they have to write it in Pijin."*

54. *"They are due for... making improvement to this Onenews. To have a version like SIBC, ya? In this way it would be good, because... people... I think most... some elderly people maybe, they will... understand only in Pijin, whereas... in English they won't know. Especially those who are illiterate, ya? They know only... Pijin will be better for them... Those who are a little bit educated, they know English. (...) I think, maybe, Onenews... they should make it double, two versions.*

*Double? English and Pijin, ok. But... the English one they would do it for whom?*

*In English they would do it for those... those who know how to read or..., ya? And the Pijin one for... when they tell it in Pijin like that, the people... the illiterate people they will know too 'oh, this is what is going on'.*

*Ok, so the Pijin version would be for non-educated people, ok."*



55. *"Maybe some people won't go further in education to know English well, so they will use Pijin... So they should learn Pijin too, how to read and write it."*
56. *"They should make [education] in Pijin too, because many people in Solomon Islands are not really educated."*
57. *"So it's really nice: you don't understand English? You can read it in Pijin. Then if you don't understand Pijin, you can read that... last one."*
58. *"I think, some local people, who were born... they can read Pijin but they don't understand when it's written in English. Like, the ones who attended only the primary school level. When they see the Pijin words they understand them."*
59. *"I can write Pijin, because English and Pijin are almost similar. So whenever I think of a word or an expression that I want to express in English, I know how to express it in Pijin as well. That's how I learnt how to write Pijin. Because, the expressions that I use in English, I can use them in form of... Pijin language, Pijin spelling."*
60. *"We should put aside English as one subject like science or maths. Not like something which influences the whole curriculum. We should keep it aside, until the end of university. Because, as I understand it, once we put it in this way, it will be better. For example like Japan, or Taiwan, or even France, Italy, they put English as something aside like science or maths, ya? So, same application here, once we do that, you'll be smarter in the things you learn. Because you concentrate on them."*
61. *"One thing that I consider: why learning that language [English]? That's the thing: that's my identity, no need for me to waste my time learning English. So if I were the director, I wouldn't put a policy like that. We have to show our identity. It's Pijin our identity in Solomon Islands. Or our language. English is a foreign language, ya? So... that's the thing: it's just not necessary, no need for it. As long as you understand and you can write it, that's it. And you can speak it a little bit in formal communication, that's it. No need for us to speak it like... English people, or Americans or... whoever. No need. I mean, that is not for our benefit, that is for the whole benefit of their... to show their power. So personally, I agree with what this friend said, that we shouldn't... encourage English inside the university."*
62. *"We just have to consider the literacy rate in the country. If we see that the literacy rate in the country, more than 60% of the people attend formal education, ok, we can go for English. Because everyone is taking part. (...) But at this point of time, the country's illiteracy rate is still one of the highest in the Pacific, so I wouldn't agree to English yet. Because the national members of the country, they don't know English. They only speak Pijin. (...) Until we see that it's time, we stick to Pijin. Then we'll be able to remove Pijin and English will become our national language."*
63. Quote in English
64. *"According to me, those who created Pijin are people from Solomon who went to university and came back, they made this language so that it's easy to communicate with foreign people. So you mean, Pijin would be like simple English? Simplified English? Ya. It has been simplified for the grassroot people who don't know English. Ya. So that they can know what the people who have studied come and tell them."*
65. *"SIBC is more like putting English words inside Pijin, rather than really breaking down the English words into the more simplified words which exist in Pijin. Someone who doesn't have access to formal education wouldn't have a clear understanding of the words that they use."*
66. *"The people who have got... educated, they just don't really care about speaking proper Pijin."*
67. *"It's funny: we Solomon students, if we write to a Solomon Islander in another country, on the Internet we write in Pijin, the e-mails. It's just normal to us."*
68. *"Whenever I write e-mails, like in the places where I want to make jokes, I often use Pijin. Not a full one, just some parts of it, for things I want him to really get, or for funny things, like any joke."*

69. *"I just consider that... everything is good to know, it's good to know a little bit about it."*
70. *"Do you think that it's useful to know how to write Pijin or not?  
I think... hum... I think it's very useful, ya.  
Useful for what?  
Just to know it... I mean, you just speak it, but you don't know how to spell the words. It would be awkward that you know the words but don't know how to write them."*
71. *"It happens sometimes that you try to write in Pijin or?...  
Once I did it: I tried to write in Pijin, but the way I put the words, it wasn't right. Like, someone else read it and said 'what on earth were you trying to do?'.  
An for which occasion did you try to do this, try to write in Pijin?  
I wanted to write to Joyce [a relative]. When I was still in my village, I sent her a letter. Like, I felt like writing it in Pijin. Because usually I wrote in English. Then I thought 'in which language will I write it? Shall I write it in Pijin?', then I thought 'I'll try to write it in Pijin'. Then once I finished it, I gave it to read to a friend of mine and she said 'what on earth are you trying to do here? It looks funny'. So I just gave up and I wrote it in English!"*
72. *"In other cases I simply use the English words, but... the structure of the sentence is that of Pijin. But if I follow the formal, or the normal way of writing Pijin, when I say 'you' it will be 'iu'."*
73. *"You see? It's Pijin English. You say that you wrote in Pijin, but it's spelled in English sometimes. English just comes in, in this Pijin."*
74. *"'Lime' should be 'laem', ya?"*
75. *"This word 'question', I would write it 'questin'."*
76. *"This word 'betelnut' is spelled in English: it should be 'bitalnat'."*
77. *"The way you read Pijin, it's different, certain things don't follow the way you speak. I mean, it's like slang when you stick to the way you pronounce it."*
78. *"Like, when I read a book in Pijin, such as the Bible, some wordings that they put inside it, some Pijin words that I should use, they are no longer used now! (...) For example, the word 'middol': the really Pijin word, it's 'melewan'. But it's no longer used now. These days, people just use 'middol'. But this word 'middol' doesn't reflect the real Pijin. It's an English word."*
79. *"Some people they... even me, I speak in Pijin but it's not like in one book in Pijin, e-ve-ry sin-gle word that they write it really follows the Pijin language. (...) So Pijin nowadays it's like it has changed. From the real Pijin that people wrote [in the Bible]."*
80. *"That of SIBC. Because that one would be more... like real Pijin. It would be a bit... different. From English."*
81. *"That of Nate is much better, it's more Pijin: it would give a sense of identity to the people in the country: 'oh, we have our own language, it's not the same as English, the way we write it'. (...) Like it has its own flavour."*
82. *"It's good that [foreigners] speak it here, where Pijin originated, to speak with people inside the country. Like, we, we educate in case we go overseas one day, and we'll use English to speak with them. The same happens with the RAMSI: they come here, they learn Pijin to speak with Solomon people."*
83. *"I think, they don't want to make people feel out of place. Like, the language that people in Solomon Islands usually speak, they speak it, so that... they can integrate inside the society."*

## CONCLUSION

*"Olsem, if mi trae fo iusim exempel blo Japan, for instance. Mi think, evri pipol blo oketa, ot skul well tu bikos... most of the things ot kam up wetem, technology o evriting, hem written down lo language blo oketa. So oketa understandim, hao oketa save respond lo datwan, things hem isi. Ok. Solomon Islands - bikos mifala haf-haf, ia - so iu no save full English, iu no save full Pijin. (laughs) It's kind of in-between, iu no save watkaen term ot save iusim fo datwan, but... it's just like you... you middolman! (laughs) Iu no fully save English, iu no fully save Pijin tu, ia."*<sup>1</sup>

(Alison, Honiara)

Thirty years after Independence, Solomon Islands is a young nation, which is still negotiating its colonial past and making decisive choices for its future. Throughout this thesis, I have examined how Solomon students, literate in a language that they do not consider theirs, conceive the complex linguistic situation of their country, and their own. These students, as the future elite of this young nation, are at the heart of two phenomena which are likely to have a determining impact on the future of the country: the rise of national consciousness, and increasing social differentiation. Their attitudes toward Pijin and English, two languages currently engaged in implicit competition at the institutional level, speak in an enlightening way to these larger issues in which many young Solomon Islanders, and their political leaders, are currently enmeshed.

Solomon students' attitudes toward these languages are shaped by a diversity of influences, or language ideologies, that I have attempted to bring to light and examine in my analysis. I have considered four main influences which inform, at different levels, these attitudes: the linguistic hierarchy which remains from the colonial period; the more egalitarian pre-colonial ideology of reciprocal multilingualism; the growing influence of

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<sup>1</sup> "Like, if I try to take the example of Japan, for instance. I think, all Japanese people, they do well at school because... most of the things they encounter, like technology or everything, it's written in their own language. So they can understand, they know how to respond to them, things are easy. Ok. In Solomon Islands - because we are half-half - so you don't totally know English, you don't totally know Pijin. It's kind of in-between, I don't know what kind of term people normally use for that, but... it's just like you... you're a middleman! You don't fully master English, you don't fully master Pijin either."

nationalist language ideologies in the Pacific region; and the pragmatic awareness of the high instrumental value of English as international language in today's globalized world. In students' discourses on Pijin and English, these different ideologies meet; they sometimes challenge each other, but often they combine and "creolize" (cf. Hannerz 1992). The diverse ways in which the encounter of these divergent language ideologies is negotiated and interpreted by Solomon students has been at the heart of this thesis.

We have seen in particular how the idea of hierarchy between Pijin and English, a legacy of the colonial period, remains pervasive, while being partly reinterpreted by students. At a superficial level, the stickiness of the colonial prejudices against Pijin, diffusely transmitted by their elders, is impressive: The stock-phrase "Pijin is broken English" remains commonsense, and is hardly challenged by most students. However, among many youth who have appropriated this language as a second mother tongue, it is a learnt discourse assimilated independently from their emotional attachment toward this language - a discourse which is now largely devoid of clear content. Very often, it is partly or totally reinterpreted in a diachronic perspective, according to which Solomon Pijin would have recently evolved from "pure" Pijin to "broken Pijin-English". On the other hand, this "broken English" prejudice is likely to linger as long as Solomon youth grow up with the (highly contestable) belief that Pijin was historically born from a failed attempt to acquire English - i.e. as long as they do not formally study this language in schools, and are made aware of its strong Melanesian substrate.

As a matter of fact, while the notion of hierarchy between Pijin and English remains in students' discourses, it has largely shifted in meaning. The superiority of English is now generally attributed not to its intrinsic qualities, but to its greater instrumental value at the

global level. Students' marked emphasis on the current international role of English, and their concurrent reluctance to discuss its formal role in the diglossic situation which still prevails in Solomon Islands, was enlightening in this regard. Indeed, in Solomon Islands, English remains a gatekeeper for outward and upward social mobility, which are currently tightly related. As in many other post-colonial countries, such as India or Hong-Hong, it still functions as effective linguistic capital despite Independence, and this reality generates understandable reluctance to mother-tongue education (Lai 2005:378). But in such cases, Lai points out, students should not be viewed as "*passive victims of linguistic imperialism, but [rather as] active language pragmatists*" (2005:381). In this context, the maintenance among Solomon students of the idea that Pijin is a broken version of English may actually reveal less an inherited subservience to colonial ideology, than a strong desire for symbolic association with the global English-speaking community. One might even say that students partly *resist* the idea that Pijin is *not* broken English, because the idea of belonging to this global, "developed" community – if only partially - is fundamentally aspirational.

While students often privilege pragmatic considerations (indeed in line with the current socio-economic realities) over affective ones, they fully acknowledge Pijin's position as *de facto* national language, and are well aware of the nationalist discourse which implies that Pijin is part of Solomon cultural heritage and national identity. Probably under the influence of the nationalist language ideologies which prevail in neighbouring Pacific countries (where students complete their degree), counter-discourses on the nature and value of Pijin have emerged and grown. This was demonstrated not only by the fact that a small minority of students subscribe to them, but also by the cautious "people say" employed by some other students who still adhere to the prejudiced view against Pijin. It

was also clear in the diffuse feeling that the promotion of Pijin is somehow *supposed* to be endorsed by them as Solomon citizens. But, at the same time, as we have seen with my Suva informants, the nationalist ideology can also be mobilized *against* Pijin: As a product of cultural contact, it is then deemed too “artificial” to be protected as part of Solomon culture. Here, the nationalist ideology and the colonial one, which are both informed by tenets of linguistic purism, meet, and Pijin suffers once again from European-biased conceptions of what a “real” language is.

In post-colonial Honiara, local and imported language ideologies meet, with sometimes surprising points of convergence and divergence, and “creolize”. As revealed in students’ linguistic behaviours, this creolization process has unintended outcomes, which may be deemed more or less productive from the point of view of language planners. In this regard, from a theoretical perspective, this research has shown the importance of considering both the discursive and the behavioral components of language ideologies, and contrasting them: Linguistic behaviours reveal aspects of language ideologies which may be, consciously or not, downplayed in discourses. Thus, whereas the association of English with social inequality was often evaded during interviews, the pervasive linkage of language, race and class status – legacy of the colonial period - was glaring in students’ linguistic behaviours in classrooms, and had a major impact on their language practices.

In USP classrooms, the residual effect of the colonial language ideology combines with a nationalist egalitarian ethos in a way arguably detrimental to *both* languages: As the use of English is interpreted as an unpatriotic behaviour which goes against the principle of social equality fundamental to Solomon culture, the colonial legacy impairs the effective acquisition of oral English – without concurrently clearly benefiting Pijin. Free choice of

language, as the absence of regulation at the USP SI Campus might suggest, is purely theoretical. In practice, students are compelled by peer pressure to make a “choice” between social mobility and national solidarity – a choice that they obviously *cannot* make. Indeed, the contrast between their claimed desire to practice English at the USP SI Campus and what they actually do in classrooms provides a striking illustration of the contradictions in which Solomon students are caught. Even if they often criticize the language-class status linkage, students are unable to escape the persistent connotation of English as a status marker which thwarts egalitarian relationships among Solomon Islanders, and actually perpetuate the linkage of language and class through their participation in “mocking” behaviours. As a result, students are led to resort in classrooms to a heavily anglicized version of Pijin (or, better said, Pijinized English) – a practice which is likely to have much more detrimental effects on their fluency in English than Pijin itself.

The residual effect of the colonial ideology also thwarts students’ endeavour to become fluent in English in another way: through the idea of interference, allegedly unavoidable due to the “broken” nature of Pijin. Stemming from the colonial ideology which presents the two languages as incompatible, this idea implies that Solomon Islanders, as Pijin speakers, are *naturally* bound to speak English badly. The fear of laying oneself open to ridicule by speaking “broken English” acts as a powerful deterrent not only in the classroom, but also in relationships with foreigners. Indeed, the fear of interference is a self-fulfilling prophecy: As it prevents students from practicing English on a daily basis, fluency in English takes longer to reach. There is no more effective way to inhibit one’s acquisition of a language than the conviction that one cannot properly speak it due to factors beyond one’s control.

Although the colonial evolutionary assumption that Pijin is a form of “pre-English” still underlies in subtle ways students’ linguistic attitudes, they personally belie this colonial prejudice as they clearly aspire to become *bilingual*, and not monolingual in Standard English. Here, two contrary tendencies are at work: the nationalist desire for a distinctive language representing their national identity, and the desire to belong to the highly aspirational English-speaking global community. To meet these contradictory desires, students may opt for a heavily mixed English/Pijin code; but they can also become full bilinguals, with each language dedicated to a different layer of identity and different interlocutors. As demonstrated by the example of several “pro-Pijin” students, willingness to acquire English for its instrumental value does not need to entail a concurrent depreciation of Pijin, if these languages are conceived as distinct and not in terms of hierarchy and competition.

Multilingualism has a long tradition in Solomon Islands, and is highly valued. The local language ideology of balanced multilingualism could then combine with a nationalist valuation of Pijin - as it does in the case of these students - to support a more egalitarian view of languages, in a way which benefits both English and Pijin as *complementary* codes. Pijin, as national language, enables communication between Solomon Islanders from different islands without eroding their sense of belonging to their ethno-linguistic group; similarly, English should enable communication with foreign peoples without being interpreted as altering Solomon Islanders’ loyalty as fellow nationals. Rather than being “in-between”, as Alison put it, Solomon students could be “both”: Through their *double* competence in Pijin and English, they could resolutely position themselves as educated cosmopolitans and loyal Solomon Islanders.



## **APPENDIX: Written samples**

### ***“Student distaem”* by NATE (July 2007)**

Evri student skul distaem,  
Wearem uniform, nating nomoa.  
Hem se hem skul,  
Bat hang around, nating nomoa.  
Peem betelnut, ofa an lime,  
Roll tobacco moa behaen,  
Student ba, gogo luk stupid nao.

Evri student skul distaem,  
Wearem uniform, nating nomoa.  
Hem se hem skul,  
Bat hang around, nating nomoa.  
Peem betelnut, ofa an lime,  
Roll tobacco moa behaen,  
Student ba, gogo luk stupid nao.

Break time kam, peem forty-five (*kwaso*),  
Negonego olabaotim  
Half past two, iu mitim mi,  
Art Gallery...

Boes an gels semsem nomoa,  
Ple around lo skul nomoa,  
Dastawhy, your test bae fail nomoa.  
Dastawhy, your test bae fail nomoa.  
Dastawhy, your test bae fail nomoa.

### **Extract from SIBC radio news (July 31<sup>st</sup> 2007):**

“Wanfala report talem dat girls who a as young as eleven years old a among 36-fala pikinini wea oketa documentim olsem victims of sexual abuse an exploitation lo Arosiwe region, East Makira. Plande lo oketa pikinini a victimised by sexual commercial exploitation. Main samthing report ia hemi talem hem oketa samthing olsem prostitution, sexual abuse and pornography hemi big tumas. Report se talem tu dat lo plande locations parents tu encouragim ot iang girls fo involve lo oketa samthing in exchange fo money an permanent buildings. Lady X talem dat report ia hemi wanfala reminder lo evri mothers lo responsibility blo oketa over pikinini blo oketa an grandchildren blo oketa. Lady X talem dat summary blo report ia hemi shoem hao oketa pikinini become victims blo disturbing crimes olsem. (...) Lo company offis lo Honiara, oketa talem dat oketa no getem iet eni confirmation lo samthing ia, an therefore oketa no wande mekem eni comment iet.”

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