INTRODUCTION

The following paper outlines the second stage of development of Torres Strait Creole, now the *lingua franca*, or common language, of Torres Strait Islanders everywhere. The first stage, which I discussed in an earlier volume of this journal, was that of the creolisation of Pacific Pidgin English around the turn of the century in three Torres Strait island communities. In that article, I argued that creolisation was the result of two factors not reproduced elsewhere in Torres Strait at the time: (1) the creation of *de facto* Pacific Islander settlements on Erub, Ugar and St Paul's Anglican Mission, Moa, where the Pacific Islanders outnumbered Torres Strait Islanders and (2) the integration into those communities of these hitherto marginal immigrants. The prestige of the Pacific Islanders derived from their function as linguistic and cultural middlemen, interpreters of European ways of life to their Torres Strait Islander kinfolk.

A third stage in the development of the creole began with the war years, when almost all able-bodied men left their home islands to join the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion and, for the first time, came into daily contact with English-speaking Europeans.

The present overview article traces the diffusion of Pacific Pidgin English and the creole which developed from it, focusing on the central islands of the Strait between the early 1900s and the beginning of World War II. Also briefly discussed are certain interwoven historical

Anna Shnukal carried out research into Torres Strait Creole while a Visiting Research Fellow in Sociolinguistics at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. She now teaches linguistics at the University of Queensland.

1 This paper summarises the results of fieldwork carried out in Torres Strait in 1981 and 1982, together with library and archival research, which was funded by a Visiting Research Fellowship in Sociolinguistics from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. It is part of an ongoing study of the history of the creole *lingua franca* of Torres Strait.

My thanks to Lui Bon, Miller Cook, Tom Dutton, Peter Gillan, Murray Lui, Marriott Mabo, Sam Passi, Bruce Rigsby and John Scott for helpful conversations and to members of the following central island families for their kindliness, hospitality, and information: Billy, Bob, Faiud, Garnier, Lowatta, Lui, Mari, Mauga, Mills, Mosby, Pearson, Samuel, Sorogo, Thaiday, Warria.

2 Pidgins and creoles are of particular interest to sociolinguists, since they cannot be fully described without reference to both linguistic and social phenomena. A pidgin is usually said to be a 'mixed' language, formed through the fusion of two or more languages. Typical pidgins have a small vocabulary and reduced grammar and are functionally restricted compared to 'normal' languages. Most importantly, they have no native speakers. A creole becomes a creole, however, when a group of children begins to use it as their first language. When this happens, the creole quickly develops the means of expressing all the communicative needs of its speaker and, on purely linguistic grounds, i.e. without reference to its history, cannot be differentiated from any other natural language.

3 Shnukal 1983.
SPREAD OF TORRES STRAIT CREOLE

Torres Strait Island Groups.
themes which explain the creole’s survival and expansion during the early decades of this century.

The material presented here has been distilled primarily from conversations with central Islanders, but I have also drawn on: government reports; missionary journals; the accounts of teachers, Anglican priests and travellers who resided in or visited those islands; legends; and the major anthropological and sociological works by Beckett, Haddon, Moore and Sharp.

The major studies of Torres Strait history and ethnography have concentrated on the eastern and western island groups. Probably because of their small and shifting populations and their somewhat ambiguous position between the eastern and western Islanders, surprisingly little has been written about the central Islanders, although recently Masig (Yorke Island) has received attention from a team of Japanese sociologists, only fragments of whose work has been published in English (see Yabuuchi et al 1977:15-19); and from a sociolinguist, Peter Gillan. Anthropologist Maureen Fuary has worked on Yam, but has not yet published her research findings.

The history of Torres Strait Creole is unusual among creoles in that its creolisation and diffusion are the outcomes of two different (though related) sets of historical circumstances. An examination of those two sets of circumstances from a sociolinguistic viewpoint, fitting together a jigsaw puzzle of field observations, oral history and genealogies provided by Islanders and both official and unofficial government and church records, affords a further perspective on the little-researched post-contact history of Torres Strait.

TORRES STRAIT CREEOLE

The language in question, Torres Strait Creole, developed from pidgin English brought to the Strait in the mid-nineteenth century by Pacific Islanders working in the marine industries. It was mistakenly believed, both by Islanders and Europeans, to be English, the linguistic symbol of the new socio-cultural order which was at that time beginning to transform all aspects of life in the Strait. This belief was the primary psycho-social impetus both for its adoption as their primary language by the children of the immigrants born on three Torres Strait islands around the turn of the century and, within two to three decades, for its spread to the central islands.

Between 1910 and 1940, the creole became the first language of the children in the central islands and eventually displaced the traditional Australian language, Kala Lagaw Ya, as the primary language of those islands. While this process is not complete as yet, Kala Lagaw Ya has ceased to be a viable community language there, although the creole spoken contains many borrowings from it. Only a handful of elderly first language speakers of the traditional language remain on Yam and Masig and while there are more native speakers on Waraber and Purma, the language is used only among the over-fifty age group and rarely spoken to children. Young people on Purma and Waraber can still understand Kala Lagaw Ya, but they have difficulty in sustaining long conversations in the language and can no longer make speeches, deliver sermons, or compose songs in it.

THE CENTRAL ISLANDS

It is customary to divide the islands and cays of Torres Strait, that stretch of water between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea, into three main groups: western, central and eastern (see Figure 1). This primarily geographical division, however, parallels geophysical, cultural and linguistic phenomena.
The central islands and cays never supported the large populations of the eastern islands. Generally small, flat, low-lying wooded coral sand formations or scrub-covered sandbanks, often with poor sandy soil and little fresh water, they were not permanently inhabited in pre-contact times. The central Islanders, or Kulkalaig, were semi-nomadic, forced to move from island to island in response to the changing seasons and the availability of water and food. They were the ‘fishing people’, the major traders and fiercest warriors of the Strait, visiting the western and eastern Islanders as well as the mainland of Papua New Guinea to their north and islands off the Australian coast.

There appear to have been at least three groups of central Islanders. Tudu provided a centre for those who moved among the north-west central islands, whereas Masig and the western island of Nagi were the foci for those who moved among the north-east and south central islands respectively. According to Islanders, the Aurid, Burar, Purma and Waraber people have always been on friendly terms and their relations with neighbouring Nagi were cordial. Haddon reports that the Aurid, Masig, Damud and Purma people went every year to islands off the east coast of north Queensland ‘to live for a while and to barter’ and legend has it that Waraber and Purma joined with Nagi to fight the inhabitants of Moa. Relations among the central island groups, however, were not always cordial, Tudu making raids on Aurid, for example, and attacking Purma in 1871.

Nevertheless, the central Islanders were linked not only by language and lifestyle, but also by exchange and religion, which in turn linked them with the eastern Islanders. There was reciprocal visiting between the central and eastern peoples and it was not unusual for groups of central Islanders to spend several months on Erub or Mer and be visited in turn. One can infer from stories about those times and from the fact that there appear to have been no central-eastern marriages that the visitors, while on perfectly friendly terms with their eastern island hosts, remained together as a group and segregated from the Easterners with whom they exchanged fish, turtle and shell for fruit and vegetables. Each year canoes from Aurid, Masig, Purma and Yam, as well as from Nagi, Erub and Ugar, rendezvoused at Mer, the focus of the Bumai-Malo cult. They congregated there not only to trade, but also to plan the annual religious festival which would take place on one of the ‘lodge’ islands. Thus,

4 The Tudu Islanders are said to have come originally from Babaia, a village on the Bina River of Papua New Guinea and they maintained a close association with the coastal people of Papua New Guinea. There were some marriages but generally the central Islanders intermarried with each other and with the Muralag people from the lower western islands of Torres Strait.

5 Haddon 1935:88.

6 Jardine 1872.

7 Murray, April 1873; March-April 1874.

8 Malo, the pivotal figure in the eastern island traditional religion, and his three brothers came to Torres Strait from Tuger country in Papua New Guinea. During the journey from Nagi to Mer, each brother settled on a different central island: Sigar on Yam; Kolka on Aurid; Siu on Masig. Malo, however, continued on to Mer. According to Lawrie 1977:326, ‘the religion which developed at these places after the coming of the brothers created a bond with Mer.’ She claims also that the cult was known at Waraber and Nagi. Coral 1925:11 refers to the Bumai-Malo ‘lodges’ on Aurid, Purma, Yam, Nagi, Masig, Ugar, Erub and Mer and visitors from those islands were made welcome on Mer. Each family at [the Murray Island village of] Las chose a friend from among the visitors and took him into its home. (Friendships made at that time have endured through succeeding generations and are recognised today.)’ (Lawrie 1977:336).
there was a long tradition of central-eastern contact, which was later to be reinforced by the Christian churches.

The language of the central Islanders was a dialect of Kala Lagaw Ya. Ireland, a captive survivor from the wreck of the Charles Eaton in 1834, claimed that the Masig people spoke Meriam Mir, the Papuan eastern islands language. This is certainly incorrect, although the central Islanders had indeed borrowed Meriam Mir vocabulary. From legends and stories, it is clear that the central and eastern Islanders communicated mainly through handsigns (*ol i tok lo an* ‘they talked with their hands’) and although there were no doubt bilingual individuals, there were no bilingual communities as there are today on several Torres Strait islands.

Of the sixty or so central islands, only four are currently inhabited: Yam (Turtle-Backed Island), Purma (Coconut Island), Waraber (Sue Island) and Masig (Yorke Island), with 1983 populations of 110, 132, 160, and 131 respectively. Nevertheless, all the other islands, cays and reefs are owned and many continue to be used for recreation or production — for camping, fishing, food gathering, gardening and pig keeping.

From historical and legendary sources, both written and oral, we know that many more were inhabited at one time or another, if not permanently. Even in post-contact time, Aurid, Burar, Damud, Gebar, Giaka, Mauar, Mukar, Sasi, Tudu, Umaga and Yarpar all supported populations, sometimes merely one extended family, for at least some part of the year.

**POST-CONTACT**

In examining the reasons for the abandonment of the traditional central islands language, one is struck, as always, by how closely linguistic growth and decay mirror extralinguistic (socio-cultural and historical) events and trends, even though the precise psycho-social mechanisms underlying the processes are unclear.

In the central islands, several inter-related non-linguistic events appear to explain the

---

9 King 1837:47.

10 Murray, September-December 1872. According to Haddon 1935:93, the speech of Masig, which marked the linguistic boundary between east and west, was said by other central Islanders in the 1880s and 1890s to be half eastern and half western.

11 Traditional and European names of central islands discussed in this paper are given below, with currently inhabited islands starred:

- **Aurid** Skull Island
- **Burar** Bet Island
- **Damud** Dalrymple Island
- **Gebar** Two Brothers Island
- **Giaka** Dungeness Island
- **Masig** Yorke Island
- **Mauar** Rennel Island
- **Mukar** Cap Island
- **Purma** Coconut Island
- **Sasi** Long Island
- **Tudu** Warrior Island
- **Umaga** Keats Island
- **Waraber** Sue Island
- **Yam** Turtle-Backed Island
- **Yarpar** Roberts Island

Other islands mentioned are:

- **Badu** Mulgrave Island
- **Daun** Mount Cornwallis Island
- **Erub** Darnley Island
- **Mabuiag** Jervis Island
- **Mer** Murray Island
- **Muralag** Prince of Wales Island
- **Muri** Mount Adolphus Island
- **Nagi** Mount Ernest Island
- **Saibai** Saibai Island
- **Ugar** Stephen’s Island
linguistic shift by which the traditional language was replaced as the community language by Torres Strait Creole. These were: (1) the establishment of marine industries, controlled by outsiders and requiring people speaking different languages to live as well as work together for extended periods of time; (2) the widespread acceptance of Christianity, which in the central islands was instrumental (on ideological grounds as well as for administrative convenience) in dispersing populations and establishing permanent settlements on relatively few islands; (3) the growth of schooling, of which the de facto medium was often the creole; (4) the creation of an elite group of Islanders, often the descendants of South Sea Islanders or Europeans, with status and privileges; and (5) the change in traditional central-eastern patterns of interaction, including inter-marriage, which led to the breakdown of old loyalties and rivalries. Each of these processes will be discussed in detail below but may be better understood if first situated within the context of increasing external European control in Torres Strait, with all that that implied in societal disruption and feelings of powerlessness among the Islanders.

The post-contact history of the central Islanders is one of incursion, population decline, resettlement and regrouping — a struggle to make sense of and come to terms with the new order gradually imposed by Europeans.

The first recorded contact between Europeans and central Islanders was in 1892, when the Tudu warriors attacked two English ships under the command of Captain Bligh. It is obvious from the account of the skirmish that the Islanders spoke no English, communication being carried out by signs and traditional language words.\(^{12}\)

The first central island to be visited by Europeans was Damud, also in 1892, although the visitors apparently did not land.\(^{13}\) Some three and a half decades later, we have the fullest account of the central islands in Captain King's *A voyage to Torres Strait in search of the survivors of the ship 'Charles Eaton'* and it is from this and the writings of later visitors that we know what little we do about the central Islanders of that early contact period.

Thus we know that in 1836, no English was spoken by the central Islanders. By 1840, however, the Tudu Islanders were reported to know some English words\(^{14}\) and in 1845, the Masig Islanders used the English words for 'water', 'knife' and 'ship'.\(^{15}\)

Five events were referred to above as contributing to the displacement of Kala Lagaw Ya by Torres Strait Creole in the central islands of the Strait. These events will now be discussed in greater detail.

1. **Marine industries.**

During the 1840s, several survey missions were made by British Navy ships and the resulting navigational charts and sailing directions, together with the growing awareness of the wealth to be gained from the marine life of the Strait, encouraged European commercial interest in the area. In 1846 we have the first report of a fishing vessel in Torres Strait, gathering beche-de-mer and turtle shell.\(^{16}\)

\(^{12}\) Haddon 1935:72.

\(^{13}\) Haddon 1935:93-94.

\(^{14}\) Haddon 1935:73.

\(^{15}\) Jukes 1847:1,160.

\(^{16}\) Macgillivray 1852:308.
By the early 1860s, beche-de-mer stations had been established in the central islands and, in 1868, Captain William Banner converted his beche-de-mer station on the north-west side of Tudu into the first commercial pearling station in Torres Strait. Banner had previously worked in the Pacific and by 1873 his station employed some thirty South Sea Islanders, both Polynesians and Melanesians. Two years later, the Police Magistrate at Somerset reported that pearling was 'in full swing' in Torres Strait.

During the 1870s, beche-de-mer and pearling stations were established on Purma (George Pearson, Robert Scott and a man named McCourt), Giaka (Edward Mosby and Jack Walker), Gebar (Ernst Redlich), Masig (Mosby) and Damud (Walker), employing, in addition to central Islanders, men from Saibai, Erub, Ugar and Mer. Relations between the immigrant workers and the Torres Strait Islanders were generally good (in contrast to the early years of beche-de-mer gathering) and there were marriages between central island women and the Europeans and Pacific Islanders. Since local labour was never sufficient for the needs of the industry, foreigners — predominantly Pacific Islanders, but also Australian Aborigines and New Guineans from what is now Papua New Guinea — were imported into the region. Having no common language, they used the Pacific Pidgin English of the Pacific Islanders which, according to Haddon, was widely spoken throughout the region by the 1880s and 1890s, especially by men from the islands near beche-de-mer and pearling stations.

Very little else is recorded of the years between 1836 and 1871, the year when London Missionary Society teachers were first placed in Torres Strait. However, we know that with the outsiders came disease and within a few decades, the population of the Strait is estimated to have been halved, declining to between 1,500 and 2,000. Of those, no more than a few hundred would have been from the central islands, which were never densely populated. On Gebar, Aurid, Mauar, Damud, and Nagi, a western island with close ties to the central islands, only remnants of the earlier inhabitants remained.

17 Moresby 1876:29. 
18 Beckett 1963:40. 
19 Murray (September-December 1872) writes of Gebar that it was 'small and of no great importance on any account. Its population is somewhere from thirty to fifty.' Some Tudu Islanders moved to Gebar in the 1890s but a few years later it was deserted, most of the people, decimated by a disease that was ascribed to sorcery, moving to Yam. I was told that some families settled on Mabuiag and possibly also on Erub.

By the 1880s, the once large population of Aurid had disappeared, the few remaining people having moved to neighbouring islands. At that time, only two Sandwich Islanders and a Filipino, Juan Francis Garcia, lived there with their families and the island became uninhabited in 1925 after the death of its last inhabitant, Garcia, whose widow settled on Purma.

Similarly, by 1873 the Mauar people, who then numbered only about twenty or thirty, were being urged by the LMS to move to Masig, with whose people they were connected (Murray, letter of 8 September 1873). In 1922, The Queenslander (14 October 1922:40) reported that Susui, the ‘last surviving member of the once populous island of [Mauar]’ had died on Masig.

When the Scotsman, Jack Walker, a former partner of Edward Mosby, married a woman from Damud and settled there in the 1880s, the island was still populated. Largely because of water problems, the population dispersed during the LMS time, some people moving to Yam and others to Masig and Waraber.

In 1849, Macgillivray 1852,II:35 estimated Nagi's population at 150. However, when James Mills, then Frank Jardine's agent, settled there in the 1870s, only a few of its people remained. By 1904, after Mills had imported Aborigines, New Guineans, eastern and western Islanders, as well as other
It should be noted that, while Europeans of course controlled the industries, they were outnumbered by the Pacific Islanders by at least ten to one. Moreover, the Pacific Islanders had high status, derived from their close association with the Europeans, whose chief lieutenants they were. Some of the Pacific Islanders were literate world travellers, experienced in European ways. Joseph John (also known as Iae), a Fijian, who is said to have fought on the British side in the Battle of Sebastopol, was placed in charge of Banner's beche-de-mer station in Banner's absence and it was he, so one story goes, who discovered the rich pearl-shell beds near Tudu in 1868. James Mills, a Samoan, who was Frank Jardine's foreman on Nagi, is reported eventually to have leased that island from the Queensland government. In 1911, the Protector wrote approvingly that, under Mills's management, Nagi, with its extensive coconut plantation of about 40,000 palms, ... is certainly an object lesson as to what may be done with most of the islands in Torres Straits, practically the whole of which are still in their primeval state, although quite as capable as [Nagi] of being brought into a profitable state of production. According to their descendants, some Pacific Islanders were taken into partnership. Mills is said to have been in partnership with Jardine and Samson Lowatta, a Tanna man, with Mosby.

(2) 'The Coming of the Light'.

The arrival of the Christian missionaries of the London Missionary Society in Torres Strait on 1 July 1871 is still considered by Islanders to be the single most significant event in their history. Known as 'The Coming of the Light', that day continues to symbolise the rejection of the 'dark' traditional past and the acceptance of the 'light of civilisation' and it is celebrated each year as the Torres Strait national day.

The already high status of the Pacific Islanders, which resulted from their special relationship with Europeans, was reinforced by the arrival of the LMS. For, although the missionaries themselves were Europeans, they in fact spent little time in the Strait, the daily work of conversion, pastoral care and education among the Torres Strait Islanders deliberately being delegated to their South Sea Island teachers.

In 1871, two teachers were temporarily placed on Tudu, where they were welcomed primarily as agents of European protection against enemies, as potential providers of European central Islanders, to work his coconut and copra plantations and his pearling vessels, only two of the original inhabitants lived there, one of whom, Sorogo, was the son of the last chief, Mori (Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1904:14). By 1913, only about twenty people continued to live on Nagi, almost all of them descendants of Mills and other Pacific Islanders (Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals 1913:15). The island was abandoned in the 1960s (Benny Mills, p.c.).

20 William Banner, George Pearson and Edward Mosby, among others, brought in Pacific Islander crews with whom they had previously worked in the Pacific.

21 Another story is that an American sailor named Toy was the first to discover commercial quantities of shell in 1861.


goods and 'know-how', as teachers of English and as guides to the ways of 'civilisation'.

In spite of pockets of hostility, determined resistance and apathy, there was nevertheless an eagerness among central Islanders to receive an LMS teacher. In 1872, Murray reported that the Masig Islanders had made 'urgent application' for teachers and of the Tudu Islanders he wrote:

It was deeply interesting to observe the earnestness with which they expressed their wishes to have a teacher, though of course they have a very imperfect idea as to the teacher's errand and office.

The placing of a teacher was not, however, unconditional. It could be argued that the goal of the LMS was to refashion the spiritual and material lives of the Islanders in a manner more consistent with the English Victorian lower-middle-class virtues of work, thrift and modesty. Thus they and their South Sea teachers, often themselves first generation converts in their own islands, tended to see evidence of the Torres Strait Islanders' spiritual conversion in the wearing of clothes; cleanliness; regular church attendance; construction of churches, schools and houses; settlement in tidy villages; and cultivation of gardens; that is, in the adoption of a more 'civilised' way of life.

By 1873, the population of Tudu, where the majority of the central Islanders were then living, was estimated to be 'considerably over two hundred'. The Tudu Islanders, now without a teacher, 'our South Sea Island teachers being unable to remain at the place for more than short periods', were said to be anxious to have another. The missionaries, engaged as they were in efforts to transform the Islanders into self-sufficient cultivators on the Pacific model and thoroughly mindful of the moral harm which could befall them through consorting with shellers, put pressure on the Tudu people to abandon their semi-nomadic way of life and settle in permanent villages, close to church and school. After assurances by the Islanders that they would settle permanently on their garden island of Yam, where 'there is plenty of good water and fertile soil', a Mare teacher, Gutacene, was sent to Tudu

According to Langbridge (1977:29), the LMS 'came with the sanction of the government which felt that they would serve to protect, pacify and civilize the Islanders.' It is interesting to note the two reasons advanced by McFarlane for his decision to place teachers on Tudu (1888:48-49):

First, that they might be a check upon the South Sea Islanders, ... [who] often found their recreation on visiting heathen villages, and plundering plantations and homes. ... The poor savages soon found that their clubs and spears were of little use against snider rifles. Another reason ... was that the [Tudu] islanders had intercourse with those of Bampton, an island off the mouth of the Fly River, where we contemplated forming our other mission station. [Tudu] appeared healthy, Bampton did not; and so we thought it wise to leave them for a time, where we knew it was tolerably healthy and safe, till they became acquainted with the people and place of their destination.

Murray, April-May 1873.

McFarlane 1888:138-139.

Murray, April-May 1873.

In 1873, the Mauar people were urged to move to Masig (Murray, letter of 8 September 1873) and as late as 1913, efforts were still being made to induce the Purma Islanders to settle there too. They resisted, however, since 'the natives of each island consider themselves a different people to those on other islands' and, although on friendly terms, were 'averse to sinking their individuality as a distinct body.' (Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginais for 1913:13).
SPREAD OF TORRES STRAIT CREOLE

from Mabuiag. The Islanders, however, did not keep their promise, the people preferring Tudu ‘on account of the facilities which it affords for fishing’ and in 1876, with most of the population still engaged in pearlshelling away from Tudu, McFarlane removed the teacher.

In 1879, with the passage of the Queensland Coast Islands Act, the Queensland government annexed all the islands in Torres Strait. During the twenty-five years following annexation, the Queensland government initiated some measures of self-management, most notably the election of island councils in 1889, but seems to have interfered very little in the lives of the Islanders. Since the government lacked the resources to administer the islands, that task at times went by default to the LMS teachers who, by virtue of their spiritual authority, became the de facto rulers on some islands. This added to their prestige and to their symbolic position as powerful ‘coloured men’ in the changed order. Ultimate authority, however, remained with the Government Resident on Thursday Island.

(3) Schools.

Along with Christianity came the earliest instruction by the LMS teachers in catechism, (Pidgin) English and arithmetic. In the central islands which, by comparison with east and west, were poorly served by teachers, there seems to have been considerable pressure from the Tudu chief, Maino, for a school.

In spite of pressure on the Tudu Islanders to settle on Yam in return for a teacher, however, it was not until the 1890s that certain Tudu families, together with a few Damud and Gebar people took up permanent residence there, whereupon, after further representations from the Islanders, the LMS sent a Lifuan teacher to teach the children of Yam and the neighbouring islands to ‘read English’. Maino was reported to be delighted, saying: ‘You see, all children grow up now, no savee nothing’.

29 Murray, letter of 8 September 1873.
30 We can, I think, deduce from this that the majority of the Tudu people were reluctant to abandon their traditional mode of life and submit to the control of the teacher.
31 According to Langbridge 1977: Gutacene served on Tudu from 1873 to 1876; a Lifuan teacher was placed on Yam in 1897, but there is no indication of the length of his stay nor of the date at which a Samoan replaced him, serving until 1914; Simone, from Mare, taught on Masig between 1873 and 1876. After he left, the Lifuan, Gucheng, oversaw the congregation from Erub during at least the following year and in 1893, Gabey, a Murray Islander, was appointed but was dismissed two years later. The Samoan, Samuel, served between 1905 and 1914; Aragu, a Daun Islander, taught at Purma for some years until the end of 1914. None of the other central islands received LMS teachers.
32 Chalmers 1897. Although it was reported that by 1897 ‘the few remaining representatives of the once powerful [Tudu] tribe’ had settled at Yam (Report of the Government Resident at Thursday Island for 1896 and 1897:6), not all the Tudu people moved there. Individual families settled on Gebar, Masig, Damud, Muri, Purma and Waraber following the 1880s downturn in the pearling industry, a decrease in the price of shell, increasing sickness and the salination of the well water on Tudu. Similarly, Masig became the home of various Damud, Aurid and Mauar people.
33 Letter from Chalmers, dated 14 July 1897, quoted in Lovett 1902:440. Maino is certainly speaking the pidgin here. Pacific Pidgin English features are the use of ol (‘all’), the plural determiner; nau (‘now’), an aspect marker indicating that a process has begun but is not yet completed; no ... nating (‘no ... nothing’), negative preverbal marker plus negative pronoun; and sabe (‘savee’, originally from Portuguese saber), the verb ‘to know’. From the Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition, for which Maino served as an informant, we know that he spoke the pidgin with Haddon (see, for example, Haddon 1904:225).
eager to receive schooling for their children. In an 1897 report, Chalmers tells us that 'the great felt want [on Waraber, Purma, Masig and Damud] is the want of education for the young.'

Education in English was an important element in the decline of Kala Lagaw Ya in the central islands. Schooling was seen as a necessary adjunct to 'civilisation', which imparted skills and knowledge, the most important being English literacy, needed for coping with and perhaps even advancing in the new order.

Long before the appointment of government teachers to the Torres Strait islands, the Masig people had made 'urgent application' to the LMS for teachers and in the 1890s, Edward Mosby, an American pearler who had married a Masig woman and settled there in the 1870s, had hired at least one European teacher for the children of the island. After the Masig government school closed in 1904 following the death of the teacher, James Mills of Nagi erected the 'John Douglas School' (named after the recently deceased Government Resident) at his own expense and hired a European teacher. This school, however, was soon closed by the government following complaints by parents about Mills's behaviour.

By 1891, the Government Resident was urging the appointment of a European administrator-teacher to Mer. Following the successful appointment of John Stewart Bruce to Mer, government primary schools were established on Yam and Masig, as well as on Erub, Saibai, Mabuaig and Badu. In 1900, Mrs Smallwood was appointed to Yam and Mrs McLean to Masig, where twenty children received regular instruction. However, the school on Yam closed after six months and the twenty-five Yam, Nagi and Gebar children were without a teacher. A school was opened on Nagi in 1904, with a Miss Steele as teacher but, perhaps because of its small population, Purma does not appear to have been given a government teacher for the Waraber and Purma children until about 1921, when an Erub Islander was appointed.

The change to Torres Strait Creole on Yam and Masig is commonly believed to date from the arrival of the white teachers, who encouraged parents and children to speak English 'to improve their schooling' and punished the use of the traditional language, even in the playground. But there were never more than one or two European teachers in the central islands and their influence as language models was restricted to the school and to a relatively few formal situations. More important, I believe, in the dissemination of the newly creolised pidgin was its use as a lingua franca by prestigious eastern Islanders living in central island

34 Murray, September-December 1872.
39 In 1915, however, we are told that a 'temporary native teacher' was engaged to teach the Purma children to read, write and do simple arithmetic (Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1915:11). As far as I can gather, though this aspect needs more research, Mrs McLean, the Masig teacher, was followed by Mr Connelly, who taught there from about 1914 until 1920. Mrs Smallwood then took over until the Second World War. In 1907, Mrs Zahel was reported to be the teacher on Yam. She was followed in 1910 by Mr Richards and in 1911 by Mrs Smallwood, who later moved to Masig.
SPREAD OF TORRES STRAIT CREOLE

communities (see below). However, while schooling alone does not fully account for the transition from traditional language to creole, it is significant that the Yam and Masig children, who received instruction in English from Europeans, adopted the creole as their primary language some twenty years before the Waraber and Purma children. Elementary education for the latter during the second decade of the century was provided on Purma by Aragu, a Dauan LMS teacher and hence a speaker of another dialect of Kala Lagaw Ya.40

DISPLACEMENT OF THE TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE

This, then, takes us to the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, when there was fairly wide-spread knowledge of Pacific Pidgin English in the central islands among adults, especially men who had worked on the stations. The children still spoke Kala Lagaw Ya as their first language, but those who were near a primary school learned a little English from the European teacher. The traditional language was just beginning to be stigmatised as belonging to the 'dark, uncivilised' past and as inappropriate to the new society being created.

By themselves, however, these circumstances do not account for the rapid adoption of the creole as their first language by the Yam, Nagi, Gebar and Masig children born towards the end of the second decade of the century, nor by the Purma and Waraber children born in the 1930s, since similar conditions existed on other islands where the traditional language remained strong.

Crucial in understanding this linguistic change is the role of the creole as a pan-Islander lingua franca, the contributions made to this by the members of a newly emerging Torres Strait elite and increased central-eastern contact, including inter-marriage, during the period.

(4) An emerging elite.

Following the death in 1904 of John Douglas, for many years the Government Resident on Thursday Island, the Torres Strait Islanders were drawn under the 'protection' of the Queensland Government. The previous policy of community self-regulation through councils and police under the day-to-day management of the Islanders themselves began to be reversed and became increasingly paternalist and segregationist.41 Under the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction on the Sale of Opium Act of 1897, island 'reserves' were created and more and more aspects of Islander lives began to be supervised and regulated.

At a time when movement among the islands was restricted and Islanders were beginning to be aware that their control over events which concerned them was being eroded, one small group of Islanders was set somewhat apart from the others, as favoured by the government and the church and given status through their contribution to their new order.42

Although I have nowhere seen the term 'elite' referred to in the literature on Torres Strait and Europeans at the time would probably have referred to those concerned as 'potential leaders', it is clear that certain categories of Islanders, most notably priests and teachers, but to a lesser extent police, and later, store managers, were accorded authority, status and privileges, not only by their employers, the church and government, but by their fellow Islanders. For one thing, having achieved prominent and prestigious positions in the new societal

41 Sharp 1980.
42 The Anglican Church had officially taken over the work of the LMS in Torres Strait in 1915.
order, they were seen as part of the government/church nexus that was increasing its control over the lives of the Islanders. They received wages which, while not always as high as those of men on the company boats during a good season, were regular and assured. Because of their knowledge of 'English', they were usually the island spokesmen in negotiations with visiting Europeans and they in turn derived prestige from their perceived ability to deal with Europeans. Many, incidentally, were the descendants of Europeans and South Sea Islanders who had settled in Torres Strait between 1870 and 1900 and as *apkas* 'half-castes' were highly regarded (especially as marriage partners) because of their light skins and straight hair.43

Moreover, at a time when inter-island movement was restricted, these men were sent to different communities to carry out their duties and often, it would seem, deliberately posted across the east-west linguistic barrier in order to break down traditional loyalties and anti­pathies.

From the second decade of the present century, selected Torres Strait Islanders began to be trained as assistant teachers, at first informally and later at the Mabuiag Teacher Training Institute. The first government-appointed teacher at the Purma primary school, for example, which was also attended by the Waraber children, was an Erub Islander and he was followed by a man from Mer. Both men were forced to use the creole, which they spoke as a second language, not only as the language of instruction (which contributed to its prestige and to the widespread belief that it was English) but also in their daily interaction with the Purma people with whom they shared no other language. Some years later, Kala Lagaw Ya-speakers from Saibai and Mabuiag, as well as other Easterners, also taught at Purma but by then the creole had begun to replace Kala Lagaw Ya as the primary language of the children and was well established as the teaching medium in the school.

(5) Cross-linguistic interaction.

Now, whereas eastern and central Islanders had generally been on cordial terms in the past, visiting was limited to exchange and religious occasions and rigorously controlled by both hosts and visitors. Since the groups lived apart and there appear to have been taboos on mixing with the women of the other group, there was no need for a common language.

One would expect these circumstances to have been repeated when, in post-contact times, priests, teachers and policemen were posted across the linguistic barrier, in much the same way as the few European teachers on the islands were (and still are) courteously isolated from the life of the community, whose language they do not share.

For several reasons, however, the nature of post-contact central-eastern interaction had changed. On arriving in the Strait, many Pacific Islanders had established brotherhood relationships with others who shared their first language and these ties remained operative even if the individuals concerned eventually settled on opposite sides of the linguistic barrier. Their children, who may have spoken different languages, were no less cousins, even if fictive ones, with the same rights and obligations as true blood relatives. Moreover, although central-eastern marriages had been extremely rare before contact, from around the 1860s a few Pacific Islanders working in the eastern fishing and pearling grounds had married eastern

43 The *apkas* were also favoured by the Europeans (for much the same reasons) and generally considered to be intellectually, and even morally, superior to 'full' Torres Strait Islanders.
island women and brought them to the central and western islands, thus establishing affinal ties with the Easterners whom they and their children visited on occasion.44 One expression of the universalist philosophy of Christianity was the encouragement, by both the LMS and its successor, the Anglican Church, of inter-island visiting for church meetings, religious festivals and church openings. This led to the daily discussions between hosts and visitors necessary to plan and assign responsibility for accommodation, the preparation of meals and feasts, tidying up, church services, Mothers Union meetings, dance programmes, and the like. Some years later, inter-island crews on some of the company boats began to visit the families of new friends from other islands and to form sexual alliances with the women. Thus a practical need arose for a common language and this common language in turn contributed to the development of a pan-Islander consciousness which was to have its first major expression in the 1936 company boat strike, so well documented by Sharp.45

To return to the important eastern visitors, who now came to teach or minister to the central Islanders: they could no longer be treated as outsiders and politely isolated at the margin of central island social life. Accorded status by virtue of their position, and linked by blood and affinal ties to their hosts, they could not be excluded from community life as once they might have been. Here again, a lingua franca was necessary, since for the hosts to speak their own traditional language in the presence of the guests would have been discourteous in the extreme. Since neither of the traditional languages was acceptable to both groups and the context of use also had become less traditional, the obvious compromise was the creole, which had by then acquired prestigious first language Torres Strait Islander speakers and had developed a lexical and grammatical structure strongly influenced by the two traditional Torres Strait languages.

CONCLUSION

Variations on this account of the decline of the central islands traditional language and its displacement by an English-based creole during the early years of this century will be familiar to many readers. It is a more conventional tale than that of the initial creolisation of Pacific Pidgin English in Torres Strait. Those who have studied the loss of indigenous Australian languages will recognise recurring elements: incursion of Europeans, intent on exploiting local human and natural resources; rapid population decline; missionary influence and the subsequent dispersal and resettlement of previously nomadic or semi-nomadic groups; increasing external control, with consequent loss of autonomy and feelings of powerlessness and resentment; schooling in English and the stigmatising of the traditional culture and language as ‘an inferior tongue’, symbolic of the ‘unenlightened’ past.

In the central islands of Torres Strait, the effect of these processes was compounded by two additional factors: (1) the use of the creole lingua franca by an emerging elite, forced to speak it because of their movement across the east-west linguistic barrier. As we have seen, its use by priests and teachers contributed to its acceptance and status; and (2) the growth

44 The Pacific Islanders played a pivotal role in this process. There is now no central Islander who is not connected, by consanguineal or affinal ties, to the South Sea immigrants and the major families which have dominated central island life and politics since contact were all founded either by Europeans or by Pacific Islanders.

45 Sharp 1981-82.
and changing nature of central-eastern interaction. This interaction, along with all Islanders' shared experience of external control, contributed to a growing pan-Islander sentiment, the language of which was Torres Strait Creole.

In this light, the adoption of the creole, mistakenly believed to be English and, like all European cultural and material artifacts, endowed with both novelty and prestige, is seen to be a rational strategy employed by the central Islanders to adapt to the profound post-contact socio-cultural changes affecting their communities.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Chalmers, James. London Missionary Society reports, Papua, 1897.

Coral, C. 'When shadows lengthen: yarns of old identities of Torres Strait islands', *The Queenslander*, 11 July 1925:11.


Jardine, Frank L. Letter to Colonial Secretary, 1 January 1872.


King, Phillip P. *A voyage to Torres Strait in search of the survivors of the ship ‘Charles Eaton’*. Sydney, 1837.

Langbridge, John W. 'From enculturation to evangelization: an account of missionary education in the islands of Torres Strait to 1915'. James Cook University, B.Ed. thesis, 1977.


Reports of the Government Resident at Thursday Island, 1891-1907.

Reports of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 1899-1916.

Sharp, Nonie. 'Torres Strait islands 1897-1979: theme for an overview'. La Trobe Working Papers in Sociology, No. 52. Department of Sociology, La Trobe University, 1980.


Yabuuchi, Yoshikiko *et al.* Preliminary reports of fields research on Torres Strait islands. Unpublished MS, June 1977.