WHEN ISLANDS CREATE LANGUAGES

or, Why do language research with Bonin (Ogasawara) Islanders?

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Abstract

This paper examines the role that the geographical and social factors of isolation (from the outside world) and intense contact (within the community) commonly associated with small island communities can play in the development of new language systems. I focus on fieldwork studies of the creoloid and Mixed Language of the Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands.

Keywords

Japan, Ogasawara, Bonin, Chichijima, language contact, Mixed Language, creoloid

Why some linguists are attracted to islands

Island societies can teach us many things about human language itself. How do children, for example, assemble a complete language (a creole) out of the imperfect 'broken' speech (a pidgin) used by their parents and all the other adults around them?[1] Such seemingly impossible things do occur and research on language use in island communities helps us to understand the processes by which such improbable feats are accomplished. Other questions arise too. Are such pidgins and creoles the only types of language systems that can come from language contact or do other types exist? What role do island factors like isolation from the outside world and intense inner-contact among islanders play in language change? In other words, there is the question of whether island languages are more likely or less likely to change as compared to their mainland counterparts. In order to explore these issue, this paper examines evidence from the language systems of the Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands, and relates the study of such island languages to the study of broader topics like the study of human language in general, and the study of island societies. The importance of the question of how island children form creole languages reaches far beyond the interests of those of us working in island studies, but attempts to explore this question have been noticeably linked to islands, so much so, in fact, that a brief examination of the issue is warranted here.

In the summer of 1987, Derek Bickerton (then professor of linguistics at the University of Hawai'i) applied for a grant to try to empirically support his concept of the bioprogram (Bickerton, 1984). His plan was to pay six families with young children to live on the uninhabited Palauan island of Ngemelis. Each family would be unable to speak the other's language, and would be supplied only with a common vocabulary of 200 artificially created words. Although the University of Hawai'i's ethics committee had approved the project, the United States National Science Foundation halted the plan (Berreby, 1992).

In fact, quite similar linguistic situations have actually occurred in the past on places such as Pitcairn, the Bonins, Tristan da Cunha, and Palmerston - all of them islands. I will return to actual cases later but let us ponder why a linguist would go to such bizarre extremes to see how children create such an unusual thing as a creole. The answer is that studying children's acquisition of creole turns out not to be such an unusual research topic after all; in fact, this kind of research is central to us ever really understanding how any and all human beings acquire their mother tongues at all - even when these mother tongues are natural

languages—that is non-contact languages, like Japanese, English, Hawaiian or Arabic (Bickerton, 1974). To non-specialists, this might seem like a ridiculous question. At first glance, it might seem that children are taught to speak their mother tongues by their parents and other speakers around them. In other words, children learn to eat with a fork or chopsticks by watching those around them. They learn to sing by listening. And parents take more than a passive role in this training. Parents regularly say 'sit up straight, pick up your feet when you walk, don't say "goed" for 'went' or 'ain't"'. But appearances that parents 'teach' their children the grammatical rules necessary to speak their language can be deceiving.

Consider the following. The English sentence 'Who do you think Jack will kiss first?' can optionally add the word 'that' after 'think'. The sentence 'Who do you think will kiss Jill first?' looks similar. A non-native speaker might understandably assume that in this sentence too, one could optionally add the word 'that', but a native speaker would never say, 'Who do you think that will kiss Jill first?' Even young children (if native speakers) figure out that these two sentences - while looking similar on the surface - have different underlying structures. Since these are not the kind of grammatical points covered in school grammar, the young native children could not have learned this as 'overt knowledge' (like they learn not to say 'ain't' or 'lie the book down'). How, at such an early age, over a span of just a few years, and from such a small amount of information ('impoverished stimuli'), do children acquire the rules of how words can and cannot be strung together (syntax) in their native language?

Linguists did not discover this enigma only recently. It goes back to Plato' s time and in fact is nowadays known as 'Plato's Problem'. The currently accepted solution to this riddle is, however, relatively new. Linguists have posited the existence in all humans of an 'innate ability to acquire a language' - whatever language is spoken around them. In other words, children do not acquire their language from scratch as has been assumed for centuries. Rather they must have some minimal framework of grammatical rules in their head from the moment they are born (the 'language instinct', Pinker, 1994) which helps them to discover the rules of whatever language they grow up hearing.

The exact nature, however, of this cognitive skeleton is hard to study, because soon after children start hearing the language that will become their native tongue, that specific language starts to obscure the 'human language' framework, much in the same way that overlying muscles obscure the shape of underlying bones. This is what occurs in 'natural language transmission,' at least, that is, when a bunch of children learn the language that the adults and older children around them have already acquired and are already speaking natively. But think of a situation in which almost all the adults in a community are using an imperfect, 'broken' version of a language, like pidgin English. A child growing up in such an environment grows up hearing this pidgin. Even in these situations, however, children miraculously grow up speaking a language with clear grammatical rules - a creole. Now these grammatical rules differ enormously from Standard English and can still be ridiculed as 'broken' but, unlike the limited pidgin of their parents, children who speak a creole can make complex sentences with past, present and future tenses, progressive aspects, subjunctive modality, etc. Another advancement of creoles (over pidgins) is that (unlike pidgins which are limited to only some social functions) they fulfill the full range of social functions that any non-contact language has to.

To switch from our anatomical metaphor to a construction one, we might say that in natural language transmission, the children not only had the scaffolding (innate language instinct) and the building materials they needed (the sentences that they heard around them all the time) but also the blueprints for what they were supposed to build (in the form of the grammatical regularities they found in adults' speech). But in a language contact situation, the children have no blueprints. All they have to rely on is their innate language instinct. By studying the results of what they construct (the early creole), we can get a better idea of what the bare scaffolding common to all humans looks like.

The formation of such creole languages is possible in mainland situations, but when it occurs on islands it is easier for linguists to be sure of what kinds of 'building materials' the child did and did not have access to. To put it another way, if we are studying the outcome of a language contact situation that occurred generations ago in a mainland colonial city like Charleston, South Carolina, it may be extremely difficult to determine just what dialects of British English were spoken there and what West African languages, not to mention trying to figure out if there were a few Celtic or French or even Turkish speakers around. But when we study the outcomes of language contact on islands like the Bonins, Tristan da Cunha or Pitcairn, just a few years of detective work may give us an almost definitive list of the languages brought to each island by its early settlers.

This is why creolist Derek Bickerton wanted to artificially create a similar language contact situation on an uninhabited island, to test his own particular version of a language instinct theory (his Bioprogram Hypothesis). Not only do islands allow us to isolate and identify the influencing factors, but there are indications that island factors like isolation and intense intra-island interaction may facilitate language changes - not speed them up as such, but allow them to proceed without inhibiting factors like 'prescriptivism' (ideas of correct and incorrect ways of speaking). If multiethnic island communities are 'melting pots' in ethnic aspects (to use one last metaphor), islands are often 'pressure cookers' in the linguistic aspects, allowing us to observe language changes over a few generations that might well have taken centuries in mainland situations. This is why many linguists are attracted to the island communities. For the remainder of this paper, I will look at the language situation of the Bonin Islands, identify some of the most intriguing aspects of the language situation there, and point out what makes them (at least potentially) significant.

Island language contact and the creation of new language varieties

I have been conducting fieldwork on the Bonin Islands since 1997, helping the islanders to record their unique linguistic heritage and trying to analyse their contact language's structure and historical genesis. The Bonin Islands are today part of Tokyo Prefecture, Japan. They lie about half way between mainland Japan and the Northern Marianas Islands. Because it is a thousand kilometers to either, the islands were inhabited by only one species of mammal (a bat) until 1830 when the first human settlement was established. The native tongues of the early settlers included English, Portuguese, Hawaiian, Chamorro and many other Pacific island languages.[2]

All of the anecdotal, historical and circumstantial evidence points to the development in the early to mid 19th Century of a simplified (pidginised) version of English which was used as the common mode of communication among the early Bonin Island settlers. Later the children born and raised in this language environment must have acquired this as their native language (a process linguists would call creoloidization, see Long, 2007). In the 1860s and 1870s, Japan laid claim to the islands and they experienced a huge influx of Japanese settlers. The Japanese established the first schools on the islands, initiating bilingual (English and Japanese) education. Increasingly intense bilingualism among the 'Westerners' led to the development of yet another contact language (the 'Ogasawara Mixed Language', or OML) comprised basically of Japanese sentence structure with Bonin Island English words (and even complete phrases) incorporated into it.

After World War II, the linguistic situation again took a sharp turn when the United States Navy took control of the islands, allowing only the 'Westerners' (a term referring to locals of non-Japanese descent) to live on the islands and subsequently establishing an English-medium school. This period of American occupation and absolute isolation from Japanese ended abruptly in 1968 when the islands were returned to Japan and the ethnic-Japanese islanders (at the time living on the Japanese mainland for a quarter century) were allowed to return home. The Ogasawara Mixed Language continues to be used among the 'Westerners' today, but the younger generation is monolingual in a basically standard variety of Japanese.

So we see that, in the 170 year linguistic history of the Bonin Islands, the dominant language has shifted from English (from 1830) to Japanese (in 1876), back to English (in 1946), and back again to Japanese (in 1968).

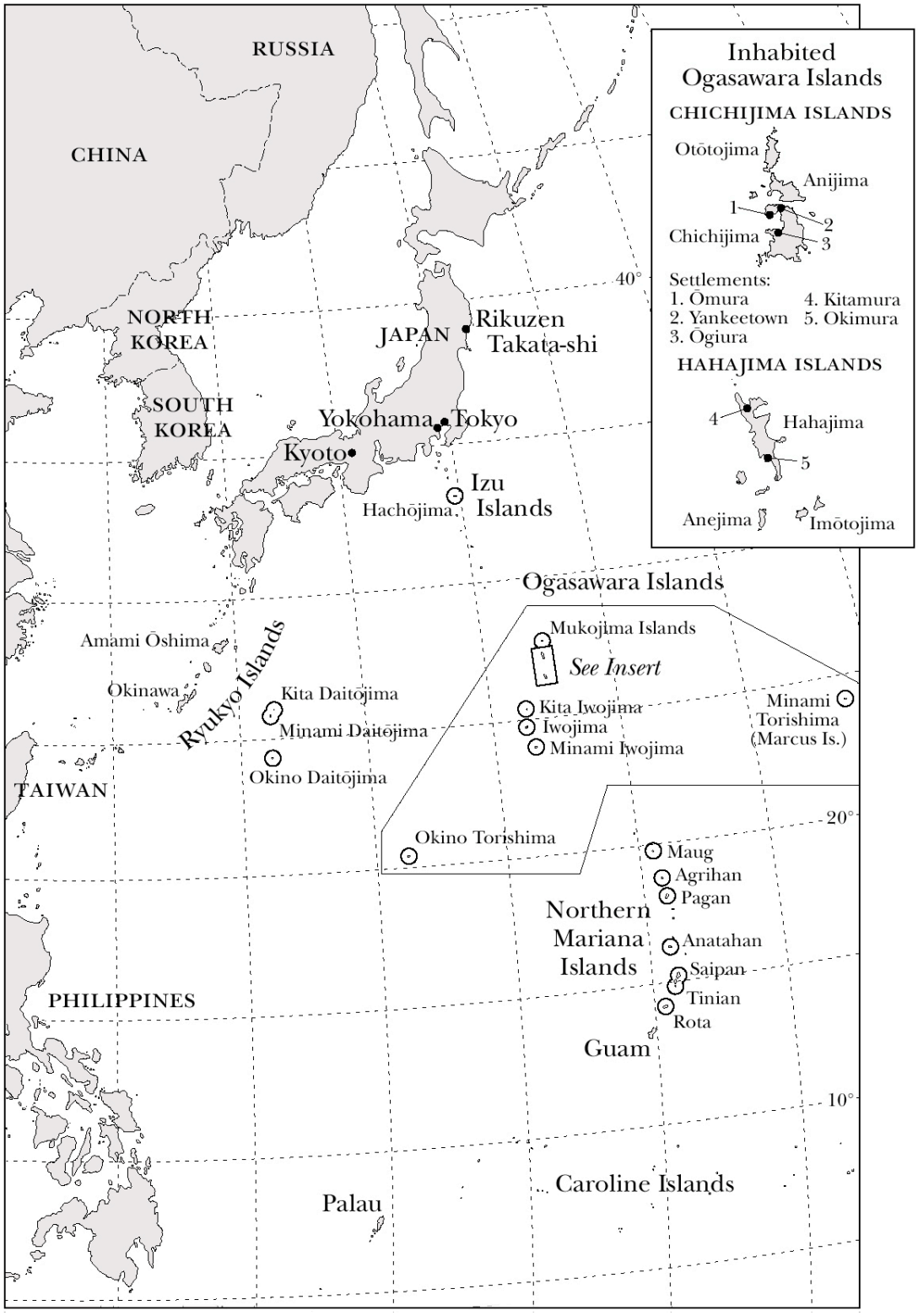

Figure 1 – map of the Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands

The development of unique island language varieties that the Bonin Islands witnessed is unusual but by no means one of a kind. Similar types of language contact have led to the creation of new, English-related language varieties on places such as Pitcairn (Laycock, 1989) and Palmerston Islands (Ehrhart-Kneher, 1996) in the South Pacific and Tristan da Cunha (Schreier, 2003) in the South Atlantic. Such language contact also occurs in mainland situations but several factors common to small island communities make island language contact and its results clearer and easier to study than language contact occurring in mainland contexts. These interrelated factors include isolation, intense interaction, shared linguistic norms, tiny populations, disproportionate influence of individual speakers, and highly changeable linguistic norms (Long, 2006).

New Types of Contact Languages on the Bonins

To linguists, the language situation on the Bonins is significant for five reasons. First, the language varieties that developed on the Bonins have never been hitherto described in linguistic terms and in published reports. Every time linguists find an undescribed contact language it adds to our body of knowledge on the subject. Second, there has been little research on language contact involving the Japanese language.[3] The overwhelming majority of contact languages that have been studied have been ones involving European languages like English and French that are structurally similar.[4] Third, (in addition to the unbalance in linguistic structures) the overwhelming majority of contact language research has been on languages in the same three geographical regions (West African coast, Caribbean Sea and Melanesia). The Bonins provide an example of language contact in the North-Western Pacific. Fourth, most contact languages in the Pacific developed in the same period, the mid to late 19th Century, and influenced one another through cross-migration. The beginning of language contact on the Bonins predates these. Moreover, while there were some early forms of South Pacific contact languages in some areas, the Bonin settlers were not from these regions.[5] Fifth, the Bonin Islands had more than one contact language, and one of these differed from both pidgins and creoles. This was a different type of contact language altogether; a Mixed Language, a phenomenon that has been described and analysed very rarely. I will examine this Ogasawara Mixed Language later in this paper.

Bonin English

What do we think 19th Century Bonin English sounded like? Our earliest evidence comes from the writings of outsiders who came to the island. Their records indicate that island English was not so pidginised as to be incomprehensible to outsiders. On other islands, like Pitcairn or Palmerston, there are many comments from visitors about how difficult the local language variety was to comprehend. On the Bonins, such comments are found in reference to 1st generation settlers but are noticeably absent from comments regarding 2nd and 3rd generation islanders. What does Bonin English today sound like and what does it tell us about 19th Century speech on the islands? We find that Bonin English has both 'conservative' and 'innovative' features. First, let us examine some of the conservative characteristics.

Early 20th Century Bonin English retained an old phonological characteristic from 18th Century non-standard dialects of English. This was the use of a w-like sound in v-words, such as *willage* 'village' and *wisit* 'visit'.[6] Two of the most influential individuals on the Bonins (Nathaniel Savory and Thomas Webb) were from areas (eastern New England [USA] and southeast England) known for this feature in the early 1800s (Long and Trudgill, 2004). In the mid to late 20th Century, the Navy generation speakers usually distinguish between the /v/ and /w/ sounds, but one does occasionally hear the influence of earlier generations in their use of the w-like sound in words like *rewersion* and *Wirginia*. 20th Century Bonin English also retained an old distinction between two classes of vowels (phonemes). The vowels in words like *north* and *short* are pronounced differently from the vowels in *door* and *aboard*. This

distinction was present in some dialects in the US and England in the early 1800's, and the Bonins seem to have preserved it. Long and Trudgill (2004) examine other conservative features that 19th Century Bonin English also apparently retained from its New England roots. While Bonin English is conservative in some aspects, it has developed its own innovations with others, including many unique characteristics that resulted from contact with other languages. Bonin English has been influenced by Hawaiian and Guamanian varieties of English, as well as various forms of mainland US English. Along with these outside influences, the 'Navy-generation' also retains traces of the 19th Century Bonin English of their grandparents in some aspects.

20th Century Bonin English was influenced by the Japanese language but this influence has not always resulted in simply a Japanese accent *per se*. Some words have changed into pronunciations that differ from both mainstream English and Japanese-accented English; they are uniquely Bonin English. Take the examples of the Bonin pronunciations of *drawers* 'underclothing' and *bath*, [dr:s] and [b:s] respectively. These are obviously not the mainstream English pronunciations; the 'z' sound in the former has become an [s] and the 'th' sound in the latter has become an [s]. But these are not the Japanese pronunciations either; those would be [zuro:su] and [ba:su], with vowels inserted between consonants and at the end of the words. One area where the Navy generation does not show the influence of Japanese is in the distinction they make between /l/ and /r/. This generation's parents (raised prewar) do not make such a distinction (as the result of Japanese influence). This generation's grandparents, however, born in the late 19th Century did have such a distinction. The 'Navy generation' has the /l/-/r/ distinction partly because of hearing the English of their grandparents, but more importantly from hearing it from the Navy and from residents of Guam when they attended school there.

Navy generation speakers are 'rhotic', meaning they pronounce the /r/ sound after vowels in words like *park* and *over.* This distinguishes them from both their parents and their grandparents. Their grand parents were non-rhotic because of the lingering influence of the British and New England accents of the earliest settlers and their parents are non-rhotic due to this and also the Japanese influence. Navy generation speakers have mainstream US English vowel distinctions, including the *caught*/*cot* distinction (which has been lost in many varieties of US English). Unlike mainstream US English, however, Bonin Islanders have long vowels rather than diphthongs in pronunciations like [se:] rather than [sei] for *say* and [bo:t] rather than [bout] for *boat* (a trait which they share with their 19th Century-born grandparents). They do have diphthongs for [ai] as in *bike* [baik].

In its lexicon, 20th Century Bonin English is similar to US English, using words like *boondocks* 'remote, backwards place' and *pissed off* 'angry', which entered via the US Navy. Perhaps the most striking feature of 20th Century Bonin English is the vocabulary not found in other varieties of English, such as *moe-moe* 'fornication' , *piimaka* 'raw fish cured in vinegar', *fumpa* 'hermit crab', *reefer* 'refrigerator', and *dongara* 'to miss a target '(from a Japanese whaling term). We also find the names of various species of living things found locally: *arahii* (a fish), *nuku mome* (a fish), *biide-biide* (a tree), *wilowilo* (a bird) and *kiikii* (a bird, probably onomatopoeic in origin).

Grammatically, when Navy-generation speakers use OML, they do not distinguish clearly between definite and indefinite articles or between the singular and plural, but in their 'English-only' code, these distinctions are grammatically close to standard English (with, understandably, some interference from their first language, OML). So, historically, English was declining in usage during the 1920s and 1930s, but it received a shot in the arm from US Navy personnel postwar and made a comeback. That being said, postwar English on the Bonins was not simply nineteenth-Century Bonin Creoloid English resurrected. Rather, post-war Bonin English has several sources: Bonin Creoloid English and varieties of US English (particularly Hawaiian English, but also Guamanian English and many various US mainland varieties).

The Mixed Language of the Bonin Islands

The English of Bonins in the 20th Century, as interesting as it is, does not have the impact that the OML has upon the first time listener. The OML is a contact language, just as pidgins and creoles are, in the sense that it was created out of Japanese and English mixing together. Mixed Languages, however, differ from pidgins and creoles in that they do not lose the grammatical rules of the source languages. Accordingly, Mixed Languages do not have the 'Broken English' (or 'broken' whatever language) feel that pidgins and creoles have.

Look at the following passages (examples 1 and 2) taken from recordings (March 2001) of conversations among three islanders and myself. (In the examples, I have put Japanese-origin words in italics and kept the English-origin words in regular script to emphasise the complex way in which the two languages are intertwined.)

(1) Me *no* sponsor *no*, *anoo*, *nan to yuu no*? *Sono* French door, *anoo* glass door *ga warete,* water *ga* up to the knee *datta.* (My sponsor's - that, what do you call it? Their French door, that glass door broke and water was up to the knee.)

(2) *Uchi no* Mama *wa* no-leg man *mo mita-tsutta zo*. *Anoo, heitai no* clothes *kite*. You *no ojiisan* too, he had lots of stories. (My mama said she even saw a one legged man, uh, wearing army clothes. Your grandpa too, he had lots of stories.)

Just by looking at a couple of examples like these, we can see some of the most salient features of the OML, for example, the use of the English-derived *me* and *you* for the first and second person pronoun. Although the words (lexemes) are from English, their grammatical characteristics have not been incorporated into the OML. We see this in the fact that these pronouns do not change to the Standard English possessive forms *my* and *your* but rather express this information through the use of Japanese grammatical particles, as in *you no ojiisan* 'your grandpa'. The same is true of the plural forms of pronouns as seen in example 3.

(3) Me *ra tabako suu to yuu ja*? ('We say 'inhale' cigarettes, right?)

Numbers are another linguistic category that appears almost exclusively in its English-derived form in the OML. We saw this in examples 4 and 5.

(4) I: *Are wa itsu taberu tabemono*, corned beef? ('When is it you eat that food, corned beef?'
R: It's Irish, is it?
I: Yeah, yeah. Oh, it's, it's *ano, are*. ('Oh, it's, uh, what-you-may-call-it.')
F: Fifteenth.
I: Fourteenth *to* fifteen yeah, yeah.
F: St. Patrick's Day.

The Japanese language has a rather complex system of counter words that have to be employed correctly depending upon the category of noun they modify.[7] This (lexico-semantic) complexity is avoided, by the use of English 'number + noun' phrases which don't require such counter words. The OML is more than simply 'Japanese with lots of English loanwords'. Not only are individual words incorporated from English, but English phrase structures as well, as seen in prepositional phrases like 'up to the knee *datt a*' (ex. 1), or adjectival phrases like 'simple taste' (ex. 5).

(5) *Doushite* me *ga sukidatta no ne*. Simple taste *ga suki de, anmari amakunai shi*. Three *ka* four *gurai no* ingredients *ga haitte nakatta.* ('The reason I liked it was, I liked the simple taste, and not too sweet. There were only three or four ingredients.')

Above, I have illustrated just a few characteristics of the Ogasawara Mixed Language, but the

point I am attempting to make is that the Bonin Islanders have developed, in the span of only a few decades, a unique language system all their own incorporating not only individual words from English and Japanese, but indeed intertwining the grammatical structures of the two languages into one rule-governed language system.

At first glance, the OML looks similar to code-switching. In other words, it appears that its speakers are bilingual, are mixing their two languages together. This is undoubtedly how the OML began to form a century ago but by the mid-20th Century the OML had melded into a single language system. This contention is based on the following facts:

i) When asked what language they grew up speaking with their siblings, peers and parents, many Navy generation speakers respond not with 'Japanese' or 'English' but with 'we mixed the languages'.

ii) Some Navy generation speakers say that they feel inadequate in expressing themselves both in 'only English' and in 'only Japanese'.

iii) Japanese and English are not mixed in a random way by OML speakers. There are clear grammatical rules about the ways in which the languages can and cannot be combined. (This is clear because, if I myself mix Japanese and English together randomly, the islanders tell me 'you can't say it that way'. In other words, they can and do make judgments about the grammaticality of a sentence in OML, the same way that native speakers of other languages could tell a non-native speaker if a given sentence were grammatically well-formed or a mistake.)

The Ogasawara Mixed Language can be seen as a mixing of its two source languages only to the extent that modern English can be seen as a mixing of French and Old English. It would be ludicrous to contend that current English speakers are simply code switching between French and Old English, although no one can deny that our language is a mixture of these two source languages. It is impossible for 20th Century speakers of English to separate that language into its two sources languages and hold a conversation only in Old English or only in French. In the case of the few people who could accomplish such a task, it is because they learned to speak these languages as second and third languages later in life. Factors i-iii above do not fit with the view that the speakers acquired Japanese and English as their second and third languages and subsequently mixed the two languages together. Rather, they indicate that these speakers acquired the Mixed Language as their native tongue, and only later did they learn to separate the two languages into English and Japanese.

What does this research mean for scholars of the science of human language?

Research on a single island community like the Bonins cannot itself reveal all the secrets of human language, but taken as a part of the broader picture it provides us with significant information towards that goal. Moreover, the island nature of the Bonins has made the socio-historic factors behind the linguistic phenomena encountered there easier to analyse. Here are some things that research on the Bonin Islands has taught us.

For decades, linguists debated whether such things as 'Mixed Languages' (contact languages, but not displaying the simplification seen in pidgins and creoles) could even exist.[8] They were theoretical concepts like early theories of Black Holes, and linguists had yet to actually document and analyse an actual Mixed Language. Then contact linguist Peter Bakker provided a thorough and convincing description of a Mixed Language called Michif (Bakker and Maarten, 1994). The attention that this scholarship attracted led to a stream of other Mixed Language candidates being studied and written about (Matras and Bakker, 2003). When I first started researching the language situation on the Bonins, the only tools I had for analysing the situation were the standard concepts of pidgin and creole. I tried my best to comprehend the Bonin situation through these concepts, but the language phenomenon I had

found on the island did not fit either of these models. It was only after I was pointed in the direction of Bakker's work that I found a suitable conceptual framework through which to analyse the Bonin language. At the same time that research into Mixed Languages around the world helped me in my research on the Bonins, the descriptions and analyses that I published contributed yet one more specific example of the phenomenon.

We find a similar give-and-take situation when trying to figure out how the OML came into being in the first place; its historical development. The Westerners of Ogasawara speak a Mixed Language, but the two source languages do not mix in the way common sense tells us they would. The ancestors of today's Westerners were speaking a variety of English and began to incorporate more and more Japanese elements into their speech, so we would expect the Ogasawara Mixed Language to consist of an English sentence structure with Japanese words and phrases mixed heavily into it. The Ogasawara Mixed Language as it is presently spoken is the exact opposite of this. This odd situation is however, explainable if we employ something called the 'Matrix Language Turnover Hypothesis' proposed by Carol Myers-Scotton (1993). But the Ogasawara situation not only is aided by the existence of this hypothesis; it in turn provides one more concrete example of this theory's viability. The more such language situations we find around the world and throughout history, the stronger the indication that this type of language change is not some freak exception to linguistic principles, but rather should be treated as one more type of language contact phenomena for which linguists should be on the lookout.

Another contribution that the Bonins have made to our understanding of human language is in the question of how much influence a single individual can exert on the language of an entire community. The Bonins provide evidence that in small island communities, single individual speakers can indeed disproportionately influence the language that the community will use. People who found their way to the Bonin Islands were, to a degree, isolated from the outside world and its linguistic influences but this very isolation meant that interaction among the island settlers was quite intense. In talking to the same people day in and day out, speakers come to share 'linguistic norms' - not necessarily ideas about the 'correct' way to speak, but social agreement on the 'regular' way that people in the island do speak. In many such communities, a single individual can exert a disproportionate degree of linguistic influence over the other speakers in the community.[9] These factors (isolation from the outside world, intense inner contact) often tend to make the fledging community's language more 'conservative' - that is, more likely to retain old linguistic traits. In a seeming paradox, however, these same factors can also facilitate the rapid spread of linguistic 'innovations' in the language (when and if language change does start). If a handful of island children develop a specific new linguistic trait, it may take root even more firmly in this type of social environment than it would have in a mainland situation.

There are more technical aspects of linguistics on which Bonin Islands research has shed some light. Above, I pointed out that the Bonins have retained an old and complex phonemic rule in which [w] is used for /v/, but only in some phonological environments. Trudgill, et al (2003) have used data from the Bonins as part of a larger argument for the reversibility of near-mergers in the phonological system of languages. In other words, they have shown that two sounds in languages can come precariously close to losing their distinction but then make a comeback and continue to be used as separate sounds in the language.

The Bonins provide evidence that not all non-native communities result in creole formation. Bonin English (not to be confused with the Ogasawara Mixed Language) is close to Standard English, remarkably close considering the overwhelmingly small percentage of native speakers of English. Bonin English is more appropriately described as a 'creoloid', a relatively new term in contact linguistics. Creoloid refers to a language variety that has been substantially influenced by another language but that has undergone fundamental grammatical restructuring as in the cases on true creoles. Bonin English has provided another example to add to the small but growing scholarship on creoloids. The Bonins have also provided evidence that such creoloids may come about by a process akin to 'abrupt

creolization'. The term alludes to the fact that although creoles typically come about after pidgins have been used for a number of years and stabilised, there are cases where the children in the community acquire the pidgin as their native tongue before the pidgin has had time to become structurally stable. A similarly premature acquisition of pidgin English appears to have occurred in the early to mid 19th Century Bonin Islands, thus indicating that 'abrupt creoloid-ization' can also occur.

The Bonins have also provided evidence on language-specific issues as well. When we contrast the language varieties of the Bonins with other Japanese-related contact varieties (Yokohama Pidgin Japanese, Bamboo English, Japanese spoken in the former colonies like Micronesia or Taiwan, etc.) we begin to notice which elements of Japanese grammatical structure are 'core' (those which are less affected by contact) and which are 'peripheral' elements (those which become 'broken'). For example, personal pronoun systems and 'valency' systems (transitive and intransitive verbs, passive voice, etc.) are highly changeable and thus can be considered more 'peripheral' elements of the Japanese language. On the other hand, grammatical formations like modifying clauses or subordinate clauses used to make 'complex sentences' do not become pidginised as one might expect, and thus these grammatical structures may be considered more 'core' elements of the Japanese language.

What does this research mean to the island communities themselves?

The potential contributions of the Bonin Islands to linguistics are not limited to topics of linguistic structure; Ogasawara provides evidence of the complex relationship between language use (language maintenance) and identity as well. The 'Westerners' learned in the mid-20th Century that they did not have to retain English *per se* in order to maintain their unique identity - the use of the Ogasawara Mixed Language would suffice. In other words, before the War and again after the 1968 reversion to Japan, the OML made its users distinct because, being a mixture of Japanese and English, it differed from the speech (only Japanese) of the other island residents. In the same way, in the post-war period, the OML functioned to set its users aside from the US Navy personnel because those people were using only English.

The residents of islands themselves may, understandably, be less interested in the aspects of their language that contribute to theoretical constructs in the linguistic sciences like 'universal grammar' and the 'language instinct' of humans. But this does not mean linguists' research is insignificant for islanders. On the contrary, linguists and their research contribute in various ways to the lives of islanders. One is in a socio-psychological way. I myself have seen the self-image of the Bonin Islanders improve with respect to their language usage, and it is gratifying to think my colleagues and I may have made a small contribution to this improvement. After decades of being told by Americans 'your English is bad because you mix Japanese into it' and then being told the same thing by Japanese people, here was someone telling them that their language was (1) of interest to academics, (2) not random and broken at all, but possessing its own grammatical rules just as any other human language does, and (3) that one's language - of the mixed sort or the traditional sort - was something to be proud of, not ashamed of. Research in other academic fields (musicology, history, etc.) can, does and should have similar positive effects. Linguistics research can be used to help the islanders harness their local language variety as a tourism resource and thus use it to their economic advantage as well. This can mean anything from including the local island names on the name plaques posted on trees around town (under the Standard Japanese name and the Latin taxonomic name) to encouraging the use of island speech at public tourism events, or its inclusion in pamphlets aimed at tourists.

There is no reason for us as academic fieldworkers to distance ourselves from the island communities in which we work, when we can cooperate with the islanders to see that the results of our studies - objectively and scientifically conducted - are used for the benefit of the islanders themselves.

Endnotes:

[1] In the field of contact linguistics, there has been much controversy about the relationships between pidgins and creoles. I will stick with recent work such as Carol Myers-Scotton, who writes "The general view probably still is that creoles develop from pidgins" (2002: 272). She then goes on to mention convincing counter-arguments to this contention in the obsession that some scholars have had with finding a single theory to explain the genesis of numerous contact languages that have developed in various social circumstances, in various parts of the world and at various times on history. Sarah G. Thomason, a voice of reason in the field, has written recently "I believe that some, perhaps many or even most, of the controversies surrounding the topic of pidgin and creole genesis will vanish if we recognise that the common assumption of a single developmental route to creole genesis - which is the main locus of the controversies - is unmotivated" (2001: 175). So, while there remain many controversies regarding the geneses of creoles, my assertion here that there are some cases in which pidgins develop into creoles is outside the controversial points in these arguments, as seen in Thomason's statement "In fact, some creoles are nativised pidgins" (160).

[2] Western Malyo-Polynesian languages brought to the island included Chamorro and Malagasy. Oceanic languages (belonging to the Eastern Malyo-Polynesian phylum) included the Polynesian languages Hawaiian, Tahitian, North Marquesan, Rotuman and the Micronesian languages Carolinian, Kiribati, Ponapean and Mokilese. In addition, there were settlers from China, the Philippines and Bougainville Island, but we do not know what languages varieties they spoke. The native tongues of the European settlers included English, Danish, Italian, French, German and Portuguese (Long, 2007).

[3] Some notable exceptions to this are the late 19th Century Yokohama Pidgin Japanese, the mid-20th Century varieties of Bamboo English used in Japan and Korea, and the late 19th and 20th Century varieties of Hawaiian Pidgin and Creole English (Long, 2002). Interestingly there is speculation that established languages such as Japanese itself may have their origins in ancient creoles but, as the title on one Masters degree thesis suggests, this is more of a 'hypothesis' than a 'theory' due to the fact that the only evidence we have to examine is the supposed outcome of such contact centuries later and not linguistic evidence from the actual period of language contact, i.e. the actual period of the pidgin-creole development itself (Doi, 1984). While Doi's approach is to identify features of Japanese that are typologically similar to known contact languages, Maher (2001) takes the opposite approach, offering a 'language-contact scenario' of what linguistic process would probably have occurred based on our knowledge of archaeological, historical and anthropological data. The idea that Japanese has its origins in language contact dates back at least as far as Polivanov (1924).

[4] Mark Sebba points out "Although we now have information about a very wide range of pidgins, most of the creoles which have been well described have quite similar origins." (1997: 169) His use of the word 'now' should not be overlooked. Even with pidgins, much of the early data on which keystone theories of language contact were founded was from pidgins formed in socially, historically and linguistically similar circumstances.

[5] Numerous Pidgin varieties of English, French and other European languages evolved in the 17th and 18th centuries along the West African coast, in the Caribbean Islands and surrounding coastal regions, and in the 19th Century along the southern Chinese coast, in Australia, and throughout Melanesia. Due to maritime trading and the (often forced) transfer of island labourers, Pacific pidgin Englishes are almost all interrelated. Pitcairn is a notable exception, independent of other Pacific pidgins. This independent development can be see, for example, in the fact that of 30 grammatical and lexical features Clark examines as being common to many contact languages, Pitcairnese contains only 7 (Clark, 1979: 19) and Bonin English less than this by even the most inclusive judgment.

[6] This 'w-like' sound I describe is phonetically realised as voiced bilabial approximant [ß¢] or a voiced bilabial fricative [ß].

[7] The English, 'two students, two months, two fishing poles, two sharks' would be *futari no gakusei, futa tsuki, futsuka kan, nihon no tsurizao, nihiki no same*.

[8] Sarah Thompson (2001: 198) quotes Max Müller (1871) as writing "es gibt keine Mischsprache" (there is no such thing as a mixed language). More recently, Greenberg writes "It is hard to imagine how a truly mixed language… in the usual sense, could arise by a natural process" (1999: 632).

[9] See Erhart-Kneher (1996: 530) regarding the possible influence of William Marsters on Palmerston; Ross (1964: 137-138, 168), Laycock (1989: 614) and Müllhäusler (1998: 43) regarding John Adams, Edward Young and others on Pitcairn; Long and Trudgill (2004: 366) regarding Nathaniel Savory on the Bonins.

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