Pitkern and Norfolk revisited

ANDREI A. AVRAM

Is Pitkern-Norfolk an Atlantic creole spoken in the Pacific?

The English creole now known as 'Pitkern-Norfolk' is spoken as a community language only on the widely separated Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Scholars divide the pidgins and creoles of English into two broad types: Atlantic and Pacific. Logically, the creole that arose as a consequence of the mutiny on the Royal Navy's *H.M.S Bounty* in 1789 should straightforwardly belong in the Pacific group, but internal evidence indicates, paradoxically, that it is an Atlantic rather than a Pacific Creole.

THE ENGLISH creole of Pitcairn and Norfolk, two widely separated islands in the Pacific Ocean, is spoken by the descendants of the British sailors who mutinied on the *Bounty* in 1789 and their Polynesian companions. It was initially spoken only on Pitcairn Island, but in 1856 the entire population was moved to Norfolk Island. Between 1859 and 1864, forty-three people returned to Pitcairn, where their descendants still live. Historically, therefore, the variety of Norfolk Island is an offshoot of that spoken on Pitcairn Island. This article is an account of the English creole of Pitcairn and Norfolk islands in the Pacific, focusing on some of its selected features, their distribution and first attestations.

A number of names for this creole circulate in the literature, of which *Pitcairnese* and *Norfolkese* are perhaps the most widely used. Others include *Pitcairn Island Creole*, *Norfolk Island Creole* (Mühlhäusler, 1997:18), *Pitcairnese Creole English* (Hancock, 1977:373), and *Pitcairn-Norfolk Creole* (Romaine, 1988:98). The indigenous names, however, are *Pitkern* and *Norfolk* respectively. Pitkern was declared the official language of Pitcairn Island in June 1996 (cf. Sebba 1997:138).

The two varieties are sometimes given separate entries in lists of pidgin and creole languages (cf. Hancock, 1971, 1977, and 1987; Smith, 1994), while others treat them as one creole (cf. Holm, 1989:546–551; Mühlhäusler, 1997:18; Baker & Huber, 2001). Mühlhäusler is puzzled by "Hancock's decision to provide two separate entries for the historically and structurally closely linked Norfolk Island and Pitcairn Island Creoles". Baker and Huber (2001:162) use the name *Pitcairn* only, but specify that they have also used data from Norfolk Island.

In what follows here, the three terms *Pitkern*, *Norfolk*, and *Pitken-Norfolk* are used, the first two for the distinct varieties, and the third to designate the creole as a whole. According to some commentators, the differences between the varieties "seem to be superficial" (Holm, 1989:550), while others are of the opinion that "Norfolkese [is] considerably more influenced by Standard English than Pitcairnese" (Sebba, 1977:137).

There is disagreement among creolists with respect to whether Pitkern-Norfolk is, given its

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features, a Pacific or an Atlantic creole, despite its geographical location in the Pacific. It is listed, however, among the Pacific varieties by, for example, Clark (1979:48), Holm (1989:546 & 2000:95), Smith (1994:345), and Parkvall (1999:43). Others consider it an Atlantic Creole, notably Hancock (1971:509, 1977:373, & 1987).

Sociolinguistic data indicate that both varieties are endangered. The number of Pitkern speakers is very small and steadily declining, from some 150 in 1971 (Hancock, 1971:509) to 100 in 1994 (Smith, 1994:345), and less than 50 today, while the number of speakers of Norfolk is relatively stable at around 500. Both evince many of the characteristics typical of endangered languages (cf. Crystal, 2000; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). Sebba (1997:138) writes with respect to Pitcairn Island: "In 1996 it was noted that none of the children on the island were speaking Pitkern spontaneously, though all understand it when it is spoken to them."

Kallgård refers to Pitkern as "a dying language" and notes that it has "lost a considerable number of words during the decades that passed since Moverley's fieldwork" in 1951 and that "the process at work was quite rapid – a process of anglicization and impoverishment" (Kallgård, 1998:107). Compare two structural aspects of language death mentioned by Crystal (2000:22): "knowledge of vocabulary declines" and "the threatened language incorporating features from the contact language".

As for Norfolk, it "is being displaced by NfE [Norfolk English] as the vernacular in many Island homes", and even speakers who "speak Nf [= Norfolk] consistently to their peers... fail to use it to their children" (Harrison 1985:146–7). He also notes that, in terms of the attitudes of speakers, "[s]ome feel such distress at hearing others speaking Nf 'incorrectly' [...] that they say they would rather prefer to see the language die out altogether", and – not surprisingly – "[m]any young people who do not speak Nf 'properly' [...] demonstrate great lack of confidence about their Nf speech" and "hesitate to speak [it] in a situation where they are likely to be criticized". Nettle and Romaine (2000:7) note, in general terms, that "many people object to speaking a language which they no longer regard as pure".

In addition, the importance of attitude towards an endangered language is frequently insisted upon in the literature on language obsolescence. Crystal (2000:117), for example, notes that it is "critical for an indigenous community to adopt an appropriately flexible and inclusive attitude towards language variation, especially in relation to the forms used by younger people…[I]f elders see the usage of young people as a dilution, then the prospects [for language maintenance] are not good."

The present article is part of on going research on the attestation and distribution of features in English-based pidgins and creoles. Its aim is threefold:

1. to show that a number of features, thought not to occur in Pitkern-Norfolk (cf. Baker & Huber, 2001), are in fact attested
2. to show that several other features are attested in Pitkern-Norfolk earlier than indicated in Baker and Huber (2001)
3. to examine the relevance of the data for assessing the position of Pitkern-Norfolk relative to other English-based creoles. Given that it is endangered, this is a matter of some urgency. Indeed, it is imperative that the identification of the features attested should be as accurate and complete as possible, before it is too late.

The Pitkern-Norfolk corpus consists of the monograph, texts and glossary in Ross and Moverley (1964), the Pitkern texts in Kallgård (1993), the most comprehensive word list of Pitkern in Kallgård (1998), and Buffett and Laycock (1988) for Norfolk. This may seem to be a rather limited corpus but (unfortunately) Pitkern-Norfolk has been relatively poorly documented, especially in its early stages.

For ease of reference, the features below have a dual number system: first for the immediate purposes of this paper, then (in parentheses) as they are numbered, labeled and defined in Baker & Huber (2001). Each entry below includes Baker and Huber's specification of either its status or its first attestation. There then follows textual evidence showing that a feature occurs in Pitkern-Norfolk or that it is attested earlier than hitherto assumed. For reasons of space, attestations are in most cases limited to one per feature. In addition, there are brief comments on some features at issue, examples being presented in the orthography or transcription system used in the sources.

1 (40) *hem* (definite article, demonstrative) 1997
wen hem maen go fer fish 1940s (Kallgård,

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1993:112), 'when the men go fishing' [my translation]. In this attestation, the printed form *hem* stands for spoken [hem] or [hɛm], which are two of the variants of the definite article in Pitkern, as well as for [ɛm], [dem] and [dɛm] (cf. Ross & Moverley, 1964:157).

2 (43) *dem* 1997
teck dem's boat 1940s (Kallgård, 1993:112)
'take their boat' [my translation]

3 (62) *fullup* 'fill, be-full' (not attested)
ɛs fʊləʔp fə breʔbrɛʔk piːs 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:125) 'it's full of ungrated bits'. Although listed among exclusive Atlantic creole features by Baker and Huber (2001:198), this item should be included among world-wide creole features, as it is also attested in a number of Pacific creoles (cf. Avram, in press).

4 (73) *Irish potato* 'potato' 1997
airɪʃ teɛti sʊp 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:227) 'potato soup'

5 (98) *maga* 'thin' 1964
morga 1936 (Ross & Moverley, 1964: 244)

6 (109) *nasey* 'nasty' 1998
nehsi 'nasty, bitchy' 1988 (Buffett & Laycock 1988: 8)

7 (112) NP1 for NP2 (possessive, N2's N1: not attested)
a: ben hoːn bɪle fə flaɪd 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:123)
'Floyd's he-goat with the twisted horn' ['Floyd's bent-horn billy']

Some comments are in order on No. 7. This construction seems to occur rarely in P. I have found only two other instances in the corpus at my disposal (both in Ross & Moverley, 1964:227):

ɪn də medl fə daː hɔːl 1964
'in the middle of the hall'

də saɪz fə də aielen 1964
'the size of the island'

This feature appears to be one of the few differences between Pitkern and Norfolk. According to Buffett and Laycock (1988:48), in Norfolk "it is... possible to use a construction using the preposition f' *of*: aa keht f' d sheps". Notice, however, that in Norfolk, unlike Pitkern, the possessive marker *-s* is still attached to the possessor. On the other hand, however, the Norfolk type is also attested in Pitkern. Ross and Moverley (1964:161) call it "a mixed construction". Compare: daː sɔː fə fɛləps 1964 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:227), 'Phillip's sickness'

In light of this data, it would be tempting to assume that the Norfolk type is the original, since it is also attested in Pitkern, whereas the NP1 *for* NP2 construction is a later, independent innovation in Pitkern, given that it does not occur in Norfolk. However, the NP1 *for* NP2 construction is attested in several Atlantic Creoles, which implies that Pitkern independently innovated in exactly the same way as a number of Atlantic varieties of restructured English.

An alternative account would suggest that NP1 *for* NP2 also existed in Norfolk. On this analysis, Norfolk later discarded it in favour of the competing structure with possessive *-s* attached to NP2. The drawback of such a scenario is the absence of any attestation of NP1 *for* NP2 in Norfolk. This, however, could be attributed to the lack of adequate records of Norfolk in its earlier stages.

8 (147) *sweet* 'tasty; please (v.)' 1999
es tuu swiit 1988 (Buffett & Laycock, 1988:21)
'it's so delicious'

This is another feature listed as Atlantic (Baker & Huber, 2001:200). Again, as shown in Avram (in press), this is a world feature, since it occurs here and in Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea.

9 (154) *too* (preverbal) 'very, exceedingly' (not attested)
aɪ tu laɪk ɪʔ 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:125)
'I like it very much'

10 (156) *tother*, *tara* 'other' (not attested)
tudder 1936 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:248)

11 (174) *all about* 'everywhere' (not attested)
D' Kwiin's foeto orlabaut orn Norfuk 1988 (Buffett & Laycock, 1988:63)
'The Queen's photo is everywhere on Norfolk' (my translation)

12 (178) *been* (past/anterior) 1972
I nor been take it 1938 (Kallgård, 1993:112)
'I didn't take it' [my translation]

13 (187) *dead* 'die' 1972
aɪ musə deəd fə taːəd 1951 (Ross & Moverley 1964:125)
'I'm almost dying of fatigue"

14 (188) *dem* (3 PL) 1972
dem go-ut 1940s (Kallgård, 1993:112)
'they go out' [my translation]

15 (192) *for* (infinitive) 1972
I fetch et home fa make some jam. 1940s (Kallgård, 1993:113)
'I took it home to make some jam' [my translation]

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16 (194) *got* 'have' 1972
you gut plun fer I eat [?] 1938 (Kallgård, 1993:112)
'you have any banana for me to eat [?]'

17 (204) *long* 'with' 1972
Aggie call me fa sing long fa some other girls. 1940s (Kallgård, 1993:113)
'Aggie called me to sing with some other girls' [my translation]

18 (206) *make haste* 'hurry' (not attested)
wi baeta mekies 1988 (Buffett & Laycock, 1988:57)
'we had better hurry'

19 (212) *most* 'almost' (not attested)
I fin' my basket moosa full 1940s (Kallgård, 1993:113)
'I found my basket almost full' [my translation]

20 (214) *never* (negative-completive) 1999
wɪ nœwə gʌt wʌn tent 1985 (Harrison, 1985:172)
'we didn't have a tent'

21 (218) *one* (indefinite article) 1972
wʌn streɪndʒə si dem 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:123)
'a non-Pitcairnese is watching them'

22 (219) *one time* '(at) once' (not attested)
one time one ship come 1980 (Kallgård, 1993:103)
'once, a ship came'

23 (222) plenty (noun) 'a lot of' (not attested)
Plenty people go 1940s (Kallgård, 1993:113)
'a lot of people go' [my translation]

24 (224) *plenty* 'very; many' (not attested)
Some time dem get plenty un sometime dem get none. 1940s (Kallgård, 1993:112)
'Sometimes they get many and sometimes they get nothing' [my translation]

25 (226) *-side* (locative suffix) 1964
tedsaɪd 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:121)
'the other side'
ʌndəsaɪd 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:129)
'underneath'
ʌpsaɪd 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:122)
'above'

26 (239) *walkabout* 'wander' (not attested)
hi jes work abaut in a' oel klorth. 1988 (Buffett & Laycock, 1988:64)
'he just goes round in old clothes'

27 (245) WH *thing* 'what' (not attested)
what thing you want [?] 1936 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:267)

28 (277) *look see* 'inspect, take a look at' (not attested)
aɪ mɪn ə goʊ lʊk si əm tri kɔknʌʔ 1951 (Ross & Moverley, 1964:122)
'I meant to go and have a look at those coconut trees'

As noted (Avram, in press), this feature is also attested in Atlantic English creoles. Consequently, it is not uniquely a Pacific feature, as with Baker and Huber (2001:203), but a world-wide feature that occurs in early Sranan (in Surinam in South America) and is attested in modern Krio (in Sierra Leone in West Africa).

29 (288) *sing out* 'shout' (not attested)
dem sing out... fa dem 1944 (Kallgård, 1993:113)
'they shouted... at them' (my translation)

Twenty years later, Ross and Moverley (1964:257) still list *sing out* 'to shout' in their glossary of 'Pitcairnese' words. However, in Kallgård (1998), based on fieldwork carried out in 1980, *sing out* is included among the words "known on Pitcairn, but... seldom or never used".

Fourteen features considered not to occur in Pitkern-Norfolk by Baker and Huber (2001) have been attested in this creole. Of these, 3 are Atlantic (NP1 *for* NP2, *too* and *tother*, *tara*), 10 are world-wide (*all about*, *make haste*, *most*, *one time*, *plenty* NOUN, *plenty*, *walk about*, WH *thing* and *look see*) and 1 is a Pacific feature (*sing out*). The first attestations of 15 other features have been shown to predate those indicated in Baker and Huber (2001) by 13 to some 50 years. Not surprisingly, features attested in Pitkern and/or Norfolk may at the same time be indicators of language death, since they are now obsolete and replaced by their English counterparts. One such example is *sing out* discussed above.

We can now turn to the issue of the position of Pitkern-Norfolk within English creoles, i.e. whether Pitkern-Norfolk is a Pacific or rather an Atlantic variety. I will take into account the data in Baker and Huber (2001:197–204), the above additions to the list of features attested in PN, and the reclassification of several features as world-wide ones in Avram (in press). Out of a total of 48 seven features attested in Pitkern-Norfolk, 33 are world-wide, 13 are Atlantic, and 2 are Pacific. The corresponding percentages (rounded up) are 69%, 27%, and

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A summary of findings

Specific features (numbered and labelled as in Baker & Huber)	Status or first attestation (as in Baker & Huber)	Revised status and/or revised first attestation
40. *dem* (article, demonstrative)	1997	1940s
43. *dem* (3 PL POSS)	1997	1940s
62. *fullup* 'fill, be-full'	not attested	attested 1951
73. *Irish potato* 'potato'	1997	1964
98. *maga* 'thin'	1964	1936
109. *nasey* 'nasty'	1998	1988
112. NP1 *for* NP2 (possessive N2's N1)	not attested	attested 1951
147. *sweet* 'tasty; please (v.)'	1999	1988
154. *too* (preverbal) 'very, exceedingly'	not attested	attested 1952
156. *tother*, *tara* 'other'	not attested	attested 1936
174. *all about* 'everywhere'	not attested	attested 1988
178. *been* (past/anterior)	1972	1938
187. *dead* 'die'	1972	1951
188. *dem* (3 PL)	1972	1940s
192. *for* (infinitive)	1972	1940s
194. *got* 'have' 1972	1972	1938
204. *long* 'with'	1972	1940s
206. *make haste* 'hurry'	not attested	attested 1988
212. *most* 'almost'	not attested	attested 1940s
214. *never* (negative-completive)	1999	1985
218. *one* (indefinite article)	1972	1938
219. *one time* '(at) once'	not attested	attested 1980
222. *plenty* NOUN 'a lot of'	not attested	attested 1940s
224. *plenty* 'every; many'	not attested	attested 1940s
226. *–side* (locative suffix)	1964	1951
239. *walkabout* 'wander'	not attested	attested 1988
245. WH *thing* 'what'	not attested	attested 1936
277. *look see* 'inspect, take a look at'	not attested	attested 1951
288. *sing out* 'shout'	not attested	attested 1944

4% respectively. With just 2 distinctly Pacific features, amounting to only 4% of the total number of features attested, Pitkern-Norfolk can hardly qualify as a Pacific creole (as with Clark 1979, Holm 1989 and 2000, Parkvall 1999, and Smith 1994). Moreover, Pitkern-Norfolk lacks all but two of the 50 Pacific features in the list of Baker and Huber (2001: 203–204), as amended by Avram (in press). This amounts again to a very low percentage: 4%. Pitkern-Norfolk is thus the "least Pacific" variety among the Pacific creoles considered in Baker and Huber (2001). Still, this disconfirms the claim in Romaine (1989:98) that "Pitcairn-Norfolk... does not show any distinctly Pacific characteristics".

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Finally, Pitkern-Norfolk has a stronger Atlantic component, both in terms of absolute numbers and of the percentage of Atlantic features. It has 13 out of 165 Atlantic features, i.e. 7.9%. Of the 13 Atlantic features attested in PN, 9 also occur in Kittitian, the Atlantic English creole of St Kitts, that was instrumental in the genesis of Pitkern-Norfolk. It would therefore appear that, for example, Hancock (1971, 1977, and 1987) is right when he treats Pitkern-Norfolk as an Atlantic creole. As he explicitly puts it (1977:373), "[t]he language appears to have more in common with the English-derived creoles of the Atlantic than with those spoken elsewhere in the Pacific". However, striking a more cautious note, Holm (1986:266) writes that "[i]t is possible that Pitcairnese constitutes a 'semi-Atlantic' creole".

Paradoxically then, despite its location in the Pacific, PN is not a Pacific creole. The peculiar circumstances in which it emerged account for the fact that it is the only English creole evincing both Pacific and Atlantic features. The data presented and analysed above confirm the claim by Baker and Huber (2001:165) that Pitkern-Norfolk should be "treated both as a Pacific and an Atlantic variety". As a result, I can only subscribe to Baker and Huber's conclusion (2001:187) that, among the English creoles, Pitkern-Norfolk "is thus very much a special case". ■

Note

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