

Tok Pisin and the Linguistic Infrastructure of the Lutheran Missions

People have been trying to kill Tok Pisin for as long as the language has been around. In regard to other languages spoken by colonized communities, scholars and activists speak of language death. For Tok Pisin, it is better to speak of attempted language murder. While this book has taken many unexpected twists and turns since I first started working on it, one of the fundamental issues I have kept returning to is how so many love to hate Tok Pisin.

The desire to destroy Tok Pisin took many forms. People have, for example, talked about trying to “slay the dragon of Pidgin,” using an allusion to biblical verses like Isaiah 27:1 about the Leviathan: “In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” To “slay the dragon” in Isaiah is to redeem Israel, to defeat evil, and to bring about the end of earthly troubles. “Slay[ing] the dragon of Pidgin,” as the Australian minister for external territories Paul Hasluck put it, would redeem Papua New Guinea, allowing for some other radically new and better English-based future.¹ Less poetically but just as violently, the UN demanded in 1953 that the language simply be “eradicated” (as I discuss in chapter 5). Others have talked about trying, if not to kill Pidgin, then to engage in a little assisted suicide, helping to slowly transform the language into something more or less identical with standard Australian English through a process of gradual incorporation of more and more English content and grammar.

And it is not just colonial agents who have these deadly desires. Papua New Guineans have often insisted (and continue to insist) on the removal of Tok Pisin from Parliament, from the school system, or from the country more generally (see Slotta and Handman 2024). Sir Michael Somare, the first prime minister, who is

now widely revered as the father of the nation, once argued, during a 1976 parliamentary session, against proposals to make Tok Pisin a national language with official status. In itself this was a common enough argument at the time. The only thing that makes it remarkable is that he made the comment—in Parliament—while speaking in Tok Pisin.² Finally, people sometimes speak as though Tok Pisin is so fragile it will come undone with just the slightest prodding. An interlocutor from the Waria Valley once said, in response to my request that he translate an ancestral ritual couplet into Tok Pisin from the Guhu-Samane language, that to do so would rupture the language (*em bai brukim Tok Pisin*). Whether it is figured as the Leviathan to be defeated or as a suicide to be assisted, or as a fragility on the verge of disintegration, Tok Pisin is often depicted as being at death's door. The debate has often just been whether it needs a “great and strong sword” or only a slight push to send it to the other side.

Not everyone hated Tok Pisin. A few, like American linguist Robert A. Hall Jr. and some of his allies, took great pains to standardize and spread it. They argued that Tok Pisin was the only possible way of dealing with what was called “the language problem”: the problem of how to facilitate communication where there seemed to only be “insuperable barriers” of linguistic difference, as a director of Papua New Guinea's Department of Education, W. C. Groves, put it. “One of the greatest problems in this Territory is the multiplicity of vernaculars,” he wrote. “Not only in schools, but in every contact between Administration and Native, and between Native and Native, the problem of linguistic complexity arises.”³ With so many dead set against Tok Pisin, though, Groves had to remind his readers that “in New Guinea, the problem of finding a lingua franca has already been solved.”⁴ Tok Pisin was the solution to the language problem that everyone refused to see.

In addition to Hall and Groves, some Christian missionaries ended up using Tok Pisin, although sometimes, like the Lutherans whom I discuss in this chapter, they did so belatedly and through gritted teeth. The administration and missions eventually published Tok Pisin newsletters—and a weekly newspaper, *Wantok*—starting in 1970 (for Tok Pisin journalism, see Schram 2023). Australian linguists, especially those working with Stephan Wurm at the Australian National University, were also prominent supporters. The most notable examples of this support came in two forms: first, a collection of essays on the future of Tok Pisin featuring many of the ANU linguists arguing in support of Tok Pisin's necessary role in Papua New Guinea's development (McElhanon 1975); and second, the speech that linguist Thomas Dutton gave at the University of Papua New Guinea advocating Tok Pisin as the language of the nation and the school system, which sparked a vigorous and sometimes angry debate that took place via letters to the editors of the national newspapers and other media outlets (collected in McDonald 1976).

Yet even these cheerleaders worked under the assumption of Tok Pisin's inevitable and desirable demise. The Catholic Fr. Francis Mihalic, arguably the most important person in the history of Tok Pisin's life as a language of the nation-state,

published his dictionary of the language with the assumption that it would help promote English and eventually make Tok Pisin obsolete. Arthur Capell, professor of linguistics at the University of Sydney, concluded his review of Mihalic's dictionary with a left-handed compliment: "It is a pleasure to recommend the work as long as Pidgin is current. The only danger is that a work of this nature might by its very excellence tend to prolong the life of a thoroughly objectionable form of speech" (Capell 1959: 235). The Australian linguist Don Laycock, a very vocal advocate for the language, wrote in 1982 that the growing spread of English-language education programs would finish off Tok Pisin: "This does not mean that Tok Pisin will die a rapid, or even an easy, death. . . . But it does mean that, in perhaps fifty years' time, Tok Pisin will most likely be being studied by scholars among a small community of old men" (Laycock 1982: 267).

Forty years after this prediction, Laycock has so far been proven very wrong. Tok Pisin is today the most widely spoken language in Papua New Guinea by far, an extraordinary accomplishment in a place with over eight hundred languages spread unevenly among more than nine million people. I will discuss some of the more positive reactions to the language and the various supporters of it in this and subsequent chapters. But I do not want to tell this history of attempted language murder as one in which Tok Pisin valiantly triumphed in the face of adversity—even though it did that. In this book, I use the enduring criticisms and sometimes murderous thoughts about Tok Pisin as a lens on broader questions of communication in colonial and decolonial contexts. That is, trying to answer the question of why Tok Pisin was a favorite linguistic punching bag for so many both inside and outside of Papua New Guinea has, in the end, required that I move well outside of discussions of language as such. For this language that emerged from the widespread kidnapping and indenture of Melanesian peoples for forced labor on plantations across the Western Pacific, the central theme of many discussions related to Tok Pisin was the morality and modernity of circulation. All these threats to the life of Tok Pisin are refractions of the question of whether and how Papua New Guineans would be made connected, mobile, free, and well governed.

If one were to write a history of colonial Tok Pisin that focused only on the language and people's responses to it, it would necessarily just repeat the arguments that took place during the colonial period. When linguists like Hall and Dutton tried to defend Tok Pisin to colonizers and decolonizers in Australia, in Papua New Guinea, or at the UN, they often focused on defining the language as separate from Australian or British English. For these defenders, the goal was to prove that Tok Pisin had a real grammar with rules of use and was not just a mishmash of poorly pronounced words and half-learned syntactic structures. These arguments largely fell on deaf ears. To this day, many Australian English speakers (Australian and sometimes Papua New Guinean) still see Tok Pisin as just a shoddy version of what they speak. I don't want to argue that a different tactic could have been more effective; as I said, the community of Tok Pisin speakers has grown regardless of

what people tried to do to it. But I also think that focusing just on the grammatical structuredness of the language does not really get at the enduring concerns that various colonial and decolonial actors had with Tok Pisin. Rather, I argue that Tok Pisin was the object of so much scrutiny and concern because of the ways that it reflected the possibilities and promises of circulation as modes of colonialism and decolonization. The widespread dislike of Tok Pisin despite its obvious usefulness perfectly demonstrates that even though a central tenet of the modernist imaginary of circulation is that more circulation is better, when moderns made their way to the colonies they discovered that their various projects demanded that circulation be controlled, curtailed, or transformed in various ways. The Lutheran Mission again offers an important example of this dynamic.

In this chapter, I examine how the Lutherans dealt with “the language problem.” The complexity of the linguistic situation in Papua New Guinea pushed the Lutherans toward a model of language as infrastructure—as a pathway through a forest of languages, very much akin to the pathways that their road-building projects and aviation networks created. In chapter 1, I argued that the overall emphasis on the modernity of circulation was constantly upended by the contradictory forms of circulation that different colonial projects demanded. Here, I argue that a parallel ambiguity is evident in the internal Lutheran arguments about those infrastructural languages. But not all infrastructures were created equally, and the Lutherans frequently argued and changed their minds about the possibilities of movement and connection enabled by different linguistic systems. These ambivalences are especially clear when it comes to Tok Pisin, a language that was itself born of a process of circulation. They used languages as infrastructures to try to clear pathways into Papua New Guinea but, as in chapter 1, the emphasis on circulatory primitivity meant that easily accessible spaces and peoples were suspect. In that sense, Lutherans worked to define Tok Pisin as a language without life, depth, or soul as part of a broader erasure of the circulation of Papua New Guineans in labor contexts. To do so, they valorized a set of church *lingua francas* as well as what they thought of as Christian forms of circulation.

IN THE FOREST OF LANGUAGES

As I discussed in chapter 1, the Lutheran missionaries often lamented the loneliness of life at their disconnected mission stations. They worried about their health and how their families might fare in case of emergencies. They lamented how long it took for news and letters to travel to their stations. The unmanageable chattiness that the radio operators tried to tamp down was just one way that this loneliness bubbled up. The missionary R. R. Hanselmann momentarily imagines what a different kind of mission life might be like in his report on transportation costs to the Lutheran Auxiliary Society in 1934:

It is entirely out of the question that the entire mission staff could live as a colony near Madang, in order to eliminate many transport expenses. Indeed living together would expel all present isolation for members on distant stations, would bring medical aid to the door within a moment's notice, mail would be received on steamer dates and not weeks later, and it would mean much socially and spiritually to every member of the staff—but how detrimental it would be for the work.⁵

It would be a wonderful change if the whole mission could be together (or, when the radio network started, if the whole mission could just chat), but then why go to Papua New Guinea at all? Hanselmann rules out the idea that there is much, if anything, of evangelistic value to do in towns. The true objects of missionization were out in the remote corners of the territory, not in the easily accessed town centers.

But in fact there were many young men in towns and Lutheran centers to whom missionaries could have ministered if they were interested in doing so. The problem was that these young men were laborers, working in ethnolinguistically mixed groups in which communication happened through the use of Tok Pisin rather than vernacular languages. For many decades, Tok Pisin-speaking laborers were not considered targets of evangelism, even if the very same people would become so as soon as they returned home and started speaking their first language again.

If circulation was the primary problem of colonial New Guinea, the reason for missionaries being in such far-flung and remote stations to begin with, how was this population of circulating laborers and the language they spoke so invisible to the Lutheran missionaries? Why not create the conditions of idyllic, socially satisfying, missionization that Hanselmann described with a dedicated subgroup of missionaries working with the concentrated populations of men in towns and on plantations? But the existence of Papua New Guineans in town and of Tok Pisin as a language used by them was not seen as strong proof against the circulatory primitivity that governed the colonial imagination. By denying that Tok Pisin was a proper language, the colonials could maintain the idea that Papua New Guinea is characterized by a lack of circulation: the communicative system that facilitated the migration of laborers was bracketed as a non-language.

If Tok Pisin was not going to be used, would the Lutherans then use the vernacular languages of the communities they evangelized? Even at the end of the nineteenth century, before the estimated number of languages in Papua New Guinea had reached into the several hundreds, it was clear that there was a level of linguistic diversity that the missionaries had not anticipated. This was clear just by looking at the Huon Peninsula, where the mission was initially based. The first mission stations, at Simbang and later Sattelberg, were located in the area of Kâte speakers. The mission as a whole was based in nearby Finschhafen, in an area of Jabem speakers (see map 1). Although Sattelberg and Finschhafen are quite close to each other geographically, their inhabitants are separated by a language-family boundary: Kâte is in the Papuan, or non-Austronesian, language family; Jabem is in the Austronesian language family.⁶

Not only were Kâte and Jabem two of the first languages that the Lutheran missionaries used, but they became the *lingua francas* of the mission as its workers spread across the Huon Peninsula and points south. This meant that Lutheran missionaries and their “native evangelist” helpers not only had to teach local people about Christianity, but also had to teach them one of two languages in which Christian evangelistic materials were prepared. In the early twentieth century, most official mission literature was printed in either Kâte or Jabem, and many children in the burgeoning Lutheran school system learned one or the other language as part of their education. Likewise, when Lutheran missionaries from the Rhenish Mission started work around Madang, they used a language known as Gedaged (or Graged, or Ragetta) as their mission *lingua franca*.

Which of the two church *lingua francas*—Kâte or Jabem—was used in any given part of the Neuendettelsau Mission was based on the language family of the vernacular language spoken there. If a non-Austronesian language was spoken in the area, Kâte was used; if an Austronesian language was spoken, Jabem was used. This policy obviously required knowledge of local languages and language families, and some of the missionaries devoted considerable time to language study and linguistic description. Otto Dempwolff, a German linguist and doctor, was first to posit, on the basis of Lutheran Mission reports, that the Austronesian language family spread across coastal New Guinea and throughout the island Pacific. These classifications became the basis of the administrative organization of church communities. All the congregations that used Kâte as their mission *lingua franca* belonged to the Kâte Circuit, and all the congregations that used Jabem as their mission *lingua franca* belonged to the Jabem Circuit.

But why would Lutherans, of all people, decide to promulgate languages that people did not natively speak? Martin Luther was the champion of vernacular-language Bible translation. Luther thought the Catholic Church’s use of Latin kept the laity from having knowledge of, and interactions with, God. Luther advocated for “a priesthood of all believers” that could partly do away with Roman Catholic hierarchies that mediated between God and the faithful. Luther’s translation of the Bible into German set off the modern era of translation, in which the Protestant norm is that one is supposed to read the Bible in one’s own first native language. Johannes Flierl wrote that “only by acquiring a knowledge of the native’s own language was it possible to completely understand and instruct him. Our Lutheran Mission holds to the principle of instructing the native in his own vernacular” (1936: 26).

Yet the definition of “his own vernacular” was somewhat elastic. Given the problem of circulation, the church *lingua francas* were both helpful and local enough: Kâte could stand in for all non-Austronesian languages; Jabem could stand in for all Austronesian languages; Gedaged could cover the entirety of the north coast around Madang. For the Lutherans, there was a nonspecificity to Papua

New Guinean languages below the level of language family that made them interchangeable. As one Lutheran missionary later put it, "All New Guinea languages have practically identical thought categories, ideas, and concepts."⁷ Sometimes the hyperdiversity of Papua New Guinean languages engendered a sense of primitivist sameness that seemed to offer a way through the circulatory primitivity: these church lingua francas that embodied local categories well enough could be the infrastructural routes through a fragmented social field.

Questions of spiritual access and connection were discussed in more practical terms when the Lutherans dealt with infrastructural issues of transportation. Landscape, language, and infrastructure are all connected in a complex whole, as in the example of the Rhenish Mission's promotional material from roughly 1935, aimed at members of the Iowa Synod of the Lutheran Church in the United States.⁸ American Lutherans supported overseas missions in the Madang region of Papua New Guinea and in the area around Chennai [then Madras], India. The two regions are presented in abbreviated form through a series of contrastive statistics that are meant to give the American reader a flavor of life "on the mission field."

Described in terms of infrastructural problems and possibilities, the Indian mission field is depicted as a wide-open space of mobility compared with Papua New Guinea's impenetrability: "Roads—Fairly good highways and railroads. Considerable auto travel." Note that for a target population totaling "about one million souls," only fifteen missionaries are allocated to India at this point. In Papua New Guinea, travel is arduous and slow: "No railroads, driveways or bridges, except foot and bridle paths and an occasional hanging bridge suspended by vines, or a log laid across the deep ravine. Boats and canoes are used along the sea shore but very little on rivers, these usually being turbulent mountain streams." Within this impenetrable zone live a relatively small number of people. Indeed, until 1933 the population of the Lutheran section of the Territory of New Guinea was counted at roughly forty-six thousand. It was only a few years prior to this notice that several hundred thousand people were "discovered" in the highlands. The Papua New Guinea field was difficult to access and had an extremely tiny population in comparison with the area around Madras, yet at this point twenty-seven missionaries had been sent out there, almost twice as many as were in India, with many more needed.

The discrepancy arises from the interconnection of the landscape and languages: just like the dense foliage that kept the missionaries from evangelizing by "auto," the density of languages kept them rooted to ever-smaller corners of the Papua New Guinea field. In India, all is simple: "Language of the people—Telegu (which our missionaries learn in about two years)." In Papua New Guinea, all is complicated: "Language of the people—Many different languages and dialects divide the people into countless tribes and clans. The language selected to

become the universal one of our Mission is Ragetta [i.e. Gedaged], a Melanesian vernacular. In the far inland the Papuan or mountain language, Kâte, may have to be added. Every missionary is compelled to learn at least two native languages besides Pidgin English which is gaining ground right along.”

Beyond just the distinction in the number of languages—one Indian versus hundreds of New Guinean ones—is the fact that Telegu has a long literary history. By contrast, in Papua New Guinea the missionaries had to develop orthographies for all of these languages. Processes of recording and transcription are likened to pathways through dense jungle in a later internal history of the mission:

Already in 1886, the flying foxes of Finschhafen were well-equipped with ultrasonic squeakers and echo-sensitive ears and wingtips to find a pathway through thick jungle in the dark, tropical night. By comparison, Senior [Johannes] Flierl was ill-equipped to penetrate the jungle of languages that confronted him. No tape recorders, no word processors, and no computers were available to him and his fellow missionaries. In their wisdom, they decided to make only a narrow pathway through this jungle by using one or two local languages, which they hoped everyone would learn. (Hage 1986: 409)

Kâte, Jabem, and Gedaged were these narrow paths, linguistic roads that were used, as one missionary said in defense of them, “in those days when travel and transportation were so very difficult.”⁹ However, the Lutherans were deeply ambivalent about whether languages as communicative roads could all equally allow for communication between souls and God. At points, they talked as if all languages could act as infrastructures of connection to the divine, while at other points they claimed that each potential convert had to be addressed in terms of her or his native language, as when Flierl and many others argued for using only the local vernacular. The use of church *lingua francas* expressed both positions at once: they were roads through the dense and imposing jungle, itself an image of the opacity of the population’s linguistic forest, but they were also keyed to particular language families, Austronesian and non-Austronesian. As I argue below, the depth of the *lingua francas*—the sense in which they connected to local souls—was secured only through comparisons with what the Lutherans saw as Tok Pisin’s surface-level capacity to connect laborers but not souls.

Missionaries were so invested in the sense that Kâte, Jabem, or Gedaged was the language of the people (even when it was promulgated by the mission itself) that they refused to give up on the different languages. In the 1930s, Neuendettelsau Mission leaders fiercely debated which of the *lingua francas* to use, but neither the Kâte proponents nor the Jabem proponents were able to win out (the Rhenish and later American missions around Madang kept using Gedaged).¹⁰ In the post-World War II era, with American and Australian financial support very low and all former German support ruled out as a possibility, it would have made sense economically to bring the nearly bankrupt mission together under a single *lingua franca*. Theologically it made sense to unite the future church under a

single linguistic umbrella, so that only one Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea might eventually exist. Thus,

the introduction of three unifying languages [the *lingua francas*] did not produce a solution either of the problem of language, or of the problem of the unity of the Church. What happened was that three Churches had come into being. They were all Lutheran but they had nothing more to hold them together than the fact that they had all grown out of the work of a mission, and that they all reflected the character of the Papuan people. (Vicedom 1961: 52)

According to Vicedom, the “controversy about languages was never settled” (ibid.: 53) and by the postwar era it seemed that the *lingua francas* were too well entrenched. John Kuder, the superintendent of Lutheran Mission New Guinea, lamented in 1953 that they might have been able to unite the missions under one language prior to the war, but at that point it was a lost cause. It was a few years after this unhappy admission from Kuder that the members of the Lutheran Mission resolved at their 1956 annual meeting to “accept” Tok Pisin in those emerging situations where a church *lingua franca* was inadvisable (Hage 1986: 413). But this move toward Tok Pisin was made with all the enthusiasm of a prisoner headed to the gallows. In his retrospective account of Lutheran education, under the sub-heading “Reluctant acceptance of Pidgin,” Hartley Hage writes: “If missionaries had been able to agree on the use of only one church vernacular, the practical need for using Pidgin would hardly have arisen within the church” (ibid.). Hage refers to mission fathers like Flierl when he writes: “Little could these men know that the centenary of their arrival would be celebrated in a language for which they had the lowest possible esteem” (ibid.: 409).

How does a mission—especially a Protestant mission oriented toward the text—use a language it despises? More importantly, what traces of that dislike might be left on the language? In the next section, I argue that with the use of Tok Pisin as a secular channel—a desubjectivized language for the circulation of laborers—whatever emphasis there was on interior subjectivity could reside contrastively in the Lutheran *lingua francas*. It was thereby possible to bracket off the colonial movement of laborers as a temporary disturbance of the more fundamental, permanent circulatory primitivity of Papua New Guinea.

TOK PISIN, THE “HORROR OF HORRORS”

The most important early colonial proponent of Tok Pisin was the Roman Catholic Mission. In the 1930s, the Catholic Society of the Divine Word decided to make Tok Pisin a liturgical language and started to produce the necessary literature. Fr. Joseph Schebesta compiled a dictionary and was preparing it for publication when he was killed in World War II. The manuscript dictionary was published by Fr. Leo Meiser in a very limited run in 1945, although it became the basis of

Fr. Francis Mihalic's influential and widely used dictionary published two decades later (Mihalic 1968).

Even Catholics who were working to promote the language were vocal about what appeared to them as Tok Pisin's flaws. Chief among these flaws was what they considered its tendency toward constant and radical change. In Meiser's preface he states that "this dictionary cannot be considered as an exhaustive and final compilation, but only as a collection of words in current use among those who speak the language" (Meiser 1945: 2). It is unclear how this differs from a dictionary for any other language, yet the rate of change is something for which Meiser and many other later supporters of the language had to apologize. But this capacity for change marked Tok Pisin not as a living but rather as a dying language. Arthur Capell argued that later Australian policies were "definitely aimed at causing Tok Pisin to commit suicide, albeit as painlessly as possible, by taking more and more English over into it" (Capell 1955: 72). As he notes a couple of pages later, "It is only a question of time" (*ibid.*: 74). Capell argues here for something like a linguistic version of the Australian policy toward Aboriginal Australians, whereby the latter would slowly "die out" as a separate ethnic group the more they were forced to marry and have children with white Australians.¹¹

The perceived instability of the language—and the possibility that it was in the midst of self-harm—provoked a strong contrast with the other Papua New Guinean languages that missionaries dealt with. According to the missionaries, those vernaculars were deeply rooted in the land, so much so that they produced an impenetrable jungle that had to be cleared with focal languages that could stand in for all the New Guinea thought categories. Tok Pisin, by contrast, looked like no language at all from the colonial perspective.

As Hage noted in the quotation above, the early missionaries "had the lowest possible esteem" for the language. Flierl was particularly adamant that Tok Pisin could not be used in missionary work. In commenting on other missions in Papua New Guinea, he wrote that the Seventh-day Adventists "show their predilection for Pidgin English, this 'horror of horrors'."¹² The Catholics also favour Pidgin English very much. Bishop Vesters told the conference at Rabaul that it was a simple and easy vehicle of conversation with the native. The Lutheran and Methodist representatives opposed this statement of the Bishop. It was a superficial language" (1936: 26). The Lutheran position on Tok Pisin remained negative well into the mid-twentieth century. Otto Theile, an Australia-based leader who worked with the Lutheran Mission in Papua New Guinea, argued that pidgins spoken in both Papua New Guinea and Aboriginal Queensland were useless in missions work. In a speech titled "Missionary Methods," Theile condemns anything but "the vernacular": "Among themselves they [i.e., Aboriginal Australians and Papua New Guineans] use the vernacular, and I am convinced that if we would understand their innermost thoughts we must be able to converse with them in the vernacular.

We can therefore, not support the proposals that for primitive natives Pidgin or English be adopted as a means of bringing to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They must hear the message in their own tongue.”¹³ Theile’s speech is definitive: Tok Pisin was seen as a language that could not reach the soul. It was not a language that constituted a perspective from which to speak; Theile reserved the latter category for those innermost thoughts that had to be turned inside-out in order for the conversion process to take place (Keane 2007). Instead of the linguist Capell’s image of a language that was committing suicide, we get here the Lutheran missionary image of a language that was simply never alive. In this view Tok Pisin lacks dimension, staying at the surface of evangelism rather than plumbing the soul’s depths. As another missionary said in a different context, Tok Pisin “is a language without a father,” a genealogical bastard that could not anchor any sense of self or past.¹⁴

What Theile leaves out, however, is that the church lingua francas like Kâte and Jabem that the mission was using in the Territory of New Guinea were vernacular languages but *not* the vernacular languages for most of the converts in their domain. Kâte and Jabem had only about a thousand speakers each at the time of Flierl’s arrival in 1886. But in 1959 the Lutherans estimated that over two hundred thousand people spoke or could understand some amount of Kâte.¹⁵ The Jabem circuit was smaller, but it too involved a vast increase in the number of speakers of the language in comparison with the situation when Flierl first arrived. Theile plays with the meaning of *vernacular* here, assuming that anything vernacular and local in Papua New Guinea was intimate and interior for any Papua New Guinean. The possibility that Kâte or Jabem as a lingua franca could reach the souls of converts only emerges contrastively when put in relation to Tok Pisin’s travel along the surfaces of the self.

Lutheran complaints about Tok Pisin sometimes focused on its linguistic limitations. In a tradition that extends to contemporary white settlers and missionaries in Papua New Guinea, the Lutherans delighted in what seemed to be the absurdities of Tok Pisin. Because pidgin languages often have relatively small vocabularies, they also have highly productive ways of making compound words or circumlocutions. Some of the more inventive of these—such as *trousis bilong leta* (“envelope,” from Eng. “trousers of the letter”)—were used as evidence of the limitations of Tok Pisin rather than as testaments to the communicative creativity of people in coerced-labor contexts. Some circulated only as jokes, having never been attested in any verifiable source. No opinion piece railing against Tok Pisin was complete without mention of such howlers of circumlocution as the supposed term for “helicopter,” *miksmasta bilong Jisas Kraiss* (from Eng. “Mixmaster of Jesus Christ”), in which the spinning beaters of the Sunbeam brand of standing mixer were seen as evocative of the spinning rotor blades of a helicopter up in the heavens.¹⁶ Whether this phrase was ever used even once by a cook or other household

servant, it has lived on as part of the lore of Tok Pisin's insufficiencies and absurdities. In 1950, Tok Pisin was closely tied to colonial labor contexts, since that was where men learned to speak it and where they primarily used it with one another and, to a limited extent, with their colonial overseers. Among the Lutherans it was considered useful only as a language for barking orders on their plantations or circulating simple bits of secular information.

The threat that the *lingua francas* might only be conduits for secular information is explicitly addressed in Stephen Lehner's paper presented to the annual Lutheran Mission conference in 1930. Lehner disparages Tok Pisin as an insufficient channel for evangelism over several pages. He gives the usual examples of what he thinks are the most ridiculous circumlocutions and an extensive quote from the Tok Pisin version of the Proclamation of Annexation read to local people when Britain, as represented by Australian soldiers, took possession of German New Guinea at the start of World War I: "British new feller master, he like him black feller man too much he like him alsame you picanin alonga him."¹⁷ Tok Pisin is the language of last resort, for example "when as a result of mixed marriages Pidjin [*sic*] will be the language of the newcoming generation." The only real option is using a vernacular if one wants to actually reach the innermost self where Christian conversion happens, a space of subjectivity inaccessible to Tok Pisin. "If he [the missionary] has an opportunity to use a New Guinea language, which is so rich in detailed expressions, there should be no doubt as to which is to be used. May traders use Pidjin and may Governments even give Proclamations in it, and may an Anthropologist use it to find out facts:—a missionary cannot use this language if he wants to arouse the hearts of the people."¹⁸ Against the gibberish of Tok Pisin, or at least the gibberish version of Tok Pisin spoken by colonizers, Lehner holds up the native language as the only route to real conversion. But he has to catch himself at the end of the paper—the Lutherans do not, in fact, use the mother-tongue languages of their potential converts:

I hope that these pages do not give some people the idea regarding the introduction of one or two centralized languages, for which many of the tribes should give up their mother tongue. I admit that doing this is only a compromise forced by the fact that there are too many different languages, but not the ideal solution to the problem. Unfortunately it is impossible to cultivate 20 to 30 languages and produce school material and literature in all of them. But the introduction of another New Guinean language, even if it is not of the same structure, is still quite different than introducing a European language in order to get away from the difficulties that the many tribal languages present.¹⁹

Lehner has to apologize for a Lutheran policy that seems to go against all of the principles he laid out in his opposition to Tok Pisin. He implies that the use of the *lingua francas* is a logistical issue only—if they could use all the native

languages, they would. But even the nonlocal lingua francas are superior, since they are less different from a local language than Tok Pisin or English would be.

Lehner was not the only one to equate the use of Tok Pisin with colonial administration, and church languages with salvation. Georg Pilhofer reported on a conversation he had with an administrator in the highlands in which the latter urged him and the rest of the Lutherans to use Tok Pisin rather than Kâte or Jabem.²⁰ Pilhofer replied, “No Protestant Mission will teach the Gospel in Pidgin. Only the Catholic Mission can do that. For they are, first and foremost, concerned with acquainting their followers with ritual forms and formulas. We are not against Pidgin as a means of communication between white and black. However, for the actual mission work we decline to use it” (ibid.: 3). Catholic forms and formulas, administrative proclamations, anthropological inquiries: these are all acceptable uses for Tok Pisin since, according to the Lutherans, they do not have to create a channel to the depths of the person.

KEEPING TOK PISIN IN FLUX

All Lutheran missionaries learned and used Tok Pisin, but for a long time their approaches to Tok Pisin were disorderly and slapdash. In contrast to the Catholics, who began early on, in the 1930s, to create a Tok Pisin orthography, the Lutherans seemed to actively work to keep Tok Pisin in a state of disorder. Two documents that have been filed next to one another in the Lutheran archives demonstrate the extent to which Lutherans wrote the language idiosyncratically.

The first is a Tok Pisin translation of the famous hymn “Nearer My God to Thee,” which appears to have been produced by Jerome Ilaoa, a Lutheran missionary from Samoa, in 1933. His first text is in the top row of each numbered line, with spelling or grammar that differs from standard Tok Pisin in italics. The second row is Ilaoa’s text written in the contemporary Tok Pisin orthography. The last row is my back translation:

NEARER MY GOD TO ME [*SIC*]. BY JEROME ILAOA. 1933

1 Klos tu, o God, long yu
Klostu, o God, long yu
Near, oh God, to you

2 Klos tu long yu
Klostu long yu
Near to you

3 Kuros e kin bring im mi
Kros i ken bringim mi
The cross can bring me

- 4 Klos tu *along* yu
Klostu long yu
Near to you
- 5 Trabel *en* pen i kam
Trabel na pen i kam
There is trouble and pain
- 6 Mi no kin lusim yu
Mi no ken lusim yu
I cannot leave you
- 7 Mi laik i go along yu
Mi laik go long yu
I want to go to you
- 8 Klos tu *along* yu
Klostu long yu
Near to you
- 9 Insaïd long *santu hart*
Insait long bel holi
Inside your sacred heart
- 10 Mi laik i haid
Mi laik hait
I want to hide
- 11 Jesus yu dai *for* mi
Jisas yu indai pinis long mi [alt.: Jisas yu indai pinis long
kisim bek laip bilong mi]
Jesus you died for me
- 12 Mi no kin *fraid*
Mi no ken poret
I cannot be afraid
- 13 Taim *soul* i karim *pain*,
Taim sol [alt: tewel] i karim pen
When [my] soul is pained
- 14 Mi ken i kom along yu
Mi ken kam long yu
I can come to you

15 Klos tu long yu o God
 Klostu long yu o God
Near to you oh God

16 Klos tu long yu
 Klostu long yu
Near to you

Aside from several small changes, this translation from the 1930s looks roughly similar to contemporary Tok Pisin (so much for the argument that it is changing at an extraordinary rate). The changes needed to make it conform to contemporary usage are largely minor. Word-final voiced obstruents are usually devoiced in Tok Pisin (e.g., word-final /d/ is pronounced /t/), and contemporary spelling reflects that (*haid/hait* in line 10; *fraid/poret* in line 12). The phrase *sacred heart* in line 9 is rendered as *santu hart*, both ignoring the Tok Pisin word for heart (*bel*) that is used in a later stanza in this translation and displaying the Catholic tendency to render theological terms in Latinate form (*santu*).²¹ Within this largely phonemic spelling, there is a lack of standardization: the preposition *long* is sometimes *along* (lines 4, 7, 8, and 14); the transitive marker *-im* is not connected to the verb in line 3. The predicate marker *i* is used with first-person verbs, although this is not done in standard Tok Pisin. The worst problems are in line 11, where (1) the English preposition *for* is used in the benefactive construction “died for me” rather than using something like *bilong kisim bek laip bilong mi*, “to save you [lit., to get your life back]”; and (2) the completive marker *pinis* is left out, which in some forms of Tok Pisin at the time would have meant “Jesus passed out” rather than “Jesus died.”

If the Lutherans had regularly used an orthography and grammar that matched the hymn translation above, one could talk about a regular Lutheran Tok Pisin norm emerging. However, right next to this document in the archival record is a version of the “Our Father” prayer in Tok Pisin, translated by a bilingual German- and English-speaking missionary:²²

DAS VATER-UNSER IN PIDGIN [THE OUR FATHER]

1 Pappa belong me fellow he stop on top,
 Papa bilong mipela i stap antap
Our [EXCL] father is above

2 Name belong you he tamboo,
 Nem bilong yu i tambu
Your name is taboo

3 fashion belong you he come,

pasin bilong yu i kam
your ways came

4 something he stop along bell belong you all he make him
 on top all the same you me make him down below,
 samting i stap long bel bilong yu ol i mekim antap olsem
 yumi mekim daunbelo
something that is in your heart they do above like we
[INCL] do below

5 Kaikai belong me fellow, all time you give him me fellow,
 kaikai bilong mipela oltaim yu givim mipela
you always give us [EXCL] our food

6 loose him trouble belong me fellow past time all right,
 lusim trabel bilong mipela pastaim, orait
first remove our [EXCL] troubles, then

7 you me loose him trouble belong brother belong you me;
 yumi lusim trabel bilong brata bilong mi
we [INCL] remove my brother's troubles

8 you look out, Satan he no try him me fellow too much,
 yu lukaut Seten i no traim mipela tumas
watch that Satan does not test us [EXCL] a lot

9 altogether something havy he stop belong skin belong me
 fellow you loose him;
 olgeta samting hevi i stap long skin belong mipela yu lusim
remove the burdens from our [EXCL] bodies [lit., skins]

10 altogether bush, altogether strong, altogether light too
 much belong yu all time.
 olgeta bus, olgeta strong, olgeta lait tumas bilong yu oltaim
all the forests, all the powers, all the light really always yours

11 Him he true.
 Em i tru.
It is true (amen)

Not only is the orthography completely wedded to standard English, but several lines are notably ungrammatical or semantically questionable. Line 10 lacks a verb. The translator does not seem to understand the distinction between inclusive *we*, which refers to speaker and addressee (marked INCL above), and exclusive *we*, which refers to speaker and others but *not* the addressee (marked EXCL above).

For example, God is included in the “we” who create God’s will on Earth (line 4) and who forgive those who trespass against us (line 7).²³ Orthographically, the language is presented as nothing more than bad English, and if one is reading from an English vantage point it reads as close to gibberish. It follows none of the more phonemic spellings used in Ilaoa’s hymn. And yet, when rendered in an orthography that obscures the etymological links to English that are so transparently presented in the original document (see the second row of each numbered line), even this jumbled version of the language starts to look much more familiar, as can be seen in the transliterations I have provided between the translated and English lines.

Unlike the Catholic dictionary, which adopted early on an orthography much closer to what appears in Ilaoa’s hymn, Lutheran missionaries’ attempts at employing Tok Pisin kept the language unstable, verging on the edge of linguistic disorder. Pastor Ilaoa seems to have made an attempt at developing Tok Pisin into a liturgical language, writing it in an almost phonemic spelling system that would have been easier for newly literate Papua New Guineans to use. But one of the only other attempts at creating a liturgical text backs away from this project, using a version of Tok Pisin that underlines, in grammar and spelling, the ways in which the language can seem a garbled version of English. Ilaoa’s hymn looks like an attempt to create an accessible text, whereas the “Our Father” translation looks more like something that would be used as evidence for why Tok Pisin should not be used in evangelism at all.

FROM LABOR NETWORKS TO CHRISTIAN NETWORKS

Lutherans were happy to let Tok Pisin languish in this disordered form because Lutheran missionary efforts were focused on rural, remote, vernacular language speakers. This was true to such an extent that they completely missed the chance to evangelize to the people they were transporting to the coast to engage in Tok Pisin-mediated labor. Like their Catholic counterparts (Huber 1988), the Lutheran missionaries initially funded a portion of their work in Papua New Guinea through coastal copra (coconut) plantations, cattle ranches, and dairy farms (Wagner and Reiner 1986). Papua New Guinean men worked on these plantations, usually for three-year labor contracts during which they earned extremely low wages, living in multilingual workers’ housing. Towns were also filled with other “labor lines” (labor housing) for local white-owned businesses or for the colonial administration. Here was an available group of men who were within easy reach, men who often already had some sort of connection to Lutheran missions, and men who were known to the missionaries in charge of the plantations.

Yet it was not until the Christian literacy expert Frank Laubach visited Papua New Guinea in 1949 that the idea of evangelizing to the men in the labor lines was given concerted attention and thought within Lutheran missionary circles. Laubach was an American Congregationalist missionary who originally worked in the

Philippines in the early twentieth century. He developed a phonics-based method for rapidly teaching literacy to adults, a method that people at the time described as “miraculous” in its speed and effectiveness. An article in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* magazine about his visit to Papua New Guinea suggested that Laubach’s method had been used to teach illiterates in Indonesia to read in an hour, or even just fifteen minutes.²⁴ Laubach’s method usually involved a quick trip to an area to create minimalist literacy primers and run a few classes that both taught the content and demonstrated the teaching method. Under the label “Each One Teach One,” this method required that each student then teach another friend. Through this snowballing increase in students, Laubach claimed that he was responsible for teaching literacy to millions (Roberts 1961). In 1949, Laubach was on a UNESCO-sponsored tour of Asia, squeezing a five-week visit to Papua New Guinea into an itinerary that also included Thailand, Pakistan, and India.

Laubach came to the Lutheran headquarters just outside the city of Lae for the first stop on his New Guinea tour. He wanted to give a demonstration of his method to administrators and missionaries. A small number of men then working in Lae as laborers, who were also speakers of various languages that were known to different missionaries, were brought in as students in these initial demonstration sessions in which Laubach was explaining his method. Initially, there was no thought of developing literacy materials for the language of the labor compounds, Tok Pisin, since the missionaries were all squarely oriented around the idea of missionizing to people in what they thought of as the more monolingual, monocultural context of remote Papua New Guinea.

It was Laubach himself who seemed to see how useful Tok Pisin could be to a broader evangelistic project. And while it may not have been part of the initial plan, literacy materials were developed for Tok Pisin during the Lae demonstration sessions. During the demonstration, Laubach managed to have the superintendent of the Lutheran Mission, John Kuder, work with a number of people as Tok Pisin speakers—that is, as speakers of a language developed and used in a multilingual context of colonial labor (see figure 5). In doing so, Laubach also helped the Lutheran missionaries see Tok Pisin-speaking laborers as objects of evangelism, since Laubach’s mass literacy methods were part of a larger Christian evangelical project to create Bible readers. Writing about Laubach’s visit afterward, Kuder wrote in a letter that Laubach

saw how convenient the use of Pidgin was through an actual demonstration, which was all the more effective because it was unplanned. People of different languages came together for a service here in Lae and in order for everyone to be understood Pidgin was extensively used. People from the interior, people from the mountains and from the coast all used and understood each other through Pidgin. Dr. Laubach was much impressed.²⁵

The Lutheran missionaries seem to have been impressed too. Long held up by the Lutherans as a non-language incapable of cultivating a Christian subjectivity,



FIGURE 5. Reverend John Kuder, superintendent of the Lutheran Mission, teaches a man (identified only as a “police boy”) to read Tok Pisin during the Lae literacy conference in 1949. “Police boys” were laborers who worked for the colonial police force. Some of Frank Laubach’s literacy materials for the Purari language can be seen on the board behind Kuder and his student. (Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, TALC 16.8.1. b5 f19)

Tok Pisin took a great leap forward with Laubach’s visit. Not long after Laubach left, Kuder began to inquire with the British and Foreign Bible Society in London about the possibility of publishing a New Testament in Tok Pisin. This eventually kicked off a nineteen-year ecumenical project involving several of the major missions of Papua New Guinea, culminating in the 1969 publication of *Nupela*

Testamen na Ol Sam, the Tok Pisin New Testament with Psalms, which remains the number-one best-selling book in the country to this day. More generally, it marked a shift in Lutheran missionaries' thinking about Tok Pisin, from a language they refused to countenance as anything other than a laughable joke or conduit of secular information to a serious medium for the circulation of Christianity. Yet it is worth pointing out that even Laubach initially pitched the idea of translating Bible materials into Tok Pisin as only a temporary bridge to English, with texts gradually adding in more and more English until Tok Pisin itself was extinguished.²⁶ Laubach raised the profile of Tok Pisin a great deal, but even he thought of it as a language without a future.

The sudden upswing in Tok Pisin's fortunes after Laubach's visit was mirrored by the sudden attention the Lutherans started paying to urban laborers in labor compounds, since Tok Pisin was considered a language of laborers. In the years following Laubach's visit, the mission started having missionaries and Papua New Guinean evangelists work with laborers. In their annual reports, missionaries wrote about how they tried, in what was known as "compound work," to minister to the needs of the "boys" (a term that was applied to all male laborers regardless of age) in between all of their other work that was focused on the in situ autochthonous communities adjacent to colonial towns like Lae or Bulolo. In a report summarizing work ministering to the Lae Wampar group during 1951, the compound work is described as having "only just started."²⁷ Comments throughout the early 1950s show a few missionaries begging for the money and personnel necessary to actually have a dedicated outreach to these groups.²⁸

These reports indicate that at least part of the mission felt obligated to expand their ministry to the men who were bearing most directly the brunt of colonial exploitation, yet much of the rest of the mission required convincing that this was a worthy use of limited resources. At the annual mission conferences, selected missionaries were asked to give papers on issues that were causes of controversy or disagreement. At the 1953 conference, the missionary Theodore G. Braun gave a paper on "The Native Labor Program of the Mission."²⁹ The paper as a whole covers the incipient program that a few missionaries were starting to work on, but its final part is a plea to the mission more broadly to think of laborers as evangelistic subjects in need of care.

At this point in the early 1950s, amendments to the labor laws governing local people meant that indenture contracts were finally being phased out of the labor system. Braun asked that the missionaries likewise change their attitudes regarding people who were starting to work at least nominally by choice rather than through coerced recruitment. Men being trained for skilled labor, those in the army or the police constabulary, trade unionists: all required ministering. Braun invoked the common motivators—the specter of Roman Catholics and atheists gaining influence—to try to push his fellow missionaries toward seeing this work as important, and urged anyone who was thinking of doing this work to learn Tok Pisin.³⁰

Braun pointed in particular to the mobile, fluid, multicultural nature of labor compound communities—some of the features of these spaces that contrasted most sharply with Lutheran imaginations of rural villages as homogeneous and immobile populations—and tried to reframe these as positive features of Christian opportunity rather than disappointing contrast: “Wherever possible, compound congregations should be started, even if the population is in great part a floating one. More emphasis could be placed on the fact that Christians are brothers. We ourselves are a body of four nationalities. Our program should be so adaptable that it meets changing trends and conditions and does not become fossilized.”³¹ In other words, Papua New Guinea is a site of missionization only when an image of circulatory primitivity can be maintained. Braun had to convince his Lutheran coworkers to recognize spaces of labor mobility and circulation as spaces for Lutheran missionary work.

His paper ends with a strong plea to the missionaries to think beyond the confines of their rural districts (or “circuits” in Lutheran missionary terms) and accept that substantial change was already happening in the postwar Territory of New Guinea:

In summary, we are interested in native labor because it represents an important phase of native life. It is a time when a native is in contact with the white man and it has played, and will continue to play, a large economic and social role in the life of this country. If we remember what our calling is, namely to preach the Gospel by word and example, we will not go far wrong, especially if we avoid a picayune outlook which tries to tell us our work only extends as far as our circuit or job.³²

Note the ironies, then, of a mission group always in desperate need of funds to support its work in rural and remote parts of Papua New Guinea, always in desperate need of being able to join together in more populated areas, having to be pushed to see the people closest to hand as worthy of attention. The mission ran plantations in coastal, semi-urban areas to help fund the work in remote locales. The mission brought workers from those remote locales to the coast to work on the plantations in order to fund the missionaries’ work in the rural hinterlands. But at no point prior to Laubach’s visit did anyone think that the men who had been brought out from those same hinterlands could be objects of evangelistic attention themselves while they were speaking Tok Pisin at those plantations.

A GOOD ENOUGH CHANNEL

By 1954, with Laubach’s visit and the beginnings of the New Testament translation project, it is clear that the president of the mission, John Kuder, was contemplating a partial shift to Tok Pisin, even while maintaining his negative attitude toward it: “Because Pidgin gives us access to so many people the question arises whether we should not cultivate it rather than use it merely as a necessary evil?”³³ Lutherans

discussed two main reasons for this official recognition. First, they were battling with other denominations for dominance in the highlands. Teaching the Lutheran *lingua francas* to potential converts during yearlong confirmation classes was taking too long. Other missions were picking off the students by offering immediate baptism. Reluctantly, in 1956, the Lutherans allowed the use of Tok Pisin in these hotly contested new highlands areas in an effort to keep as much of their “flock” as they could. Second, the missionaries were starting to make more concerted efforts to turn the mission into a church, and to have local people take over for the American, Australian, German, and Samoan missionaries. Yet, because these expatriate missionaries were never able to decide on a single church language, the Papua New Guinean Lutherans had no single language with which to communicate with one another. Tok Pisin was partly accepted because it was the only language in which meetings among members of the Kâte, Jabem, and Madang synods could take place.

In the early 1950s, one of the Lutheran missionaries began to work in limited ways with the Catholic Fr. Francis Mihalic on standardizing Tok Pisin and translating the New Testament into it (see Cass 1999). The translated New Testament was published in 1969, an official orthography in 1970, and a grammar and dictionary in 1971. Yet even when codifying the language, the missionaries’ orienting horizon was always an English-language future with Tok Pisin on a modernizing suicide mission. Mihalic, the missionary most responsible for standardizing Tok Pisin, writes in the preface to the first edition of the dictionary that the codification of Tok Pisin is just meant “to span the gap to that farther shore” of English-language fluency (Mihalic 1968: ix). In other words, missionaries did not suddenly disagree with the anti-Tok Pisin rationales that were articulated in earlier decades. They continued to disparage Tok Pisin in familiar ways even as they started to use it.

The extent to which Lutherans worked to maintain Tok Pisin outside of its use as a religious channel, even as they started using it for that purpose, is most clearly on display in 1971 correspondence between Kuder and John Sievert, who had worked, before his retirement, with Mihalic on the Tok Pisin New Testament translation. Kuder complained about Sievert’s replacement on the Tok Pisin work, Paul Freyberg, who was taking too long with his translation of the Lutheran statement of faith. Before getting to Kuder’s comments, it is important to note that Kuder had been working on the statement of faith for at least five years. Hammering out the theological differences among the different Lutheran missionary societies was a seemingly never-ending task. Kuder also worked hard to make the statement of faith specific to and appropriate for the Papua New Guinean context. It was almost like his parting gift, as the mission was formally in the process of being nationalized, going from a Euro-American-run mission to a church that would be run by Papua New Guineans. This final stamp of theological authenticity and truth in the statement of faith was meant to set the new church on the right path. Kuder had been worrying over it for years, and yet he notes in his comments to Sievert that Freyberg is taking too much care with the Tok Pisin translation:

I can't see that this is going to be done in the immediate future. What seems to me would be a much better solution would be that a few of us who are not quite so good in Pidgin as Paul is [come together] and that we should get it out the best we can. Then it can be worked over and revised where necessary to bring it into line with our changing use of the Pidgin itself[—]to have somebody prepare what we think is a perfect copy is like Sisip pushing the stone up the mountain. He never reached it.³⁴

Even though Kuder was deeply concerned about this document, he was ready to insist upon what he thought would be a middling translation into Tok Pisin. One would always have to “bring it into line with our changing use of the Pidgin” because the Tok Pisin itself is always changing to an extent that does not seem to be true of other languages. That is, trying to get a Tok Pisin translation into proper order is Sisyphean because of the instability of Tok Pisin itself.

As is clear from Kuder's comments, a few Lutherans like Freyberg thought that Tok Pisin could be a channel to the soul, or they at least worked under that assumption. Certainly, after Kuder left and the leadership of the church moved into Papua New Guinean hands, Tok Pisin came to be an important part of Lutheran practice. In most Lutheran communities, Tok Pisin eventually took over from Kâte, Jabem, and Gedaged. But ambivalence about Tok Pisin was ongoing during the mission era. It was recognized as useful for uniting the mission, given the missionaries' incapacity to find a single church *lingua franca*, yet it was kept separate from those *lingua francas* and the vernacular languages of the people. Kuder's refusal to let Freyberg continue his work on the translation—his refusal to even admit that a proper Tok Pisin translation was possible—points to the ways in which Tok Pisin was maintained as a language that could only travel on the surfaces of the labor migrations that the Lutherans in general tended to ignore. Even with Kâte and Jabem sidelined and Tok Pisin on its way to becoming the main Lutheran language by the time of Papua New Guinea's independence, many Lutheran missionaries maintained a sense that Tok Pisin was still a secular channel connecting laborers, rather than one connecting souls and God. As the language enabled the movement of laborers, Tok Pisin was marginalized, erasing this history of colonial labor circulation to promote instead the Lutheran *lingua francas* as channels of Christian circulation to the supposedly remote and immobile populations further inland.

CONCLUSION

Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (2000) contrast the theories of John Locke and Johann Gottfried Herder as the two main apostles of modernist language ideologies, the one advocating a rational and transparent language of logic and the other describing the particularistic languages of ethnonational groups. In the terms I have been using here, Locke imagined language as a conduit for information transfer, in which the success of circulation of truth depended on the perfectibility of the language. The more it was an accurate reflection of reality and

no more, the better the circulation of information. Herder was instead invested in imagining language as a code, a system that imprinted itself on the speaking subject, affecting the way that speakers engaged with the world.

This opposition has become one of the main organizing principles of linguistic anthropology. Locke has become the totem of the Enlightenment, universal truth and objectivity, the analytic philosophy of language, and an emphasis on reference and the circulation of information. Herder has become the totem of the Counter-Enlightenment, relativism and subjective perspectivism, a culturally informed approach to understanding language, and an emphasis on pragmatics and context. However, information channels and cultural codes are more deeply interconnected than this story of opposed language ideologies implies. Some linguistic forms can be channels because of the way that speakers or observers reflect on them as kinds of code. Some linguistic forms can be codes only if they are seen as making particular kinds of connections. But with the division of the study of language separated between Locke and Herder, between information conduits and cultural codes, linguistic anthropologists have not paid enough attention to the cultural formation of channels.

Tok Pisin's history, especially its history within the Lutheran Mission of enforced disorder, shows how hard it is to keep these stories separate. This is especially apparent in the ways that the standard story opposes a focus on truth and universalism against a focus on particularity and subjectivity. The view from nowhere is made possible in the Lockean imagination because language can be perfected. What is especially interesting in the Lutheran case is that Tok Pisin was delinked from a subjective self not because it was perfect—a laboratory instrument for understanding the world—but because it was so deeply flawed. It changed too quickly, it did not have its own center, it was committing suicide by slowly being eaten up by English. For about seventy years, the Lutherans both used the language and tried to keep it in that imperfect state. Positing that it lacked the subjective depth that could link soul and God, which they assumed came from the structuredness of a stable linguistic code, the Lutherans thought of Tok Pisin as a language of secular labor infrastructure and no more.

One version of the modernist imaginary of circulation holds that greater circulation produces greater modernity. Yet the Lutherans' project of Christian evangelism, in which intrepid missionaries circulate the Gospel to immobile Papua New Guineans and thus compel them toward more circulation, was at odds with the actually existing forms of labor migration that many Papua New Guinean men were engaged in with the help of Tok Pisin. Papua New Guinea was mountainous and multilingual, but it became specifically a space of circulatory primitivity when colonial actors saw it through their contradictory lenses of modernist imaginaries of circulation.

One of the legacies of the colonial trope of circulatory primitivity in multilingual Papua New Guinea has been a constant emphasis on questions of access

and channels. For the Lutheran missionaries, it was only the stable and seemingly immobile codes of indigenous languages of remote Papua New Guinea that could be the communicative channels to God. To downplay circulation, to maintain an image of immobility, Tok Pisin's communicative channels were minimized as the shallow and suspicious networks of temporary labor experiences. Likewise, as I will show in chapters 3 and 5, Tok Pisin's capacity to allow for different kinds of illegitimate or unwanted circulation was the concern that continued to unite a disparate community of colonial and anticolonial actors.