

GENESIS OF A PREPOSITION SYSTEM IN BISLAMA

Terry Crowley
Pacific Languages Unit
University of the South Pacific

Vila, Vanuatu
1987

(Draft only. Comments welcome.)

1 INTRODUCTION¹

Bislama is an English-based pidgin that is spoken as the constitutionally declared national language of the Republic of Vanuatu, a nation of about 125,000 people located in the south-western Pacific. (Prior to its achieving independence in 1980, Vanuatu was known as the New Hebrides.) A survey conducted at around the time of independence revealed that approximately 8% of the population had grown up speaking Bislama as their first language (Charpentier, private communication), and this number is certain to be slightly higher today, so the language can be said to be undergoing creolisation.

Speaking in purely linguistic terms, Bislama, Solomon Islands Pijin and the rather better known Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin are all sister dialects of the same language, which exhibit a high degree of mutual intelligibility when spoken; furthermore, it is significant to note that while speakers themselves from these three countries recognise clear differences between their speech and the speech of the other countries, there is also a universal acceptance among speakers that a three-nation speech community of sorts exists, and Melanesians readily speak of their "Wantoks" (language-mates) in the other countries. This fact is also manifested politically in terms of pan-Melanesian solidarity on some issues in numerous international contexts.

At the same time, because each of the three varieties is spoken in a separate country, each having a separate name, and even to some extent a separate history, linguists have generally referred to these as though they were three separate languages. This misidentification is compounded by the fact that the language is currently standardising in three slightly different directions, each being characterised by particular phonological, lexical and structural features. Furthermore, there are three sets of orthographies emerging in standard use, which adds to the impression that there are three distinct linguistic systems in operation here. (A significant number of these orthographic differences, however, suggest phonological differences that have no basis in reality, and therefore tend to obscure some of the similarities.)

The literature of pidgin and creole studies in the Melanesian region has tended to concentrate on the numerically stronger Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin. The present paper aims to provide some information on Bislama, specifically with relation to an aspect of its structure by which it differs significantly

¹ Many thanks to Elaine Good and Jeff Siegel for helpful comments to earlier drafts of this paper. All conclusions, however, are entirely my own.

from its sister dialects. The subject of discussion in this paper is the early development of the prepositional system of Bislama.

The paper aims in particular to examine the way in which a coherent set of prepositions emerged in the first place out of a seemingly highly variable syntactic jumble in the early days of the development of the pidgin. In particular, we will examine the extent to which substrate features could have had, and indeed may well have had, in the genesis of a stable preposition system in Bislama. ^

2 PREPOSITIONS RECOGNISED IN BISLAMA TODAY

Existing grammatical and lexicographical descriptions of Bislama (Guy 1964, Camden 1977, Charpentier 1979 and Crowley 1987) recognise in one way or another a clearly definable category of forms, which we can refer to collectively as "prepositions". Syntactically, these forms can all be defined by the fact that they typically appear before noun phrases. Functionally, prepositions are all recognisable by the fact that they assign one of a number of particular semantic roles to a participant within an event, such as instrument, location, goal, source, beneficiary, possessor and so on (in addition, of course, to such non-prepositionally marked role-indicators as the occurrence of a noun phrase in the subject or object slot within a clause). Those forms which, according to these criteria, fall into this word class in past treatments of Bislama, are:

long
blong
from
wetem
olsem

(Crowley (1987 and forthcoming:b) also refers to a number of relatively recent additions to this basic set of prepositions, arising out of the reanalysis of serial verb constructions as prepositional forms.)

In order to clarify a number of the example sentences that will confront the reader in this paper, and also because there are some significant differences in prepositional usage to be noted between Bislama and its sister dialects in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, the range covered by each of these five prepositions is outlined in this section.

2.1 Long

This is without a doubt the most widely occurring preposition in Bislama today. It is essentially a marker of the three basic spatial roles - location, goal (i.e. motion towards) and source (i.e. motion away from). While having a single form to express such semantically opposite, but nevertheless closely interconnected, roles may appear, at first glance, to open the language up to unacceptable ambiguity, in actual fact, the correct role assignment for this preposition is rarely a problem. This is because *long*, when it is used in association with a stative or a locational verb, is automatically given a locative interpretation. When it is used in association with verbs that indicate motion towards something, it can only have a goal reading, while with verbs that indicate motion away from something, *long* must be interpreted as marking source. So, for instance, we find sentences such as the following, which are completely unambiguous:

- (1) *Maki i stap long haos.*
Maki is sleeping in the house. ? Se paper has
- (2) *Maki i no wandem go long maket.*
Maki doesn't want to go to the market.
- (3) *Maki i kamaot long presen.*
Maki has come out of jail.

At the same time of course, there are many verbs which are neither inherently directional nor locational, and we could expect to find ambiguity in the use of *long* in such cases. This is precisely what we do find, in fact, and a sentence such as (4) is semantically three ways ambiguous:

- (4) *Maki i wokbaot long bus.*

The possible readings for this sentence are as follows:

- Maki walked in the bush (location)
- Maki walked to the bush (goal)
- Maki walked from the bush (source)

This kind of ambiguity seldom arises in actual fact, however, either because real world contextual factors would eliminate incorrect readings, or because speakers can, and in fact generally do, make use of the device of verb serialisation to

express these kinds of distinctions (Crowley, forthcoming:b). We therefore commonly find sentences such as these rather than (4) when a specifically non-locational reading is intended:

- (5) *Maki i wokbaot i go long bus.*
Maki walked to the bush
- (6) *Maki i wokbaot i kam long bus.*
Maki walked from the bush.

In addition to these purely spatial functions, the preposition *long* in Bislama can be used to express a very wide range of other semantic roles that the referent of a noun phrase can play in an event. These include the following:

(i) The topic of a locutionary verb. E.g.

- (7) *Mi no save stori long yu sapos yu no stap.*
I couldn't talk about you if you weren't around.
- (8) *Olgeta oli singing long ileksen blong 1983.*
They sang about the 1983 election.

(ii) The instrument by means of which an action is carried out. E.g.

- (9) *Bata i isi long katem long smol naef.*
It's easy to cut butter with a bread knife.

long or blong

It is consistent with the goal-marking function of *long* mentioned above that this preposition should be consistently used to mark the indirect object of a transitive verb. E.g.

- (10) *Traem soem long mi fastaem.*
Can you please show me first?
- (11) *Mi nomo wantem raetem leta long yu.*
I don't want to write you any more letters.

The preposition *long* is also quite frequently used in expressing time specifications in Bislama. In some of these kinds of constructions, *long* may alternate with zero, while in others it is obligatory:

- (12) *Sapos mi gat janis, bae mi luk yu bakegen long Mande.*
If I have a chance, I'll see you again on Monday.
- (13) *Hem i stap long/∅ wan yia nomo.*
He only stayed for one year.

There are, in addition to these functions, quite a number of other functions that can be expressed by *long* in Bislama. This preposition seems to be the least marked of all the five prepositions, in that it can be used in a semantically fairly empty way, to allow an intransitive verb to be followed by a pragmatically rather salient noun phrase, which in the case of a grammatically transitive verb, would be expressed as a direct object. So, look at the following sentence:

- (14) *Bae yu rato long ol lif i go wan ples.*
Rake the leaves all together.

Here, although the form *rato* is being used verbally to mean "to rake", there is no transitive equivalent **ratoem*. If the speaker wants to include *ol lif* "the leaves" as an object, this can only be done by introducing the preposition *long* as a substitute transitiviser. (On the other hand, the synonymous form *rek* does exist both intransitively and transitively, with the corresponding transitive form being *rekem*, as illustrated by (15), which expresses the same meaning as (14):

- (15) *Bae yu rekem ol lif i go wan ples.*

2.2 Blong

This preposition can be regarded as having three major functions in Bislama, which are set out below:

(i) Possessor, i.e. the noun that expresses the possessor in a possessive construction, or in a part-whole construction. E.g.

- (16) *mane blong mi*
my money

- (17) *haos blong Maki*
Maki's house

(18) *mane blong papa blong yu*
your father's money

(19) *rus blong wud*
tree root

(ii) Purpose, i.e. the noun that expresses the purpose for which something is used, or the characteristic use to which something is put. E.g.

(20) *ki blong trak*
car key

(21) *sop blong hea*
shampoo (i.e. soap for hair)

(iii) Beneficiary, i.e. the noun that expresses the one for whom an action is carried out. E.g.

(22) *Yu save finisim blong mi?*
Can you finish it for me?

2.3 From

The preposition *from* is used to mark the cause of an event, or the reason for which an action is performed. E.g.

(23) *Smol boe blong Tom i stap sik oltaem from ol moskito.*
Tom's young son is always sick because of the mosquitoes.

(24) *Mi kam long Vila from wan kos.*
I've come to Vila for a course.

2.4 Wetem

This preposition can be used to express two distinct semantic roles. These are as follows:

(i) Comitative, i.e. the entity (usually a noun phrase with animate reference) in the company of which an action is performed. E.g.

- (25) *Yu stap wok wetem huia?*
Who do you work with?

(ii) Instrument, i.e. the thing by means of which an action is carried out. E.g.

- (26) *Yu mas katem pepa wetem sises.*
You should cut the paper with scissors.

It should be noted that this latter function of *wetem* can also be expressed by means of the preposition *long*, as pointed out in 2.1 above. It is very difficult to establish any real difference in meaning between sentences that alternate between *wetem* and *long* in Bislama as (26), which alternates with (27), which has the same meaning:

- (27) *Yu mas katem pepa long sises.*

2.5 Olsem

The last of the five prepositions recognised in Bislama is *olsem*. This has only a single basic function, which is to mark the referent of one noun phrase as being similar to something else. This is illustrated by a sentence such as (28):

- (28) *Hafnad ia i toktok olsem wan pikinini
nomo.*
That crazy guy just talks like a child.

2.6 Complex Prepositions

Bislama also makes use of a construction that we can label a "complex prepositional" construction. In this construction, an unmarked function-marker appears before a noun phrase, to which the noun phrase is linked by the intervening preposition *long*. This construction can be illustrated by the following examples:

- (29) *antap long tri/*antap tri*
above the tree
- (30) *tru long haos/*tru haos*
through the house
- (31) *raon long aelan/*raon aelan*
around the island

- (32) *insaed long trak/*insaed trak*
inside the car

The first elements in these prepositional constructions are structurally different from genuine prepositions also in that they can be freely used without any following noun phrase at all. We therefore find sentences such as these:

- (33) *Pisin i stap flae antap.*
The bird is flying above.
- (34) *Hem i go tru nomo, be i no stap insaed.*
He just went through, but he didn't stay inside.

3 PREPOSITIONAL USAGE ON THE QUEENSLAND CANEFIELDS

In this section, we will attempt to establish the nature of the prepositional system that was used in the early formative years of Bislama, when it first came to be used on the canefields of Queensland. This discussion will provide a basis from which we can compare the present-day system, in an effort to see how - and why - the present system could have evolved as it has.

3.1 Sources of Information

The precise details of how Bislama ended up with a five number set of prepositions, rather than a much larger set more similar in size and in semantic scope to the set of prepositions in English, its chief lexifier language, is likely to remain somewhat shrouded in mystery. The reason for this is, of course, the fact that during the crucial formative years in the history of Bislama, precious few reliable records were kept of how the language was actually spoken. Those Melanesians who were responsible for the emergence of Bislama on the plantations of Queensland from the 1860's and later were largely illiterate, and so left no written records of how they spoke. European observers of the time were liable to be guilty of stereotyping the speech of Melanesians in a "Me Tarzan, you Jane" type of fashion, and so many of the individual observations from sources such as these cannot be relied upon.

However, there are written records from a number of different observers at different times, and in different places, that do allow us to draw some conclusions as to the nature of the

speech of plantation workers during the crucial formative years for Bislama, i.e. the 1860's to the 1880's. All indications point to a highly variable manner of speaking, with a number of the features of present-day Bislama in one form or another already in place fairly early on, often in alternation with more English-like forms (Clark 1979-80).

Sankoff (1980) examines the verbatim statements in an official enquiry held in 1882 on abuses within the labour recruiting system of Melanesian labourers contracted to work in Queensland. Her investigation reveals that there was very clear evidence of a continuum between a basilectal pidgin and something that with some speakers came to a close approximation to standard English. At the same time, she concludes that this body of data points clearly to the fact that crystallisation within this variable system was already taking place towards the basilectal end of the continuum at that time. Sankoff's examination reveals - almost surprisingly given the nature of the data with which she was working - a degree of subtlety and consistency in individual usage that seems to have transcended to some extent the prejudices and stereotypes of the individual court recorders.

Because this particular source has already been tested and seemingly has some degree of reliability, and also because it dates from a crucial time in the evolution of Bislama, we will also use it in the present paper as a source for possible prepositional usage in the 1880's, before Bislama had been "repatriated" to Vanuatu.

3.2 Prepositional Usage in the 1880's

A total of 480 Melanesian labourers were interviewed in the court proceedings referred to in the previous section, and their testimonies recorded. Of these 480, Sankoff (1980:147) mentions that 32 were deemed able to speak sufficient "English" not to need the services of an interpreter to translate out of his own language. In order to gain some indications of prepositional usage in Bislama in its formative years a century ago, the testimonies of fifteen of these 32 will be examined in some detail, along with a sample of equivalent length of the speech of two other labourers, Diene and Cago, who were often used as interpreters for those who were monolingual in the language of their respective islands.

These court records clearly indicate that the precursors of *long* and *blong* were already in use a century ago as markers of spatial and possessive noun phrases respectively. We therefore find examples such as these:

- (35) *Boatswain tell me to come up along Queensland and work sugar.* (Kabita, 638)
The boatswain told me to come to Queensland and work the sugar.
- (36) *Yes; good fellow gun, box, plenty something belong a white man.* (Taurimai, 784)
Yes; a good gun, a box, and lots of the Europeans' things.

The precursor of *olsem* is also attested in these records, though at this stage it seems to have had an adverbial rather than a prepositional function, as illustrated by (37):

- (37) *Suppose he tell him all same, me no come up.*
(Sani, 385)
If he had said that, I wouldn't have come.

The precursor of present-day *wetem* is also attested, though there is no indication of the final syllable that we find in Bislama today. E.g.

- (38) *I came up along ship with coconuts.* (Mutiana, 481)
I came to the ship with coconuts.

(Note, incidentally, that the survival into Bislama of "with" as *wetem* appears to be in direct contradiction to Bickerton's (1980:123) statement that this form is phonologically so marked as to be virtually doomed to extinction in any English-based creole.)

The only currently used preposition for which we find no precursor in this set of data is the causal preposition *from*. At the same time, however, it needs to be pointed out that in the particular testimonies examined, there were no contexts in which its use would be required today, so this particular lack is not significant. (The form "from" is attested in the data, only once, and then expressing the source role.)

As might be expected from what was said in the preceding section, the speech of these seventeen men exhibits a high degree of variability. While we do find the precursors of most of the modern prepositional usages, we also find a considerable number of much more English-looking usages. In addition to the forms just referred to, we also find attestations of the following, none of which have survived as prepositions into modern Bislama:

"on", "in", "at", "to", "from" (in a spatial sense), "without", "concerning", "by", "for", "about", "through", "alongside" and "of". We also find that in alternation with the precursor of *blong*, speakers in 1882 were recorded as using the possessive pronominal forms "my", "your" and so on, as well as the genitive suffix "'s" on nouns, none of which have been part of the synchronic grammar of Bislama for some considerable period of time.

X
X
The following table sets out the full details of prepositional usage in 1882 as we find them in the recorded statements of the interpreters Diene and Cago, along with the other fifteen speakers whose speech was examined for whom no interpreters were required. For each of the semantic roles that are indicated, the percentage figures indicate the extent to which that particular role for each speaker of group of speakers was expressed by a standard prepositional usage, or one of a number of different non-standard forms (or by the lack of any prepositional form altogether). The figures in parenthesis behind each percentage indicate the actual number of individual occurrences upon which the percentages are based.

SEMANTIC ROLE	SPEAKER	STANDARD USAGE	NON-STANDARD USAGE
LOCATION		<i>on, in, at</i>	<i>along, along a, ∅</i>
	Diene	95%(18)	5%(1)
	Cago	77%(17)	23%(5)
	others	65%(30)	35%(16)
GOAL		<i>to</i>	<i>along, along a, ∅</i>
	Diene	69%(9)	31%(4)
	Cago	50%(4)	50%(4)
	Others	43%(15)	57%(20)
COMITATIVE		<i>with</i>	<i>along, along a, ∅</i>
	Diene	100%(10)	0%(0)
	Cago	-	-
	Others	60%(6)	40%(4)
POSSESSOR		<i>my, your, man's</i>	<i>belong, belong a</i>
	Diene	100%(10)	0%(0)
	Cago	100%(3)	0%(0)
	Others	64%(9)	36%(5)
DURATION		<i>for</i>	<i>∅</i>
	Diene	80%(4)	20%(1)
	Cago	44%(4)	56%(5)
	Others	30%(3)	70%(7)
BENEFICIARY		<i>for</i>	<i>along, along a, ∅</i>
	Diene	100%(2)	0%(0)
	Cago	-	-
	Others	0%(0)	100%(6)
SIMILATIVE		<i>same, like</i>	<i>all same</i>
	Diene	-	-
	Cago	-	-
	Others	33%(1)	67%(2)
OTHERS		<i>from (=source), by, without, of, concerning, about, through, alongside, with (=instrument)</i>	
	Diene	100%(7)	-
	Cago	100%(3)	-
	others	100%(4)	-
TOTAL	Diene	91%(60)	9%(6)
	Cago	69%(31)	31%(14)
	others	53%(68)	47%(60)
	Overall	67%(159)	33%(80)

This table indicates that, taken over all speakers, the ratio of standard to non-standard usages in 1882 is as high as 67:33. The figures also indicate that different individuals behave differently, with the interpreter Diene more closely approximating to the standard than Cago, who is in turn more closely approximating to the standard than is the case with the other speakers. However, even if we exclude the figures for acrolectal Diene and mesolectal Cago, we find that among the most basilectal speakers, the ratio of standard to non-standard forms is still as high as 53:47. Another indication of the existence of a continuum along which speakers were located involves the more arcane prepositions dealt with in the table collectively under the heading of "others". Fully half (seven out of fourteen examples) of these more specialised prepositions were used only by Diene, with a further three coming from Cago, leaving only four instances that were shared among fifteen basilectal speakers. (It should be noted that exactly the same kinds of generalisations are drawn in Sankoff (1980:148) on the basis of basically the same sources of information, but with quite different sets of linguistic variables.)

3.3 Crystallisation into a Five Preposition System

The most surprising feature of the figures presented in 3.2 is the fact that the forms which eventually "won out" in Bislama - that is the non-standard rather than the standard forms - were so infrequently used in the incipient stages of the evolution of the language. There are some indications however, even within this set of data, that grammatical crystallisation was already taking place in the direction of the basilectal forms.

For one thing, there are strong indications that the less basilectal speakers were aware of differences in register within their "English", and that they were able to move up and down the scale of registers according to the nature of the situation they were in. Obviously, in situations in which questions are being posed by the court in English, we should not be surprised to find speakers offering their most acrolectal varieties, while reserving more basilectal varieties for less formal in-group contexts.

Evidence that this is the case comes in an examination of the contexts in which the non-standard usages of the two non-basilectal interpreters actually occur. Of Diene's six attested non-standard prepositional usages, all but one occur in contexts similar to the following (with Diene interpreting for Barama):

- (39) *Wari boi said, "You stop here and come along Queensland. (Barama, 2108)*
Wariboi said, "Stay here and come to Queensland".

That is, when Diene is quoting direct speech from somebody else rather than simply addressing the court directly on behalf of the person he is translating for in the first person, he typically slips into a more basilectal register. Of Cago's fourteen non-standard prepositional usages, we find that he does precisely the same kind of thing in eight out of these fourteen cases. (This lower rate with Cago is not surprising, of course, since he seems to be lower down the scale overall).

There is also evidence of a greater tendency towards prepositional fixity at the basilectal end of the continuum if we examine the same data along a different set of axes. For instance, it seems that in particular lexical contexts - typically involving the most frequently occurring forms, and in particular those forms that survived into modern Bislama - non-standard usages were likely to increase. For instance, while the basilectal speakers in the table above express the location and goal roles by non-standard forms in only 44% of attestations (i.e. 36 out of 81), we find that with the verbs "come", "go" and "stop" (meaning "stay"), the usage of non-standard forms climbs to 62% of attestations. With other less common verbs however, it is the standard usages that are more frequent. This suggests that with the more commonly used verbs, which are generally those that were destined to survive into modern Bislama as we have just noted, the non-standard forms were tending to become collocationally rather more fixed, and it was presumably on the basis of these more frequently occurring patterns that the non-standard usages were generalised throughout the grammar.

4 WHENCE THE EMERGENT SYSTEM?

This brings us now to perhaps the most important question that needs to be answered with regard to the development of the existing prepositional system in Bislama, and that is: Precisely how did it evolve as it did? (In) discussing the genesis of relatively stable grammatical systems out of some kind of a syntactic jumble (has) been the subject of considerable debate within the field of pidgin and creole studies in recent years, centring around the degrees to which there has been influence from universal factors, the superstrate language, and the substrate languages. We will now examine in some detail the prepositional system of Bislama, in order to assess the relative influence of each of these three possible factors.

4.1 Vernacular Role-Marking Systems

Without necessarily preempting any conclusion that substrate influences were predominant in this situation, let us begin by examining the extent to which there actually is structural

parallellism between the role-marking system of Bislama, and those of Vanuatu vernacular languages. It should be pointed out that demonstrating the existence of structural parallels between Bislama and Vanuatu languages does not, in itself, prove the existence of substratum influence, as there would be other possible logical explanations for the similarities, most notably coincidence and universal constraints on what role-marking systems can be like. We will be addressing these particular points later on in this paper, and concentrate for the moment on simply demonstrating the existence of structural parallellism.

Despite the fact that there are over a hundred languages spoken in Vanuatu, the search for structural parallels with Bislama need not be as daunting as it may seem at first. This is because with respect to their role-marking system, Vanuatu languages are all typologically fairly similar, sharing as they do membership in the Oceanic subgroup of the Austronesian language family. (Most, in fact, even belong together in the Eastern Oceanic subgroup within this larger subgroup.)

In order to demonstrate the degree of structural parallellism, we will compare the Bislama role-marking system with one typologically fairly representative Vanuatu language, in order to bring the task of comparison down to manageable proportions. The language that we will examine is Paamese, with which the author has some familiarity. Paamese has essentially three distinct construction types that mark the semantic role that the referent of a noun phrase plays in an event - in addition, of course, to the subject and object marking positions - these being the prepositional construction, the complex prepositional construction, and the suffixed construction. Each of these constructions is described below, along with the various semantic roles that each expresses. (For fuller details of the nature of these various construction types in Paamese, and the semantic roles expressed by each, the reader is referred to Crowley (1982).)

(i) Prepositional Construction

Paamese has a five member prepositional system, consisting of the forms *eni*, *rani*, *mini*, *veni*, and *teni*. The semantic roles that are expressed by each of these five forms are discussed in turn below.

(a) *Eni*. This preposition is used to express the three basic spatial roles of location, goal and source. E.g.

- (40) *Maki mul matil en² aim.*
 Maki 3sg:realis:be 3sg:realis:sleep spatial house
 Maki is sleeping in the house.
- (41) *Maki len rovattei*
 Maki interior:3sg 3sg:realis:neg:want:neg
vaha en maket.
 3sg:imm future:go spatial market
 Maki doesn't want to go to the market.
- (42) *Maki sital en presen.*
Maki 3sg:realis:come out spatial jail
 Maki has come out of jail.

Any potential ambiguity between these three roles is resolved by means of productive verb serialisation, as in:

- (43) *Maki mual va en leiai.*
 Maki 3sg:realis:walk 3sg:realis:go spatial bush
 Maki walked to the bush.
- (44) *Maki mual mai en leiai.*
 Maki 3sg:realis:walk 3sg:realis:come spatial bush
 Maki walked from the bush.

The form *eni* is also used in Paamese to mark the topic of a verb of locution, or the instrument by means of which an action is carried out. E.g. X

- (45) *Inau nesakras matun en*
 1sg 1sg:realis:unable 1sg:imm future:talk about
kaik navong kaik kirodotei.
 2sg if 2sg 2sg:future:neg:stay:neg
 I couldn't talk about you if you weren't here.
- (46) *Kail amusau en ileksen ten 1983.*
 3pl 3pl:realis:sing about election of 1983
 They sang about the 1983 election.

² Note that although the citation forms quoted in this section all have final vowels, these appear in the examples without these final vowels as a result of regular deletion rules. For the details of the phonological processes of Paamese, refer to Crowley (1982).

- (47) *Bata temale avatehei*
 butter 3sg:realis:easy 3sg:imm future:cut
en tinaiv.
 instrument bread knife
 Butter is easy to cut with a bread knife.

The preposition *eni* is also used (frequently in alternation with zero) to mark temporal phrases. E.g.

- (48) *Navong nikur sanis, nilsikoris*
 if 1sg:future:get chance 1sg:future:see:2sg:again
en Made.
 temporal Monday
 If I have a chance, I'll see you again on Monday.

- (49) *Kai do en/∅ auh tas.*
 3sg 3sg:realis:stay temporal year one
 He only stayed for one year.

X The preposition *eni* in Paamese also has the cliticised variant *-ni*, which attaches to any preceding constituent. The following are therefore semantically equivalent variants:

- (50) *Nilesik en Made.*
 1sg:future:see:2sg temporal Monday

- (51) *Nelesikon³ Made.*
 1sg:future:see:2sg:temporal Monday

I will see you on Monday.

When a formally intransitive verb undergoes transitivity in Paamese, in order to be able to take a direct object, it is by means of this cliticised form of the preposition *eni* that this is achieved:

- (52) *Sai mul musau.*
 Sai 3sg:realis:be 3sg:realis:sing
 Sai was singing.

³ Refer, once again, to Crowley (1982) for details on the regular appearance and disappearance of vowels in these examples.

- (53) *Sai mul* *musaun* *souen.*
 Sai 3sg:realis:be 3sg:realis:sing:tr song
 Sai was singing the song.

(b) *Rani*. This preposition is used only to express the spatial source of an action. It is often used in alternation with *eni* when this preposition has a source interpretation which is potentially ambiguous. E.g.

- (54) *Maki sital* *ran* *presen.*
 Maki 3sg:realis: come out source jail
 Maki has come out of jail.

(c) *Mini*. This preposition is mainly used with animate nouns to express goal (in contrast to *eni*, which expresses spatial goals). E.g.

- (55) *Nisakras* *nisan* *mane*
 1sg:future:unable 1sg:future:give money
min ulumatu.
 goal old man
 I won't be able to give the old man any money.

This form can also be used to express the idea of accompaniment, usually with an animate noun, as in:

- (56) *Kamil min* *isei mulumul* *mulumum?*
 2dl accomp who 2dl:realis:be 2dl:realis:work
 Who do you work with? (Literally: You two with
 with who, do you two work?)

(d) *Veni*. This preposition is used to mark the cause of an event, or the reason for which an action is performed. E.g.

- (57) *Natinali Tom mul* *mesai liseles* *ven*
 son:3sg Tom 3sg:realis:be 3sg:realis:sick cause
anam keil.
 mosquito plural
 Tom's son is always sick because of the mosquitoes.

- (58) *Naumai* *Vila ven* *kos* *tai.*
 1sg:realis:come Vila cause course one
 I've come to Vila for a course.

(e) *Teni*. Finally, we have the preposition *teni* in Paamese, which is used to express both the purpose to which something is put, or the characteristic use to which something is put. E.g.

(59) *ki ten terak*
car key

(60) *sov ten ahil*
shampoo (i.e. soap for hair)

(ii) Complex Prepositional Construction

In addition to these five prepositions, there exists in Paamese a separate prepositional construction in which an unmarked location noun can be used before a noun phrase, to which it must be linked by means of the spatial preposition *eni*. E.g.

(61) *nesa en ai/*nesa ai*
above the tree

(62) *naim en terak/*naim terak*
inside the car

The locational nouns which occur as the initial elements in these kinds of constructions are further different from prepositions in that they can be freely used without any following noun phrase at all, as in sentences such as the following:

(63) *Aman muka nesa.*
bird 3sg:realis:fly above
The bird is flying above.

(iii) Suffixed Construction

The third construction type referred to earlier was the suffixed construction, and this involves the attachment of pronominal suffixes directly to some other constituent in order to express semantic roles. This construction actually subsumes two particular subtypes of suffixation in Paamese (along with most other Vanuatu languages).

(a) *Inalienable Construction*. In this kind of construction, the pronominal suffix attaches directly onto a nominal form. The semantic role expressed by this kind of construction is basically that of possessor. E.g.

- (64) *vatu-k*
 head:1sg
 my head
- (65) *re-k*
 voice:1sg
 my voice
- (66) *aso-k*
 spouse:1sg
 my spouse

(b) *Alienable Construction*. On the other hand, alienable possessor - and beneficiary also - is expressed in Paamese by attaching the pronominal suffixes to one of a series of special possessive constituents, each of which indicates the owner's or user's intentions towards the possessed noun. In Paamese, there are four such possessive constituents, which are illustrated in the following phrases:

- (67) *ani a-k*
 coconut edible:1sg
 my coconut (which I intend to eat)
- (68) *ani ema-k*
 coconut potable:1sg
 my coconut (which I intend to drink)
- (69) *ani esa-k*
 coconut traditional:1sg
 my coconut (which I have planted on my land)
- (70) *ani ona-k*
 coconut neutral:1sg
 my coconut (which I might want to do anything else with, such as perhaps throw at you)

This brief discussion has not attempted to go into any real detail about the Paamese prepositional and possessive constructions. In its bare outline form as it has been presented, however, this description would be typologically recognisable for most of the languages of Vanuatu. While the size of the prepositional inventory, and certainly the actual forms, will vary from language to language, as well as the precise manner in which semantic roles are distributed between these prepositions, Paamese is nevertheless typologically fairly representative of

Vanuatu's languages as a whole. Similarly, the formal distinction between alienable and inalienable possession is widespread among these languages, and is marked in essentially the same ways morphologically. The distinction between the various subtypes of alienable possession is also fairly common in Vanuatu languages, though there are also many languages for which there is only a single type of alienable possessive construction.

4.2 The Extent of Structural Parallellism

It should be clear from a comparison of the discussions in sections 2 and 4.1 that there are some striking similarities between the role-marking systems of Bislama and of Vanuatu languages, as typified by Paamese. The most notable similarities lie in the following specific facts:

- (a) There is a single prepositional form marking the three basic spatial roles in both languages, which can be disambiguated by verb serialisation when necessary.
- (b) The spatial preposition in both languages is also used to mark both the topic of a locutionary verb and the instrument, as well as temporal phrases.
- (c) A formally intransitive verb can accept a direct object by means of a construction involving the spatial preposition in both languages.
- (d) In both languages, there is a complex prepositional construction, in which a noun phrase is linked to an initial constituent, again by means of the spatial preposition.
- (e) Both languages have a separate form to express the causal role, which does not conflate with any other major semantic role.
- (f) The possessive and benefactive in both languages are expressed by the same forms.

At the same time that we can observe these structural parallels, which by and large hold for most Vanuatu languages along with Bislama, there are undeniably structural differences to be observed between Bislama and Paamese. The most significant differences lie in the following facts:

- (a) In Paamese, there is a separate source marking preposition, which alternates with the spatial role marker, an option that is not available in Bislama.

(b) Paamese, unlike Bislama, has a separate preposition for the marking of the indirect object, which conflates with the comitative. There is a comitative preposition in Bislama, which conflates with the instrument.

(c) Only Paamese makes a formal distinction between alienable and inalienable possession (including the various subtypes of alienable possession that were discussed earlier). In Bislama, these functions all conflate under a single prepositional marker, which also functions for the purposive.

4.3 An Attempt towards Explanation

The world's languages admit a range of typologies in terms of how semantically distinct roles are conflated together under a generally fairly restricted set of prepositional forms (or other kinds of case-markers). Because of the inevitability of a range of roles having to share the same case-marker in a language, it is far from uncommon to find historically unconnected languages exhibiting structural similarities.

The questions that need to be asked about Bislama at this point are these:

(i) How is it that the highly variable, and much more English-looking prepositional inventory of Bislama as spoken a century ago stabilised so convincingly in a non-English way?

(ii) Are there any significant structural facts or confluences of roles that are shared between Bislama and its substrate languages which would lead us to recognise substratum as being a factor involved in this stabilisation?

These are the questions to which we will turn in the following sections.

4.3.1 The Superstrate and Universal Factors

From all that we have seen in the present paper, it seems clear that we can dismiss the superstrate as having had any significant role in the crystallisation of the Bislama prepositional system. The similarities between Bislama and English go no further than the actual forms which are used to express the semantic roles. The whole point of this paper has been precisely to isolate those factors responsible for the shape of the present system in Bislama, given that it crystallised so rapidly and so convincingly away from the superstrate system after the 1880's.

By the normal processes of linguistic change, however, semantic roles can easily be redistributed among case-markers in a language. One thing that seems to have happened when Bislama emerged as a stable pidgin at the end of the 1800's and in the very early 1900's, was for the "weeding out" of as much arcane vocabulary as possible, amongst which we can evidently count prepositional forms such as "without", "concerning", "alongside" and so on. What Bislama speakers left themselves with was a set of prepositional forms which, judging by the size of case-marking inventories in "natural" languages, must have been close to being as small as possible, without causing difficulties in unambiguously encoding information.

Given that this degree of lexical attrition forced the language to redistribute a number of semantic roles among those prepositional forms that were left, we should not be surprised to find some of the confluences of semantic roles under single prepositional forms in Bislama mirroring the kinds of confluences found in other languages. The confluence of beneficiary and possession in Bislama (under the form *blong*) for example, is repeated in typologically and genetically diverse languages the world over. Similarly, many languages have one preposition which seems to represent something of a semantic rag-bag, in that it expresses a very wide range of apparently unconnected meanings. In Bislama, the form that seems to have ended up doing this job is the preposition *long*.

This now brings us to a point in the discussion where we should ask whether the shape of the Bislama prepositional system may in some way correspond to the kind of system that may result from some kind of universal strategy for "language creation" in situations of radical language transmission loss. That is to say, perhaps the differences between the English and the Bislama role-marking systems reflect some kind of a biologically motivated stripping down of the case-marking system into something more "basic". Unless significant parallels can be found between what happened in Bislama and in other languages arising in similar situations, which additionally could not possibly be explained as being the result of substratum influence, it seems impossible to make any stronger claim than that these changes in Bislama appear to be "natural" and that they are widely mirrored in unrelated languages.

4.3.2 The Substrate

Although more recent second language acquisition studies and studies of bilingualism suggest that genuine structural transfer between two languages is relatively rarely attested in an absolutely convincing way, this does not necessarily mean that we cannot argue for such structural transfer in the emergence of a stable pidgin. The feeling of the present writer is that there

is a significant difference between "normal" second language acquisition and a pidginisation/creolisation situation, namely that in the former case, learners are operating with some externally established norm to which they are aware they should be aiming, whereas in the latter kind of situation, language acquisition is "untargeted". In the absence of significant access to a recognised linguistic target, speakers have to create their own, and it is in precisely this kind of situation that it seems reasonable to assume that structural transfer might successfully take root. The present writer is therefore not afraid to admit to some substratophilic feelings in this case, as there seem to be some structural similarities between Bislama and Paamese that go beyond accident or ordinary developments.

In particular, we should note that the "complex prepositional" construction that is found in both Bislama and in Paamese represents a significant structural development in Bislama, that is unusual enough to be worthy of special suspicion for substratum influence. This kind of construction is quite widely distributed in Oceanic languages generally. It would be somewhat more difficult to push the argument in the case of this particular construction that the similarity between Bislama and the substrate languages is merely accidental.

5 CONCLUSION

The field of pidgin and creole studies at present appears to be abuzz with arguments to explain structural similarities between these kinds of languages. These arguments centre mainly around quite distinct substratophile and substratophobe cum universalist positions. In the present paper, we have not tried to disprove universalist arguments about the acquisition of structural features in pidgin and creole languages. However, some universalist viewpoints in recent years have come to the point of almost completely excluding the possibility of significant structural influence of the substrate on the development of pidgin and creole grammars. This, the present writer feels, is going too far. The Bislama preposition system, in stabilising so convincingly away from the system of its lexifier language, seems to have developed partly as a result of the kinds of grammatical changes that can take place in any language under "normal" circumstances, and partly as a result of speakers drawing from structural features common to their first languages.

REFERENCES

- Bickerton, Derek. 1981. *Roots of Language*. Karoma Publishers, Ann Arbor.
- Camden, Pastor Bill. 1977. *A Descriptive Dictionary: Bislama to English*. Maropa Bookshop, Vila.
- Charpentier, Jean-Michel. 1979. *Le pidgin bislama(n) et le multilinguisme aux Nouvelles-Hébrides*. *Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale* 35. Société d'Etudes Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de France, Paris.
- Clark, Ross. 1979-80. 'In Search of Beach-la-Mar: Towards a History of Pacific Pidgin English'. *Te Reo* 22-23, pp. 3-64.
- Crowley, Terry. 1982. *The Paamese Language of Vanuatu*. Pacific Linguistics, Series B, No.87. Canberra.
- Crowley, Terry. 1987. *Gramma blong Bislama*. Extension Services, University of the South Pacific, Suva.
- Crowley, Terry. (forthcoming:a) 'Serial Verbs in Paamese'. To appear in *Studies in Language* 11(1), pp. 35-84.
- Crowley, Terry. (forthcoming:b). 'Serial Verbs and Prepositions in Bislama'. To appear in John Verhaar (ed.) *Companion Series to Studies in Language*.
- Guy, J.B.M. 1964. *Handbook of Bichelamar/Manuel de Bichelamar*. Pacific Linguistics, Series C, No.34. Canberra.
- Sankoff, G. 1980. 'Variation, Pidgins and Creoles.' In Valdman and Highfield, pp.139-64.
- Valdman, A. and A. Highfield (eds). 1980. *Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies*. Academic Press, New York.