The image of Babel in metalinguistic debates on Hawai‘i Creole and Tok Pisin

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1. Introduction

One of the greatest *language myths*[1] of the Western world (cf. Bailey 1992, Bell 2011) arose from a religious story about diversification: the tale of the tower of *Babel*. It is the narrative of linguistic heterogeneity as a consequence of divine interference, either as a punishment for the overambitious, or simply as a new regulatory circumstance for human existence. The tale has become a "primary myth about multilingualism" (Bell 2011: 530), due to the simplicity and adaptability of its message, as I argue here: The story of Babel has been told over and over again, each reiteration shaped by discourses of the time (and in turn shaping the discourses to follow). Due to its prevalence in metalinguistic debates in the age of European colonialism, the myth found its way into new worlds and thus had an impact on discursive representations of languages far beyond its place of origin. The purpose of the present paper is to investigate this impact and to trace the role of Babel in the formation and maintenance of language ideologies from pre-colonial European discourses to colonial and finally post-colonial discourses in the Pacific. More precisely, I will focus on *language ideological debates* (Blommaert 1999) within the anglophone world and, ultimately, examine the effects of the

[1] The term 'language myth' has been discussed from a number of different perspectives in the linguistic literature: Bauer and Trudgill (1998) compiled a volume addressing *popular myths* about language, and Lippi-Green (1997) investigated the myths of *non-accent* and *standard language*. Watts (2000, 2011) provided a more theoretical discussion and historiographical analysis of how myths feed into *ideologies of prescriptivism* and *standardisation*. In creolistics, Da Pidgin Coup (1999) used the term to rectify people's *preconceptions* about Hawai'i Creole, and DeGraff (2005) identified language myths to criticise *ideological strands in academic work* on creoles.

invoking the story of Babel on the perception and legitimisation processes of Hawai'i Creole and Tok Pisin, two Pacific creoles with English as their common lexifier.

The legend of Babel has a longstanding tradition in metalinguistic debates on English (cf. Bailey 1992). Early British nationalists have made a connection between the confounding of languages and the purity and superiority of English; prescriptivists have evoked the image of Babel to warn about the consequences of linguistic change and diversification. In the age of imperialism, ideas about the importance of language maintenance and standardisation (the antidote to the linguistic confusion of Babel) were carried across the Seven Seas on new trading routes and arrived – with new purposes – in the empire's recently established colonies. As Mazzon (2000: 73) puts it: "The period of the formation of Extraterritorial Englishes coincided with a time in which language prescriptivism was in full swing in Britain. This has necessarily left some traces in the way Extraterritorial Englishes have developed." As a consequence, and by similar processes, British prescriptivism and standardisationism also affected English-based pidgins and creoles, both on the linguistic level, i.e. the structural development of these new varieties, and the metalinguistic level, i.e. the way these languages came to be perceived. This paper will only be concerned with the latter.

Of course, colonial ideas about language have long since been challenged, re-appropriated and adapted to other languages, to new socio-political developments and economic contexts. Nevertheless, although they may be transformed in the process, many themes in metalinguistic debates tend to be very persistent over time (Blommaert 1999). Babel can be argued to be one of these persistent themes. While adaptable in its *form* (e.g. the languages and sociohistorical contexts it is applied to, or the lens through which it is seen), the concept of Babel remains stable in what I consider its core dimension: its *function* as a *topos* (cf. Grue 2009, Reisigl and Wodak 2016).

To elaborate this argument, I divide my discussion into two parts. Section 3 aims to demonstrate how the Biblical story (3.1) was conceptualised in nationalist and imperialist discourse in Britain in the pre-colonial and colonial era (3.2), and ultimately instrumentalised in metalinguistic debates (3.3). In Section 4, I illustrate how the Western (or British) conceptualisation and instrumentalisation of Babel have been adapted to the Pacific. While the concept of Babel itself shows the capacity to be re-interpreted quite considerably in the multilingual environments of PNG and Hawai'i, the basic mechanism of Babel as a seemingly

irrefutable "conclusion rule" (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 35) to a metapragmatic argument appears to be immune to geographic, linguistic and sociopolitical re-contextualisation.

Drawing on data collected in Papua New Guinea and Hawai'i in 2014 and 2015,[2] I will examine metalinguistic public debates in both places, specifically on comments in which language ideological discourse manifests in relation to nationalism and linguistic diversity. I will then discuss two specific examples – one from each place – in which the story of Babel was evoked as an argument in debating the role of Hawai'i Creole or Tok Pisin respectively. This historiographical approach of embedding metalinguistic comments in a chronology of ideological discourse has been put forward by, amongst others, Blommaert (1999), Reisigl and Wodak (2016), and Watts (2000, 2011). In the following section, I outline my theoretical framework for this analysis. I will start by discussing the role of language myths in the formation and perpetuation of language ideologies (2.1). As nationalism, or the concept of nationhood, is closely intertwined with the metalinguistic debates discussed here, I will also address the link between nation building (and the discourse revolving around it) and the notion of monolingualism (Section 2.2).

2. Language myths, nationalism and their postcolonial legacy

While the multiple layers, mechanisms and internal structure of language ideologies have been defined quite narrowly for different purposes (e.g. Irvine and Gal 2000, Kroskrity 2010, Watts 2011), the concept of language ideology as a unit of analysis remains rather intangible. This is not a flaw in the concept *per se*, as a certain degree of flexibility in our understanding of it facilitates its adaptability to different research goals. In general, we can conceptualise language ideology as a particular type of *discursive formation* (Foucault 1972: 115) that has emerged and been reshaped throughout history via spoken and written text about linguistic phenomena and their relation to social groups, and has thus resulted in various sets of *beliefs about language* (Silverstein 1979). These beliefs concern, on the one hand, ways of speaking, such as specific language varieties, styles, registers or linguistic variation and change in

[2] PNG and Hawai'i were initially selected as case studies for a comparison of legitimisation processes in metalinguistic discourses on Tok Pisin and Hawai'i Creole. The data gathered for this study consists of written texts dating back to the Second World War (including newspaper articles, letters to the editor, official documents, dictionaries, internet blogs, online comments, etc.), and semi-structured interviews conducted with native and non-native speakers of each variety.

general, and on the other hand, speech communities, social structures and certain types of contexts associated with, or indexed by these ways of speaking (Eckert 2008). Language ideology is grounded in social practice (e.g. Woolard 1992, Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), i.e. the beliefs about language and society that we hold individually and collectively are based on interactions and relationships, on what knowledge about language we acquire through a multitude of semiotic processes and on what we, in turn, communicate about language.

There are two conclusions to be drawn from this perspective. Firstly, it is difficult – and in some cases impossible – to define *a* specific language ideology or to try and separate it from *other* language ideologies. What seems easier is to examine metalinguistic comments as manifestations of 'the ideological' (cf. Žižek) and, by extension, metalinguistic debates as manifestations of potentially conflicting ideologies. Secondly, it is paramount to look at metalinguistic comments and debates not as individual phenomena, but as interrelated expressions of a kaleidoscope of ideas about language. As such, they can be clustered together, synchronically or diachronically, as more or less coherent sets of beliefs, analysed as newly shaped convictions based on previous texts, or juxtaposed as conflicting views.

This theoretical approach is, of course, instructive in a methodological sense. The study of language ideologies is always based on an analysis of the tangible elements of metalinguistic discourse, and it needs to consider the "history of texts" (Blommaert 1999) in which these tokens are situated. Since Blommaert formulated his criticism of the lack of historicity in language ideological research, an increasing number of studies have taken the historical dimension and the embeddedness in socio-political and economic context of language ideologies into account (e.g. Makihara and Schieffelin 2007, Jourdan and Angeli 2014, Gal 2019). For the purpose of this paper, I want to concentrate on Watts' (2000, 2011) analytical framework, based on the concept of language myths, which I find particularly fertile in the context of the story of Babel. I will discuss his approach in the following section, before providing an introduction to the connection between nation building and language standardisation.

2.1 Language ideologies and myths

Drawing on Silverstein's (1979) definition of linguistic ideologies as sets of beliefs, Watts (2000: 30) specifies that "any language ideology can only be formed (1) on the basis of beliefs

about language, and attitudes towards language, which already have a long history, and (2) as a driving force behind a centrally significant social institution." This viewpoint limits the concept of language ideology in two ways. It implies that, while any language-related belief or attitude can be ideological, not every set of metalinguistic comments automatically constitutes a new language ideology: there must be a considerable historical dimension, i.e. the beliefs and attitudes must have had time to be embedded in a social group to form an ideology. Moreover, even a longstanding and well-established set of beliefs about language is not necessarily to be considered a language ideology, if it has not – at some point in history – promoted or sustained a "social institution". Taking the liberty to propose a rather open interpretation of this second point, I argue that a set of beliefs can be called an ideology if there is any form of *institutionalised power* associated with it, be it a governmental organisation in the narrowest sense, or an established social order in the most general sense. My reasoning behind this phrasing is that I believe the combination of these two factors, historicity and institutionalised power, to be the key to a phenomenon that makes language ideologies both so potent and elusive: the process of *normalisation*, described by Watts as well as Blommaert (1999: 10). As Watts (2000: 33) puts it, "the longer [a language ideology] exercises its hegemony, the more likely it will be that the community will accept its precepts as 'normal' [or] 'natural'". This acceptance of language ideologies as common sense will be crucial to my argument in Section 3.3.

Now, while language ideologies may become normalised through their continued dominance in metalinguistic discourse, the historicity and power required to assert this dominance (and to be regarded as ideologies in the first place, according to Watts) stems from their being historically embedded in a social group's discourse through language myths. These myths precede the ideologies and are thus essential to our understanding of the belief systems that are based on them. Watts (2000: 33) offers a fundamental methodological guideline:

> In order to trace the development of a language ideology, or any ideology for that matter, we need to locate the complex of myths that form the basis of the set of beliefs constituting that ideology.

Generally speaking, myths can be seen as "narratives that we need to believe in to make sense of the complex world in which we exist" (Watts 2011: 4). Myths are crucial to how people

imagine the social and cultural groups they belong to (or identify with), and to understanding how these groups are structured. Watts (2011: 21) puts it succinctly:

> As shared stories, [myths] tell part of the overall "story" of the sociocultural group. They help to reproduce and validate the group, and in this sense they fulfil a vital function in explaining, justifying and ratifying present behaviour by the narrated events of the past.

Since these ways of justifying a social order are common knowledge to a group, it can be expected that they are seldomly challenged. Indeed, Watts (ibid: 4) states that myths are an element of *doxa*, i.e. "beliefs that are taken for granted within a society". How, then, have they become such a fundamental and nearly unquestionable part of discourse? Based on Lippi-Green's (1997) investigation of the *standard language myth*, we may generalise that myths are continuously propagated by those who are empowered by them (consolidating their authority), and finally accepted and repeated by those who are disenfranchised by them.

This legitimisation practice becomes particularly interesting in scenarios, in which a myth has been transplanted to a community to whose "overall story" it is foreign, or even intruding – especially when that community is (or was) oppressed by the group that imported the myth. In other words, in colonial settings, such as the ones under investigation here, a myth might be implanted in local discourse and become part of common knowledge that does not "validate", as Watts says, but rather delegitimise the community. The introduction of foreign myths can thus constitute a trojan horse of sorts: it can make people more vulnerable to adopting or creating harmful ideologies. This may result, in the case of hostile myths against the group, in a type of linguistic self-devaluation that is often found in (post-)colonial communities' discourses about their own languages, be it native varieties or non-standard/ indigenised forms of the colonisers' language (Migge and Léglise 2007, Higgins 2015).

In this paper, three groups of myths will be relevant, all of which have been transplanted and adapted to discourses of (former) colonial subjects: the mythological foundation of language standardisation and prescriptivism, the story of Babel and its role in conceptualising multilingualism, and the racialist views of European imperialism. Not only are the first two groups closely connected to each other, but they are also both intertwined with the construction of nations as *imagined communities* (Anderson 1991). In the following sections, I will investigate this entanglement.

2.2 Nation building, standardisation and monolingualism

It is nearly impossible to talk about language standardisation without mentioning ideas about monolingualism, and vice versa. They are two sides of the same coin, linguistic homogeneity, and are often tied together through discourses of nation building and national unity. What is more, although the story of Babel is clearly about linguistic heterogenisation, it is latent in arguments about standardisation as well as narratives of nationhood. In this section, I will not yet be concerned with Babel. Rather, I want to examine nationalism, monolingualism and standardisation as separate yet interrelated phenomena, aiming to set the stage for the ensuing discussion.

A nation, put simply, is an "imagined political community" (Anderson 1991: 6), spatially and socially defined, and justified on the assumption of connections and commonalities among the members of that community. One key feature in the emergence of national consciousnesses in Europe was the (imagined) linguistic homogeneity within a territory, a cornerstone of nationalism that had been formed by early attempts at establishing supra-regional print-languages in the course of the advancement of 'print-capitalism' (cf. Anderson 1991: 37-46). Ideologically, this started a process of *erasure* (Irvine and Gal 2000) of regional variation, as well as the *iconization* (ibid.) of a selected few dialects or dialectal features as somehow superior, more intelligible and more embodying of the idealised characteristics of the community they were meant to represent. In other words, linguistic standardisation to some degree facilitated nationalism, before being, in turn, fuelled by the consequently emerging desire to establish a uniform national language. This promotion of a standard variety to ensure national unity culminated in the formation of what Watts (2000) calls the *ideology of prescriptivism*. The mythological basis of this ideology offers insights not only to the discourse of language standardisation, I would argue, but also to core ideas of nationalism and monolingualism. A brief overview of Watts' analysis is in order.

Exploring the historical foundation of linguistic prescriptivism in Britain, the author identifies a *language and ethnicity myth*, which places language at the heart of "the production of ethnicity" (Watts 2000: 34) and feeds directly into the *language and nationality myth*,[3] according to which a common language attests a nation's cultural homogeneity and

[3] While the language and nationality myth is, to some extent, a logical expansion of the language and ethnicity myth, it also needs to be pointed out that there is potential conflict between the two. While the uniformist

reflects the nation's character. With the forging of a political union of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland (completed by the Act of Union in 1707), indoctrination of a "strong national identity as 'British'" (ibid: 45), partly through language, became indispensable. At the same time, the British empire was competing against other colonial powers in North America, the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia and, eventually, the Pacific. This required a rhetoric of superlatives. With regard to language, the *myth of superiority* was invoked, i.e. the idea that there is a hierarchy among linguistic varieties, and that the English language (analogous to the nation) is better than its rivals – just as the standardised form is better suited to establish this dominance than the non-standard dialects. The superiority of English is supported by the *myth of the perfect language*, based on the notion that language can achieve "a state of perfection" (ibid: 35) and implying that English has done so – or *had* done so in the recent past (according to the *myth of the golden age*). As a logical consequence, the *myth of the undesirability of change* was and remains a driving force in prescriptivism and the promotion of standard English. As Jonathan Swift in his *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* in 1712 conceded, "it is better a Language should not be wholly perfect, than that it should be perpetually changing" (quoted in Watts 2000: 39).

There is an additional reason for the perception of linguistic change as change for the worse: as an expanding nation, Britain (along with other colonial powers) needed to ensure untroubled communication across space and time. Language change, especially in the new world, threatened to disrupt intelligibility in the long run, and thus national unity (Bailey 1992, see 3.2 below). In light of nations being conceptualised as inherently monolingual (cf. Bauman and Briggs 2000, Judt and Lacorne 2004), propagating the standard variety as superior, may thus be constructed (in imperialist but also in modern settings) as remedy against diversification and, eventually, impending multilingualism and/or political fragmentation of the state.

Of course, there is more than one flipside to this narrative. First of all, "[h]istorically, monolingualism is not the norm" (Judt and Lacorne 2004: 3), nor is the absence of social or regional variation within what is defined as a language. While attempts of linguistic homogenisation (be it in nationalist Europe or in former colonies) might ostensibly follow good intentions, such as "national unity, progress, and modernity", they always create inequality,

tendencies of nationalism would disapprove of minority languages, including those of ethnic minorities, the ethnicity myth would lead to the promotion of regional linguistic autonomy.

as they "assume the superiority of the chosen national language over others, and simultaneously erase multilingual realities in the discursive construction of the nation" (Rosa and Burdick 2017: 109). Additionally, processes of selecting a language over others as well as standardisation processes tend to spark disputes about what variety should be chosen, potentially how it should be codified, in what domains the chosen linguistic varieties should be promoted and used, and what exactly this promotion should look like – see, e.g., Jaffe (1999) on the revitalisation of Corsican, or Schieffelin and Charlier Doucet (1994) on the struggles over finding an orthography for Haitian Creole. Finally, the assumption of linguistic homogeneity serves as an excuse for discriminatory practices. Lippi-Green (1997: 64), for example, explains how attitudes towards accents function to exclude or "refuse to recognize" others: it seems acceptable to discriminate against people on the basis of how they speak, while "we are forbidden, by law and social custom, and perhaps by a prevailing sense of what is morally and ethically right, from using race, ethnicity, homeland or economics more directly." Similarly, knowledge of and access to the standard variety were used to assert dominance during the emergence of new forms of English in colonial times (cf. Mazzon 2000, Migge and Léglise 2007), even when imperialist, racialist thinking was on the decline.

What we must bear in mind is that – even though there are plenty of continuities from nationalist/imperialist Europe's concepts to colonial/postcolonial concepts of linguistic standardisation and the promotion of national languages – the relationship between nationality, monolingualism and standard language has been altered through its relocation to new contexts. Let us consider Geeraerts' (2008) model of *romantic* and *rationalist* perspectives on language and their role in standardisation debates. From the rationalist viewpoint, which focuses on the *communicative function* of language, the standard variety is portrayed as transcending geographical and social boundaries as well as being thematically universal, i.e. as a neutral language and thus as a "medium of participation and emancipation" (ibid: 47). In contrast, according to the romantic perspective, which emphasises the *expressive function* of language, the standard variety is an "instrument of oppression and (…) exclusion" (ibid: 53), exactly because of its geographical, social and thematic entrenchment, thus incapable of expressing a speaker's identity in the same way a regional variety can. These two antithetical perspectives are synthesised in two models that Geeraerts calls *nationalist* and *postmodern*. In the nationalist synthesis, the rationalist call for a universal medium of political participation is limited to the nation, and conversely, the romantic notion of the linguistic

variety as an expression of group membership is expanded to the national level (ibid: 58-59), whereas in the postmodern synthesis, the two functions can be assigned to different languages, recognising both the multilingual realities of today's nation states and the internationality of languages, and thus the complex "pluralization of identity" (ibid: 66).

The latter synthesis probably makes the most sense in postcolonial metalinguistic debates, where an external, dominant, and probably quite international language is competing with economically less viable, but covertly prestigious (Milroy and Milroy 2012) local languages. However, what we observe in some cases is quite different: affected by the essentialist ideology of monolingualism, postcolonial discourses frequently revolve around finding *one* language that unifies and represents the nation, be it a colonial or indigenous variety (cf. Errington 2008).

We may ask, then, what happens if we remove the model from the European context in which it was conceived and apply it to *extraterritorial* varieties of imperial languages, where an *endonormative* standard may emerge and even replace the *exonormative* one (cf. Mazzon 2000). Is this new standard seen as a medium of empowerment, more equalising than the externally imposed standard, and at the same time regarded as an expression of local identity? Or can an exonormative standard fulfil this role? As I will argue below, promoting a standard variety from outside reflects a political situation that cannot truly be considered *post*colonial (as there is no real decolonisation), such as in the case of Hawai'i. It may serve the communicative, but not the expressive purpose of language. In contrast, an endonormative standardised national language will, quite likely, be able to take on both functions. Yet, this nationalist synthesis is not a smooth one, I suggest, because it either does not contribute to the rationalist aspect, as the exonormative standard would have been sufficient to meet the need for a universally accessible medium of communication, or because the new standard is a similarly artificial choice for the expression of national identity as the exonormative standard would be.

To sum up, early standardisation and the conceptualisation of (imagined) communities as monolingual have contributed to the emergence of national consciousnesses and nationalism in Europe, and vice versa, new ideas about nationality and 'nation-ness' (Anderson 1991) have idealised monolingualism – thus solidifying the essentialist *one nation-one language ideology* –, as well as promoted language standardisation and the *ideology of prescriptivism*. As Judt and Lacorne (2004: 4) point out, "[t]he nineteenth century in Europe

marked a historical turning point in the construction of modern nationalism: one no longer said 'the nation exists because it has a language,' but rather 'the nation exists, therefore it must be given a language.'" I argue that this shift has affected language policy making in colonies and, consequently, postcolonial metalinguistic discourses on two levels: Firstly, as established cultural, political and/or linguistic communities were subjected and forcefully converted to multilingual colonial communities, it was seen necessary to promote some kind of uniformity by choosing one language over the others for administration, and later on, for national identity (albeit not necessarily the same language). The second step was the implementation of a standard form of this dominant language, to maximise administrative efficiency or national unity. In this way, the ideologies of standardisation and monolingualism complement and reinforce each other: on the one hand, a standard language is monolingualism *ad extremum*, and on the other hand, monolingualism is preserved by counteracting linguistic diversification through prescriptivism and the promotion of language standards. As I will demonstrate below, both the ideologies of standardisation and monolingualism have benefited from the cautionary tale of Babel.

3. The role of Babel in European nationalist and colonialist discourses

It is to be expected that language myths, and the linguistic ideologies that result from them, are transformed and re-interpreted when relocated to new sociopolitical, economic and linguistic realities. One of these myths is the story of Babel.

3.1 The story of Babel

"Since there has been no universal language in recorded history, mythologies have invented one and located it in a past, golden age" Bailey (1992: 93) writes. As discussed above, the glorification of such an age of universal monolingualism, and the perception of linguistic diversity as a misfortune or even punishment go hand in hand. The key to understanding this relationship is the religious story of Babel, one of the (Western) world's most influential canonical texts when it comes to explaining, interpreting and evaluating multi- and thereby monolingualism (cf. Bailey 1992, Bell 2011). Here is one common English version of the text:

> [1] Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. [2] As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. [3] They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. [4] Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." [5] But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. [6] The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. [7] Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." [8] So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. [9] That is why it was called Babel – because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (*Genesis 11*, New International Version)

The last verse is essentially a wordplay or, as Bell (2011: 541) points out, a "code-switch pun", as the Akkadian name *Babel* resembles the Hebrew word for 'confuse' (*balal*), and is thus "given a patently false etymology in the Hebrew *balal*." Another semantic detail that should be pointed out is that the Hebrew word *pws* for 'scatter' can also be translated in a less negative way as 'disperse' – and is, in Genesis 10, actually "used approvingly to describe [the] peoples 'spreading abroad' after the flood" (ibid: 540).[4]

Nevertheless, according to Bell (2011: 533), "[a] 'commonsense' proto-understanding" of the text is that the confusion of language is very much a "punishment and a curse for humankind." The legend of Babel has thus come to be perceived as both a "polemic against overweening human ambition", and a lament about a wrathful god who crushed this human ambition with the powerful tool of mutual incomprehension, "taking steps to mess them up so massively that they will never again be a challenge", as Bell (ibid.) puts it. This notion of multilingualism as some mystified obstacle to human success has had a long-lasting effect on metalinguistic discourse, and is reflected perfectly in an observation made in 1834 by American lexicographer and writer Noah Webster (quoted in Bailey 1992: 94): "The diversities

[4] It is interesting to note here that some newer translations, such as the Standard English Version (2001) and the Common English Bible (2011), in fact use the word 'disperse'. However, 'scatter' is found in the majority of English Bible translations, including the King James Bible form 1611 and the New International Version (1978) quoted in this paper as it is the "most widely used of any modern Bible version" (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

of language among men may be considered as a curse, and certainly one of the greatest evils that commerce, religion, and the social interests of men have to encounter."

There is, however, an alternative and more positive view: "one traditional Jewish interpretation" (Bell 2011: 548) does not see the building of the tower as an over-confident attempt at rebelling against God, but as a symbol of mankind's unity and their sedentariness. Consequently, the confusion of language was not meant to strike down their ambition, but rather to encourage their "spreading through the earth as God had intended" (ibid: 549). Heavenly designed multilingualism can thus be seen as a precautionary measure to create and maintain human diversity and dissemination. This view represents Geeraerts' (2008) *romantic* perspective on language, as it foregrounds the role of linguistic heterogeneity in the production and expression of different identities. Hence, this alternative interpretation of Babel prompts a more sceptical stance toward linguistic uniformity – unless maybe when it comes to homogeneity within one separate language group.

On the other hand, the more common interpretation of Babel as a curse and punishment appears intrinsically *rationalist* in its conception of linguistic diversification as detrimental to communality. The myth of a golden age of monolingualism (Bailey 1992), then, is in many ways an amplification of standard language myths (Watts 2000) – or, in fact, the latter a derivation of the former. Not only can we consider it a magnified version of the golden age of the perfect language myth, but it also takes the idea of language and ethnicity/ nationality to an extreme level: the original language did not merely unite peoples, it united humankind. Babel, in this rationalist interpretation, is thus a nightmarish spectre from a mythological past, a symbol of failure to maintain unity – which, ultimately, is invoked in the transformation that the rationalist perspective undergoes in the nationalist synthesis, to promote linguistic unity (through the selection of a language over others or the prescription of a standard variety) as a means of creating cohesion at least on some level: the nation.

Johann Gottfried Herder, in 1787, described this partial mimicry of human oneness through the production of national homogeneity: "As it was impossible for the entire human race to remain one herd, so it could not remain restricted to one language. There ensued the development of diverse national languages" (quoted in Bauman and Briggs 2000: 173). For this not to seem arbitrary, national identities needed to be imagined for these herds of people as evidence for their unity – a unity, which in a somewhat circular logic both justified the enforcement of national languages and at the same time was legitimised by them. For Herder,

national languages were, in a romantic fashion, linked to "the worldview and ways of thinking and feeling of a people" and played an "essential role in maintaining national identity and cohesion" (Bauman and Briggs 2000: 195), therefore ensuring, in a rather rationalist fashion, the stability of these worldviews and ways of thinking.

It is interesting to note that this Herderian idea of *one language – one nation* is also closely linked to the ideology of purism: not only does a nation state need to be monolingual, its language also has to be kept free from foreign influence, as "a viable polity can only be founded on a national language resistant to the penetration of foreign tongues" (ibid: 199). The desire for linguistic purity has its roots in a language's perceived antiquity and unwavering steadfastness in the past. As I will discuss below, these ideas have also been connected to the legendary emergence of the first separate languages in Babel.

3.2 Babel in British discourse

As one of the early promoters of English, Richard Verstegan in 1605 (quoted in Bailey 1992: 38) referred to the "confusion of Babel" when demonstrating the ancientness his language. Claiming that its linguistic predecessor, "Teutonic", must have emerged in the wake of God's intervention in Babel, he concludes that the language "cannot bee denied to bee one of the moste ancientest of the world". The basis for this claim was the observation that English had a simple morphology, which interestingly is a characteristic that is now often attributed to new languages, i.e. pidgins and creoles (cf. McWhorter 2001, 2005, 2011). What is more, in Verstegan's imagination, Adam had been more than likely to create monosyllabic words in the Garden of Eden, and as "the 'Teutonic' monosyllables were close to the primitive, prelapsarian lexicon ordained by divine providence, (…) these words were thus a testimony to the antiquity and excellence of English", as Bailey (1992: 39) explains. This particular view on the creation of the first language was closely connected to the increasing resentment of French and Latin (usually polysyllabic) borrowings that were seen as a "corruption" of the English language (cf. Bailey 1992: 39-41).

Nevertheless, at this early stage of the emancipation of English, the predominance of Latin and French as languages of education and politics was largely uncontested. The possibility of English becoming a European or even global lingua franca "was regarded as absurd" before 1600, as English was considered to be "confined to the British Isles" and

"virtually useless in traveling abroad" (ibid: 96). Again, this is a stereotype that we find in many discourses on pidgins and creoles. As the confidence in the English language grew in the 17th century, resulting in the establishment of spelling conventions and the replacement of Latin by English in academic writing, the language entered the competition for the future's world language, which, I argue, may also have changed the perception of multilingualism. With ever-growing imperialistic ambitions in the 18th century and the declared necessity to standardise English in order to have a stable means of communication across the increasingly demanding temporal and spatial challenges of corresponding within an expanding empire, English-speakers could now afford to present multilingualism as a nuisance and to demand, at least implicitly, a monolingual (i.e. English-speaking) world.

While both conceptions of Babel, (1) as the mythical origin of English and (2) as a curse or threat to monolingualism, have been around at least since the Renaissance (Bailey 1992: 94), the stress on linguistic homogeneity that came with imperial expansion certainly established the latter as the more dominant conception. Thus, when invoking the story of Babel, "most writers have dwelt on misfortune" (ibid.). This narrative permeates British as well as American discourse during the time of increased colonial activity in the Pacific, which is particularly important for the transplantation of Babel that this paper is concerned with. From Webster's notion of the evil nature of linguistic diversification in 1834 (quoted above), to Henry Sweet's warning in 1877 that within a hundred years from then "England, America, and Australia will be speaking mutually unintelligible languages, owing to their independent changes of pronunciation" (quoted in Bailey 1992: 114), to J. Hubert Jagger's claim in 1940 that "[t]he unfortunate incident that happened in Babylon some few millenia ago is one of the predisposing conditions leading to war" (quoted in Bailey 1992: 94): all of these comments echo the same fear of diversity. This "terror of being 'scattered'", according to Bailey (1992: 93), is "a key to understanding" the role of Babel in Western discourse.

The myth of a golden age of monolingualism, symbolised by Babel, was turned into a plan of action. Renaissance scholars endeavoured to either create a new artificial lingua franca, or to elevate an existing language to this status (cf. Bailey 1992). In the early 18th century, through the advent of linguistic standardisation and prescriptivism in Britain, "language came to be used as one of the most potent means by which social structures of power could be constructed and justified" (Watts 2000: 29), and Babel played an essential role in it. In my opinion, it is instructive to investigate the mechanics of invoking this powerful tale

in metalinguistic debates. So far, we have considered it a religious myth. Here I argue there is more to it.

3.3 Babel as a topos

Even though the story of Babel "constitutes [Jewish, Christian and/or Western] cultures' primary myth about multilingualism" (Bell 2011: 530), it is not a *language myth* in its essence. It is, first and foremost, a religious tale about the history of mankind, migration and the diversification of culture and language. It is only through interpretation that the religious tale is turned into the language myth that it is now commonly associated with: the myth of linguistic diversity as a curse, punishment or a divine precautionary measure to prevent humans from collaborating to achieve things outside their authority. This interpretation is intertwined with the myth of the golden age of monolingualism (cf. Bailey 1992), as well as the myth of the undesirability of language change (Watts 2000), since change goes hand in hand with variation and diversity.

More importantly, Babel has become a *topos*: it serves as a "conclusion rule" (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 35) to condemn linguistic diversity without offering concrete evidence of its alleged negative effects. *Topoi*, simply put, are statements that "connect the argument(s) with the conclusion, the claim" (ibid.) in a way that may be logically flawed but convincing nevertheless, due to the statement's prominence in discourse. A *topos*, as Grue (2009: 309) explains succinctly, "justifies a line of argument, but requires less justification itself because it is anchored in common attitudes or *doxa.*" As an expression of *doxa* (see 2.1), the concept resembles that of *myths* (Watts 2011), and I would in fact argue that other language myths might be interpreted as *topoi*, too.

Topoi are also linked to ideologies. Grue (2009: 312, original emphasis) defines *an* ideology "either as that under which many *topoi* fall, or the mental terrain in which different *topoi* may be located." Again, the relation to myths is noteworthy. One could argue, what distinguishes the two concepts is that the interplay of different myths leads to the formation of an ideology, while *topos* is a function that myths can acquire, once they (and the ideologies they inform) are socially established. This is, in my opinion, the transformation that Babel has undergone. Hence, distinguishing *myth* from *topos* can be quite revealing in an analysis of metalinguistic debates, particularly if we want to focus on the re-interpretation and re-

contextualisation of beliefs about language. In the case of Babel, it becomes obvious that while the myth can be re-negotiated considerably, the *topos* remains stable.

4. Analysis: From Europe to the Pacific

An investigation of Babel's relocation to the creole discourses of a (post-)colonial Pacific needs to start with the obvious: acknowledging the vast differences in context that have to be taken into account when shifting our gaze from the politically established, standardised national languages of Europe to the seemingly 'make-shift', ahistorical new languages of a world that was, up until the mid-20th century, largely considered exotic and savage. There are several layers of context that are crucial.

First of all, an important factor in the emergence of pidgins and creoles is linguistic imperialism. One key observation, when it comes to the spread of English, is that the standard variety has been instrumental in "creating a sense of inferiority, of establishing a new social scale based on the degree of knowledge of English and to the extent of adherence to its (exo-normative) standard" (Mazzon 2000: 74). Hence, new forms of English, such as koinés or indigenised varieties, have seen long (and in many cases still ongoing) struggles for recognition and legitimisation. This also applies to pidgins and creoles, since it was only in the course of the 20th century that they have started to be widely acknowledged as linguistic varieties (be it an English dialect or a language in its own right). The shift in the perception of these varieties is far from being complete today.

This attitudinal context has shaped, and also been influenced by, a more physical linguistic reality. Colonial language policies have created hierarchies of languages that were established through granting or limiting access to dominant varieties, and legally prescribing or banning certain varieties in geographical, social or political spaces (cf. Migge and Léglise 2007). This de facto segregation along linguistic lines may have influenced a more cognitive-perceptual layer. There is a potential tension between Western and non-Western basic concepts of language, communication and the function of language (cf. Keane 2007), and, from an ideological perspective, ideas about appropriateness and legitimacy of languages in a multilinguistic scenario are likely to have been reallocated or cemented. European concepts of language may have remained attached to European languages or been adapted (maybe mistranslated) to non-European ones, influenced by non-European language ideologies, and

creoles (if we consider them as new languages) most definitely have received an entirely new kaleidoscope of old notions and concepts about language.

Influential were racialist views of 17th to 19th century colonisers, explorers, missionaries and philologists. Krämer (2013: 100) summarises their "chain of argumentation":

> Blacks are said to be inferior to Whites in their constitution, physically as well as mentally and also on a moral level. Hence, they allegedly cannot build an advanced civilisation as the Europeans did, and logically, they cannot speak a language that is designed only for an advanced civilisation, nor do they want to do so.

In a semiotic process we could label as *fractal recursivity* (Irvine and Gal 2000), colonial discourse juxtaposed European 'high culture' to the assertedly 'low culture' of non-Europeans, and projected this opposition onto language. Since the marginalisation and dehumanisation of colonial subjects was a crucial aspect in the justification of colonial enterprises, particularly slavery, this imagined dichotomy of higher and lower human beings had to be kept alive, even when non-Europeans started to speak the languages of the 'masters'. Pidgins and creoles became easy targets for de-legitimisation and de-historisation. Early descriptions presented them as 'corruptions' and 'disruptions' rather than continuations of their lexifier (or any of their substrate languages). Krämer (2013: 100) explains:

> [P]hilology needed to show why the [creole and French] are different from each other so that kinship between Blacks and Whites could be denied according to common racial theory. (…) As creole speakers allegedly do not have a civilisation, nor a cultural history, neither has their language; and a language that has no history cannot claim to be directly linked and of equal value with French.

According to Krämer (2013: 101-104), this ideological separation of creoles from their lexifiers involved a focus on deviance and discontinuity. Instead of noting similarities, accounts were based on pointing out differences between creoles and European standard varieties (rather than the non-standard forms that were widely used in the colonies), especially where the creole seemed to lack or simplify a feature (cf. Farquharson 2007, and Mufwene 2008 for a detailed critique). In addition, creoles (and creole-speaking communities) were deprived of any historicity, tradition or genealogy. In the opinion of 19th century philologists, creolisation meant "grammatical destruction, linguistic ruins and decay", from which a language with no past was haphazardly rebuilt (Krämer 2013: 102).

While often associated with the slave-trade contexts of African, Caribbean and Indian Ocean creoles, these ideas have had a long-lasting effect on metalinguistic discourses on modern creoles worldwide.[5] Moreover, they have shaped the academic conceptualisation of creoles (DeGraff 2005, Krämer 2013). Ideas of *abrupt creolisation* (Thomason and Kaufmann 1988), *impoverished input/stimulus* (Bickerton 1984, Lightfoot 2006), and creoles' relative *simplicity* and *young age* compared to European languages (McWhorter 2005, 2011) still reflect this colonial view of creoles as 'languages that came out of nowhere'. DeGraff (2005) argues that modern linguistic ideas about the genesis and evolution of creoles perpetuate *myths* formed in colonial times – such as the notions that creoles are illegitimate offspring of their lexifier, 'contemporary *Ursprachen*', and created through broken transmission. These myths largely reflect the "slavery-related epistemological dualisms" (DeGraff 2005: 534) discussed above, and have led to the phenomenon of *Creole Exceptionalism* (DeGraff 2003, 2005, Krämer 2013).

Remarkably, these notions seem very close to describing the Babylonian confusion of tongues. The assumption that creoles are an exceptional type of languages is almost entirely based on their perceived morphosyntactic and phonological simplicity: the simpler they are, the more purely they reflect the primeval *language bioprogram* (Bickerton 1984) or the sign-of-youth *creole prototype* (McWhorter 2005, 2011). This kind of argumentation is almost identical to Verstegan's promotion of early 17th century English (see above). In both cases, simplicity indicates purity, in the sense of conforming to a universal model of an original language. Unlike Verstegan, however, creolists have found simplicity to attest novelty, rather than antiquity. Nevertheless, allusions to ancientness have been made. In a book, quite fittingly entitled *The Power of Babel*, McWhorter (2001: 301) compares creoles to "the first language", as they lack the more aged languages' ornamental features. He also argues that simple languages constitute the most recent additions to the world's languages, created through a process where existing languages "are crushed to powder but rise again as new ones" (ibid: 131). Even though McWhorter sets out to provide an alternative explanation for the development of human languages, it is striking how similar this violent analogy is to the divine wrath described in the Biblical story of Babel.

[5] Of course, pidgins and creoles are not only a product of recent European colonialism, but have always emerged in contexts of extreme language contact through trade or conquest (Holm 2000). In this sense, creoles (as a type of language) are probably older than the myth of Babel.

In what follows, I want to take a closer look at the historical contexts in which the story of Babel, as well as general colonial ideas about language were transferred to Hawai'i and Papua New Guinea. Section 4.3 will compare the two case studies and discuss similarities.

4.1 Babel and Hawai'i Creole

The political situation of Hawai'i has been described as "quasi-colonial" (Kent 1993: 3). After the Kingdom of Hawai'i had been overthrown by US soldiers and tradesmen in 1893, it was officially annexed as US territory in 1898, and eventually given statehood in 1959 – without being afforded the option of gaining independence (Tamura 1996, Coffman 2003). Hawai'i Creole today is spoken natively by about 700,000 people,[6] or around half the population of Hawai'i (Velupillai 2013). Unlike English and Hawaiian, HC is not an official language of Hawai'i, and it does not have their recognition as a lingua franca or indigenous language respectively. Even though there is a growing literature in HC, and the language has been (sporadically) used in public life in Hawai'i by poets, such as Joe Hadley (1974) and comedians (cf. Siegel 2008) since the 1970s – as a side effect of the Hawaiian Renaissance, one could argue – it was only in more recent years that the increasing popularity of HC facilitated its use in television advertisement (Hiramoto 2011), the marketplace and political discourse (Higgins 2015). However, in many aspects it remains stigmatised.

With the establishment of sugar plantations, beginning in 1835, and the drastic decrease of the Hawaiian population due to imported diseases, labourers from Portugal and China, and later on from Japan, Korea and the Philippines arrived in Hawai'i. In this multilingual environment, Hawai'i Pidgin English emerged as a "rather unstable and highly variable" lingua franca (Sato 1991: 648) at the end of the 19th century (Reinecke 1969, Sato 1991). Nativized and thus turned into a creole in the early 20th century, *Pidgin*, as locals refer to it, fully stabilised in the 1930s (Romaine 1999). Since its early days, HC has been marginalised and dismissed as "broken English" (Siegel 2008) and therefore unfit for many sectors of public life (cf. Da Pidgin Coup 1999, Romaine 1999, Sato 1991, Tamura 1996). The fact that English-speaking schools had been set up throughout the islands as early as the 1850s (earlier even for the Hawaiian royal family) ensured that Pidgin had a strong competitor for the role of lingua franca from its very beginning. However, since teachers were often non-native speakers

[6] of which some 100,000 speakers live on the US mainland

of English, and white English-speaking children went to separate schools and did not serve as linguistic role models, the pidgin nevertheless found its way into classrooms, which played an important role in its stabilisation and creolisation (Sato 1991, Velupillai 2013).

Schools also played a decisive role in the stigmatisation of HC. In an early investigation of attitudes towards the language, Cochran (1953: 18) discussed the effort of schools and parents to solve the "speech problem of Hawaii" and to "correct" (ibid: 16) what was seen as children's low performance at school owing to the use of pidgin. This effort resulted in certain schools only admitting students "on the basis of their ability to speak and use the English language" (ibid: 17). These English Standard schools, introduced in 1924 (Higgins 2010), effectively separated white American children from creole speakers of mixed descent and "institutionaliz[ed] what was essentially racial discrimination along linguistic lines" (Romaine 1999: 289).

In 1932, the *Hawaii Educational Review* published an article by Arthur L. Dean on *Improving Education in the Public School System of Hawaii*:

> (1) Except for the expression of the most primitive ideas, a large part of our population is inarticulate. Such language as its members have is mongrel, it follows no recognized usage in pronunciation or structure. The schools must remedy this disgraceful condition. The teaching of correct English is one of our biggest jobs. (Arthur L. Dean 1932: 65, quoted in Cochran 1953: 18)

The reflection of colonialist ideas about the inferiority of non-European offspring of European languages is blatant. Yet, it only became more extreme in the 1940s, when war-induced nationalism started to dominate the metalinguistic debates of Hawai'i. As Cochran (1953: 22-23) explicates, "[t]he onset of the war created the necessity for everyone to be as American-like as possible, and such comments as 'An American is one who thinks, acts, and speaks American,' and 'Be American, speak American' were commonly heard." In this spirit, schools started to launch "'Speak American' essay contests" (ibid: 23). This encouraged an association of the English language not only with patriotism and nationalist ideals, but also with a rather general notion of quality and conformity, as exemplified by the following excerpt from a winning essay, published in the *Hawaii Educational Review*:

(2) I give my head, and my heart to God and my country, one country, one language, and one flag. (…) [I]f we girls speak good English ourselves and show disapproval of pidgin English we will be exerting social pressure on the boys. I'm sure that this pressure will overcome the stupid pressure of the unruly boys who insist that speakers of good English are sissies. (F.O. 1943: 284, quoted in Cochran 1953: 23)

This seems very much in line with Richard Trench's famous quote from 1855: "And the love of our language, what is it in fact but the love of our country expressing itself in one particular direction?" (quoted in Crowley 1996: 184). It also reflects what Judt and Lacorne (2004: 13) call "the American paradox: a multilingual society, relatively tolerant of foreign languages, but which assures – thanks to its conception of the American dream, its education system, and its omnipresent and largely monolingual media – the predominance of English."

The closer Hawai'i approached statehood, the more this predominance was asserted, and the more HC came under attack. In an unpublished *Report on the Speech Situation in Hawaii*, W. Norwood Brigance wrote in 1947:

(3) If the standard speech of the Islands becomes pidgin English, Hawaii will never fully become a cultural part of the United States. Politically it may become the forty-ninth state, but its people will not be accepted as Americans by citizens in other parts of the United States. (Brigance 1947: 4, quoted in Cochran 1953: 31)

As Cochran points out, this went beyond being a linguistic problem – it was an issue of ethnicity as well. In letters to the editor, published in the *Hawaii Star-Bulletin* in 1952, the citizens of Hawaii were accused of lacking "Americanization", speaking "such a poor excuse for English", and not being able to "speak and think in the American language". The inherent racism in these statements was repeated later in the same year, in B.H.'s letter to the *Star-Bulletin*:

(4) 'Pidgin,' German, French, Spanish, Korean, Japanese, Tagalog, Portuguese, Hungarian, et al are not the official and accepted languages of the USA. English is. (B.H., *HSB* 10.11.1952)

The author not only invents an official language for the USA, but also very conveniently omits the language that historically has the strongest claim to legitimacy on the islands: Hawaiian. More importantly, although Babel is not explicitly mentioned, the long list of languages alludes to the Babylonian confusion and rejects linguistic diversity as undesirable and utterly un-

American. This ideological homogenisation of America, this attempt at 'reversing Babel', as we could call it, takes surprising forms. In 1958, shortly before Hawaii became the 50th state of America, B.W. (letter to the editor, *HSB* 09.12.1958) wrote that US politicians would "be shocked at the total ignorance of the Queen's English" in certain parts of Hawai'i. Bringing up the Queen may seem an odd choice, but the reference has a clear purpose: to underpin the historicity and legitimacy of English in mainland USA, derived through the country's European cultural heritage – and to juxtapose it to the barbarisation that has befallen English in Hawai'i. The author is one of many to instrumentalise the bad reputation of Pidgin to argue against the islands' impending statehood. Such comments, evoking the Herderian *one language-one nation* idea and the horror vision of Babel – an expression of fear not only of multilingualism, but diversity in general –, demonise any form of deviance from an imagined national identity.

This demonisation targets the actual process of linguistic diversification more than it targets 'established' languages. In other words, it is not a post-Babylonian world that seems to be the thorn in people's sides. As Herder pointed out, the separation of humanity into nations was inevitable. The real enemy is the incident of Babel itself: diversification in action. This is evident in an editorial of the *HSB*, three years after Hawai'i became a state, entitled *Why Not Just Grunt?*:

> (5) Pidgin is a desecration of the greatest tongue on earth, and an abomination in the sight of the Lord. (…) Mr Crooker [assistant superintendent at the Department of Education] is talking about young Americans who can speak neither Japanese – nor Chinese, nor Hawaiian, as the case may be – nor English. They speak only pidgin, which is not a language at all. Pidgin is merely a form of communication. The lower animals can communicate. (…) If a student can neither read nor write a language – again, pidgin is not a language – he stands practically no chance of gaining an education. (Editorial, *HSB*, 13.02.1962)

While the author seems to accept the multilingual reality of Hawai'i, acknowledging that all languages will eventually lead to the same outcome, namely education, pidgin is disqualified as a language and put on a level with animalic forms of communication. This may be more revealing of the traces of racialist ideologies in creole discourses than of the Babel myth's presence. However, the editorial explicitly mentions that the older inhabitants of Hawai'i are well capable of using English, Hawaiian or any of their heritage languages. That a part of the population is only able to speak pidgin is presented as a new development that compromises

mutual intelligibility, education and therefore the continuation of society in its current form. It is in this logic, I argue, that the myth of Babel lingers.

There is at least one other person who made this connection. A reader with the pseudonym No Savvy picked up on the editorial's reference to "the Lord", asking:

> (6) Did not the Lord confound the original one language? How would you interpret Genesis 11:7? Maybe the Lord does condone pidgin. (HSB, 23.02.1962)

The apparently positive interpretation of God's intentions in Babel, expressed in this letter to the editor, was followed by an editor's note, printed right below No Savvy's comment:

> (7) Genesis 11:7 – 'Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' Sure sounds like pidgin. But the Lord wasn't condoning it. He was scattering the people with it.

Here, the more common Western understanding of the Babylonian confusion as a curse is employed to undermine the legitimacy of Pidgin. The use of the word *scattering* (rather than *dispersing*) draws on this dominant interpretation and makes unmistakably clear that the last word in the debate has been spoken. It almost reads like a punchline: the argument of No Savvy stands refuted, as the conclusion rule has been invoked.

There are three things that are of interest here. First, Babel is used as a *topos* not only in the editor's note, but also by No Savvy, who referred to Genesis 11 in the first place and tried to legitimise the existence of Pidgin as an act of God. This suggests that the functionality of Babel as a conclusion rule remains stable, even when the interpretation is inverted. Second, in both instances the *topos* is somewhat off its primary topic, since the matter of the debate is not a lamenting of multilingualism (the editorial does not challenge the linguistic diversity of Hawai'i), but of the emergence of a non-language. Can we speak of linguistic diversification if the variety in question is technically a merging of languages, anyway? And if this variety is not recognised as language? Third, the way in which the conclusion in the editor's note is phrased implies that it was pidgins and creoles – i.e. the mixing of languages, not multilingualism – that 'scattered' the people. All these observations suggest that the *topos* of Babel is quite adaptable to new contexts and discourses. Whereas the original myth behind it, the *myth of multilingualism as a curse*, may help to perpetuate and spread the *topos*, its function has developed a life of its own, accepting meanings that are more relevant in contexts outside the reality in which it was conceived.

4.2 Babel and Tok Pisin

The European colonisation of Papua New Guinea was relatively slow and ensued in three phases, from the islands in the 1870s, to the mainland coast after 1900 and the highlands following the end of the Second World War (Mühlhäusler, Dutton and Romaine 2003). The sheer cultural and linguistic diversity has fascinated missionaries, anthropologists and linguists alike. There are still around 750 (Romaine 1992) to 840 (Ethnologue 2019) languages spoken on PNG today, albeit "[t]he very concept of discrete languages is probably a European cultural artefact", as Romaine (1992: 23) points out.

The most wide-spread language is Tok Pisin, spoken by three to five million people (Smith and Siegel 2013) of a total population of eight million. As a product of colonisation, Tok Pisin's history is closely intertwined with the colonial history of PNG. In the 19th century, islanders were recruited to work on ships or "were taken, often by deception or force, to work on sugar plantations in Samoa and Australia" (Turner 2001: XXXV-XXXVI). Bismarck Archipelago inhabitants, who were recruited to work on German plantations on Samoa from about 1879 onwards, brought back some knowledge of pidgin English (early Melanesian Pidgin) to Papua New Guinea (Smith and Siegel 2013). The pidgin spread as a lingua franca due to the increased language contact brought about by the newly established plantations in German New Guinea (the north of today's Papua New Guinea).

After the Germans had claimed the north, and the British the south of New Guinea in November 1984, the colonies was progressively taken over by the Australians: they were handed over the British part in 1906 and captured German New Guinea in 1914 (Turner 2001). When the First World War ended, the south was turned into the Australian Territory of Papua, while New Guinea in the north was administered by Australia as a Trust Territory. One linguistic consequence was that English became enforced quite strictly in the south, as opposed to the north, where Tok Pisin spread more freely. German missionaries, who were allowed to remain in New Guinea, kept using and codifying Tok Pisin, but their standardisation efforts were interrupted by the Second World War.

With the war, Tok Pisin's status developed from that of a "language of workers and servants" to that of a "medium of liberation and self-assertion" (Mühlhäusler et al. 2003: 7). After 1945, it was used in newspapers published by the government and became the language of local governments and a medium of emancipation. At the same time, to show their appreciation of Papua New Guinean support during the war, Australia invested in the Territory

and, amongst other things, tried to achieve “universal primary education in the English language" (Turner 2001: XL). In 1953, a Visiting Mission of the United Nations urged to abolish Tok Pisin in New Guinea, because it was seen as a language of colonial oppression. Tok Pisin newspapers were given up, but the church continued to promote the language, which eventually resulted in publications such as Father Mihalic’s *Grammar and Dictionary of Neo-Melanesian* in 1957, or the *Nupela Testamen* in 1969. Both, dictionary and New Testament are still seen as the models of Tok Pisin orthography today.

While the 1960s may have been geared towards a “smooth and peaceful transition to self-government in 1973 and complete independence in 1975”, as Turner (2001: XLI) states, independence came unexpectedly early and left many colonial policies insufficiently addressed. This becomes apparent if we look at language policy: Tok Pisin has been used in parliamentary debates since before 1975, yet its official status remains unclear (Mühlhäusler et al. 2003, Siegel 2008) and the support for the lingua franca in the education system (along with every other non-English language) has been unstable ever since (Malone and Paraide 2011).

Fifteen years after independence, Lynch (1990: 388) identified four influential attitudes in metalinguistic debates on Tok Pisin that had “their roots in the colonial era”. Firstly, the creole was seen as “inferior” to English, based on the colonialist belief in the “inherent superiority of European people, culture, technology, forms of government, etc.” (ibid.). This meant that Tok Pisin was “inadequate for discussing *any* technological or scientific subject” (ibid: 389, original emphasis). Secondly, people thought that Tok Pisin was “not a proper language”, and thirdly, that it was “broken English”, both of which are prejudices against creole languages that already have been discussed sufficiently here. Lynch’s fourth point, however, may shed new light on our discussion – mostly because, unlike the other three, is seems to be an attitude that has mostly disappeared from 21st century discourse in PNG: the perception of the creole as “a foreign language” (ibid: 390). This sentiment reflects one of the pre-independence representations of Tok Pisin as a relic of colonisation, dating back not only to the above-mentioned report by United Nations officials in the 1950s, but also to (mostly) Papuan secessionist politicians in the early 1970s. As Lynch (ibid.) summarised the argument, “because it is ‘imported’, [Tok Pisin] should not be considered as a national language” of PNG.

In fact, while linguists, journalists and activists were arguing that the country needs one unifying national language, this very idea was controversial, given the multilingual reality of PNG. When Tom Dutton, newly appointed Professor of Language at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby, "called on the Government to make Pidgin the national language" and suggested that Tok Pisin "replace English as the language used in education" (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courrier*, 14.05.1976), newspaper editors reacted sceptical, not to the promotion of Tok Pisin, but to the concept of a national language:

> (8) What Professor Dutton advocates is the imposition of a language, a tyranny of words if you like, upon many people who won't have a bar of it. (…) In PNG the idea of a national language is a utopian dream. (PNGPC, 17.05.1976)

A letter to the editor offered an interesting perspective on whether is possible – or reasonable – for the country to have a national language. The author pointed out that "[i]f we take one of the 700 [local] languages, then we are putting down the other 699 language groups. To prevent this, let's use Pidgin, since it is not one of the 700 languages" (PNGPC, 16.06.1976). According to this argumentation, a language that is perceived as foreign is better suited than local languages to be imposed as a national language, precisely because it has no ownership. This appears to be a nationalist outlook on language completely devoid of romanticism, of Herder's linguistic division of people into nations, but purely rationalist instead.

In a similarly rationalist manner, the *PNGPC* (01.03.1976) ran a story about the "disintegration of the pidgin language", which was "caused by the borrowing of English words to cover, in Pidgin, new concepts and situations." The article reported on a study by linguist Stephen Wurm, who is quoted to have said that the "disintegration process has already assumed fairly serious proportions in a variety of pidgin spoken in the big urban centres", as a result of which "[s]erious misunderstandings can arise between urban dwellers and rural dwellers." The scenario of growing unintelligibility and disconnectedness that was invoked in this article is an obvious allusion to the story of Babel. The title "Pidgin is losing its meaning" does not only stoke fear, but is also intentionally ambiguous in that the suggested loss of meaning both refers to the obscurity of urban Tok Pisin in rural areas, and to the role of Tok Pisin as a national language: to serve as a lingua franca, Pidgin must remain intelligible to everyone. A letter to the editor (entitled "Keep Pidgin pure") even speculated:

(9) The Government runs the risk that its laws may be disobeyed because the Anglicised Pidgin of Parliament is misunderstood. (*PNGPC*, 24.03.1976)

While this is a strong expression of discomfort with language change, almost seeming to suggest that linguistic diversification will cause society's descent into anarchy, the underlying scepticism of new urban varieties of Tok Pisin as detrimental to society can be found in numerous other texts. This scepticism is informed not least by linguists' views of rural varieties as more traditional and authentic (cf. Britain 2017), a belief that itself has long been formed as a result of the *language and ethnicity myth* and the *myth of the undesirability of change*. Such a perspective appears to be especially applicable to PNG, where urban areas are a markedly modern phenomenon, and thus the ideology of sedentarism (Britain 2016) supports the critical stance against cities as inauthentic, chaotic and linguistically confused.

Running another article about Wurm, the *PNGPC* (17.05.1976) reported on his proposition of a "language academy" to standardise Tok Pisin. The article emphasised that urban Tok Pisin was becoming "half English, half Pidgin – with the result that it was no language at all and could not be understood even by people in rural areas". Obviously, by denying this urban variety its languagehood, the newspaper repeats the very same ideas about mixed languages that speakers of Tok Pisin had been struggling to overcome. This disdain for contact-induced change, once nurtured in nationalist Europe and applied to the mixing of English with other languages, became a major element in metalinguistic debates of colonial PNG, and has eventually been detached from the language of the colonisers and connected to the very *bastard language* (see below) born from it. Each step on the way was fuelled by the fear of linguistic diversity, the nationalist nightmare. Of course, this fear seems odd in PNG, a country of 800 different languages, but its implementation was facilitated by – and arguably was only possible through – the simultaneous implementation of nationalist ideas and discourses.

In an interview in Port Moresby in 2014, novelist and lecturer B.M. told me about the urgent need to standardise Tok Pisin, and explained why this issue was of such great importance to him:

(10) We cannot allow ourselves to be – what did the Bible say? – the country of Babel or whatever they call it, where everyone speaks his own version of Tok Pisin.

He clearly uses Babel as a *topos*, but what is interesting is that he relates Babel to the diversification of Tok Pisin – not to the highly multilingual reality that exists outside of the creole. Again, we might deem this odd. However, it is not multilingualism *per se* that is perceived as a curse in PNG's metalinguistic discourse. Multilingualism has been described as dividing the nation in colonial times (e.g. by Australian Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, quoted in the Sidney Morning Herald, 22.07.1953), but the region had been highly multilingual for thousands of years before the first arrival of European colonisers, and it is common for Papua New Guineans to speak several languages (Smith 2002). What colonialism changed is the desire for a sense of unity amongst these diverse cultural and linguistic groups, and therefore a common ground in a widespread, relatively neutral language (amongst other instruments that forge unity, such as a common parliament and media). Diversification thus is not only a matter of philological interest; it is a threat to national cohesion. B.M. went on to state:

(11) There are more Tok Pisin speakers in this country (…) than any other language, even English. (…) Let's write books, stories for that readership. Otherwise we are failing our people.

(12) Hopefully we get some standardisation in place, so that way we monitor, if you wish, the development of our language.

Again, the function of Tok Pisin as a national language is rationalised quantitatively – it is the most widespread variety in PNG. However, a romantic dimension is added in stating that 'failing' to create a literature in this language (11) would mean failing the people (as a whole). Making sure that the language retains a certain degree of homogeneity is part of creating a sense of nation-ness.

This rationalist-cum-romantic (i.e. nationalist) perspective is complemented by a more purely romantic, sometimes more conservative narrative in public discourse. Papua New Guinean poet and scientist M.D. pointed out to me in an interview in 2014:

(13) It feels better to people to be able to speak Tok Pisin [rather than English]. There's a better sense of ownership of that language, because we're creating it as we go along.

These ideas of ownership and of creating the language along the way, two arguments often heard in contemporary metalinguistic discourse in PNG, demonstrate a considerable

awareness of the link between Tok Pisin and Papua New Guinean identity. It is a link that has nothing to do with the expediency and simplicity of Tok Pisin advocated in colonial discourse, or the functionality as lingua franca of a nationalist discourse. From the romantic perspective, languages "express an identity, and they do so because they embody a particular conception of the world, a world view or *Weltanschauung* in the sense of Herder" (Geeraerts 2008: 54). As PNG's interconnectedness with the world grew, so one could argue, Tok Pisin grew with it. Change, therefore, is not seen as intrinsically bad. However, even from this romantic perspective, contact-induced language change is stigmatised. The same person, M.D., wrote in an online blog comment on *PNG Attitude* in 2013:

(14) We continue to bastardise both English and Tok Pisin in our search for more words to fit into our modern Tok Pisin."

Note that it is no longer just the colonial language that becomes bastardised through contact. Instead, Tok Pisin can be corrupted through borrowing from the English language, too. Purism, just like linguistic nationalism, entered the metalinguistic discourse of Papua New Guinea via English, and was re-appropriated for Tok Pisin. Both stem from a deeply rooted post-Babylonian distrust of linguistic change and diversification, and consequently of multilingualism and language contact.

4.3 Discussion

Over most of their lifespan, both HC and Tok Pisin were considered bad English rather than languages in their own right. The development of these varieties was regarded as linguistic change for the worse, the resulting new 'English' varieties being less intelligible and thus less functional (at least to communicate with English speakers outside Hawai'i and PNG). The urge to keep the language homogenous translated differently to Hawai'i, where multilingualism was mainly introduced by immigrant plantation workers and English dominance was established soon after the emergence of Hawai'i Pidgin, compared to PNG, where English did not spread as far and multilingualism had always been the norm.

HC has a creole continuum with an acrolect extending almost seamlessly to Hawai'i English (Drager 2012), making it difficult sometimes to determine where the creole ends and English starts. Because criticism is often just directed at 'how people in Hawai'i talk', everything non-standard becomes stigmatised in an attempt to subjugate all English-based

Hawaiian varieties to an exonormative American English standard. HC as a national language was always out of the question. Tok Pisin, on the other hand, has never had the same competition with English, as English-speakers are much fewer in PNG, nor has it been decreolised to the same extent, which facilitated its recognition as a language in its own right and, eventually, the rise of an endonormative standard (i.e. the language of the Tok Pisin Bible) that came to be promoted as PNG's national language. The *topos* of Babel has thus been adapted to very different environments: on the one hand, to argue about the interpretation of HC as a (god-made) deviation from the exonormative standard (see examples 6 and 7), and on the other hand, to rationalise the fear of Tok Pisin diversifying and creating frictions in the endonormative standard itself.

Percy Chatterton, missionary, politician and columnist, wrote: "I am beginning to detest the word 'unity'. Not because I don't believe in unity. I do. But most of those who use the word in Papua New Guinea equate it with 'uniformity'" (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 1973). In other words, uniformity is promoted as a means to achieve unity, and it is exactly this desire for unity through uniformity that is symbolised by the mythical pre-Babylonian golden age of monolingualism. As we have seen, Babel might not always be explicitly mentioned in a text, but "*[t]opoi* … are tied more strongly to *concepts* than to *words*" (Grue 2009: 309, original emphasis) and hence "are not always expressed explicitly" (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 35). What comes up frequently in metalinguistic discourses on HC and Tok Pisin are themes associated with the *topos* of Babel, such as the idea of national languages, of linguistic change as a curse, or of "corrupted language" – a widespread rhetorical element in pidgin and creole contexts. Often, people have turned the idea around, arguing that outsiders (e.g. McElhanon 1975: 49) or modernisation (see example 14) corrupt the creole. However, even in such scenarios where the tables are turned, the basic conclusion of the *topos* remains the same: language diversity and diversification are bad.

This is not to say that the respective communities of speakers do not have actual reasons to believe that their linguistic differentness is disadvantageous. The myth of multilingualism as a curse may misrepresent the community's experienced reality, but often the colonisers' ideology of monolingualism, long ago normalised through nationalist discourses both in PNG and Hawai'i, has had some real effects on creole speakers. In both scenarios, the creole was banned from classrooms. In both places, interviewees reported how they were ridiculed or even physically punished for speaking it. In addition, just like English

once in Britain (cf. Bailey 1992), both creoles have their value on the islands, but are seen as useless in an international context. This has led to a striking marginalisation of the languages in professional contexts, given the English dominance in PNG's and Hawai'i's education systems and international orientation of their economies. None of these actual consequences of existing in a 'Country of Babel' are intrinsic characteristics of the creoles, of course. Rather, these consequences are physical, social, political and economic manifestations of discursive constructions, i.e. language ideologies, built on the Western world's arguably most influential linguistic myth: that the diversification of language leads to chaos, failure, alienation and misery.

5. Conclusion

What is at stake in debates about national languages goes beyond the purely linguistic aspect: what is debated are competing visions of nations. Analysing language ideological discourse can help us understand these visions. As a theoretical concept, with methodological implications (e.g. understanding ideology as a product of myths and beliefs), Language Ideology allows us to gain alternative perspectives to everything they are entangled in. Tradition and modernity, multilingualism and nationalism, pre-colonial and colonial heritage – all these oppositions have been the backdrop of metalinguistic debates on creoles over the past decades and continue to affect the perception of languages in various ways.

The two case studies discussed here pose very different examples of how people perpetuate ideas about pidgins and creoles that originated in a colonial, Western-dominated discourse. The image of Babel and the confounding of languages has been interpreted and instrumentalised in different ways in metalinguistic comments. Interestingly, in both cases the story of Babel has been used to support the use of the creole. However, the perspectives on the myth assumed by the proponents of the creole as a legitimate code of in-group communication is very different in the two cases. In example 6 in the Hawaiian discourse, the confusion of tongues is simply seen as God's doing – not as punishment –, thus legitimising the creole. In example 10 from PNG, on the other hand, even the slightest evidence of fragmentation of one language into several is seen as a threat to unity and thus the people, which *also* legitimises the current form of the creole.

To sum up, while Tok Pisin is valued for its functionality both as a political means of creating national identity and in community-wide communication, these roles are attributed to Hawaiian and English respectively in Hawai'i, where the former is the traditional language of identification and the latter a lingua franca not only within the 50th state of America but globally. In both cases, the creole expresses a modern form of local identity. However, this local identity qua creole is evaluated differently in regard to the 'problem' of monolingualism: Whereas HC and the sociocultural group it represents just stand for yet another scattering of the children of men across the face of the earth, Tok Pisin seems to be an effective remedy and prophylaxis against 'the Country of Babel' – as long as it remains uniform.

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