

The Kittitian *Other* in the Pacific: Edward Young, Extra-Caribbean Mobility, and Pitcairn Island

Joshua Nash
University of New England

My title is an allusion to Patricia Mohammed's (2009) paper "The Asian *Other* in the Caribbean" in the Caribbean studies journal *Small Axe*. Where Mohammed deals with an othering and migration *into* the Caribbean, which has altered the macro cultural landscape of micro Indianised locales specifically in Trinidad, my take deals with the smallest possible micro migration—a single individual—*out* of the Caribbean—specifically from the island of St Kitts—to the South Pacific—specifically Pitcairn Island—through England and Polynesia. The Caribbean cultural remnants I consider are wholly historical and linguistic. My story is both factual and speculative. In this essay I consider to what extent Caribbean-originated *Bounty* midshipman Edward Young's legacy remains in the Pitcairn Island language, Pitcairn. My angle should be relevant to linguists, island studies scholars, and Pacific scholars alike.

Concerning islands come questions of language. Who made the languages, from where have they arisen, and for what purpose do they remain? Within island spaces, among the geographical bounds of insularities, between sordid pasts and germane presents, live legacies often not apparent to cursory glances. They are places of distancing, locations of the primitive, sites of and for creolization. Grammar can be elusory, lexis easier to catch. Here I dwell primarily on words more than syntax, individuals over groups, the Pacific inculcating the Caribbean. The language of focus may be creole-inspired, but despite what many have written, it is certainly not prototypically, historically, or technically a creole. Islands can perpetuate falsehoods.

The famed tale of the *Bounty* is linked to the Caribbean for two reasons. First, its bounteous task was to transport breadfruit from Tahiti to the Antilles to feed those working on plantations. Second, the hero of our story, Edward Young, was of mixed blood. Father most likely Mr George Young, eventually Sir George Young from Britain, mother from St Kitts:

If, as we believe, Young was the illegitimate son of the man who eventually became Admiral Sir George Young ... , we are inclined to think that his "dark complexion" must have come from his unidentified mother who was probably a mulatto (Baker and Mühlhäusler 2013: 181).

For all intents a British man, on Pitcairn Island his Caribbean heritage came to bear. The linguistic remains have recently been resuscitated in discussions about lexis (Baker and Mühlhäusler 2013) and spatial orientation (Nash 2016), despite linguists' long-standing conjecture that Pitcairn was formed by only two languages in contact.¹ Edward, Ed, Ned, Nedjun, Mr Young, then, is our Caribbean exponent on faraway Pitcairn Island, a lone language and cultural soldier, the island's first school teacher, and the main linguistic socializer who spent much time with the kids. He takes the post as story-teller extraordinaire whose rhetorical

¹ It is hardly necessary to provide a source for this position. Until recently, the belief the Pitcairn Island language was a creole comprising mainly English lexicon and grammar with some Polynesian lexical influence was widespread; that is, there were only two languages in contact. My argument pushes for a greater acknowledgment of Young's linguistic Caribbean influence, vindicating a more honest appraisal of the history of the resultant language and social makeup.

benefaction can be witnessed in more than several St Kitts—Kittitian—words in the Pitcairn language. These words, which are not attested elsewhere in the Pacific like *mawga* (thin), *nasey* (nasty), and *bang* ('to hit' as a punishment), must have come from the Caribbean through him. Is it possible one man can spawn a Caribbean diaspora, one which continues in and as the linguistic? As Mühlhäusler and Nash (2012: 102) narrate about Young's worded legacy, "[a]bout 50 words of St Kitts (SKN) origin can be traced to a single mutineer." Moreover, there exists the possibility that several of Pitcairn's creole(like) characteristics and spatial means may be traceable to our same Edward Young of St Kitts in the Leeward Islands. If this venture were true, the Pitcairn Island (Pacific) case of language transmission might demonstrate a significant creole (Caribbean) influence. Scholars such as Hancock, and those who have less knowledge of possible Caribbean linguistic influence than Hancock, remain to be convinced, and that these data ought to be treated with caution. My fashioning is a step towards clearing up this wariness.

***Bounty* and Young**

The Mutiny on the *Bounty* has reached mythical status in Pacific history. It is Young's St Kitts–Caribbean connection which interests us, and some are worth recalling for a Pacific focused audience. The mutiny took place on 28 April 1789. *Bounty*, which left British shores in Portsmouth on 23 December 1787, had as a task to collect breadfruit plants from Tahiti, a commodity Captain James Cook discovered during his visit to the South Seas in 1774. The breadfruit were to be transported to Jamaica, where they would make cheap and adequate provisions for slaves working on the British Empire's burgeoning sugar plantations. These breadfruit, however, never made it beyond the Pacific.

The key figures concerning any discussion of the mutiny are Captain William Bligh and Midshipman Fletcher Christian, and with the present emphasis, Midshipman Young. *Bounty* suffered serious delays on the journey and it was only after 10 months and 27,000 miles at sea that she arrived at Tahiti. This apparent Pacific Shangri-La promised exotic victuals, good weather, leisure, and worldly pleasures with the dark skinned Tahitian women. They would have appeared as goddesses of the Pacific to the all-male crew of *Bounty*. Initially, Bligh allowed his crewmen some latitude. However, being a man of honour, with his eyes focused strongly on furthering his naval career and anticipating a promotion if he returned to England after completing a successful voyage, Bligh was not going to let his furtherance be sabotaged by the lack of disciplined behaviour of his crew. This led to heated arguments between Bligh and Christian.

With discontent and differing priorities at the forefront of both men's minds, it was Christian who broke the tense situation. On leaving Tahiti after a five-month stay, Christian and his supporters eventually mutinied and claimed *Bounty* on 28 April 1789, approximately 1300 miles west of Tahiti, near modern day Tonga. Those who sided with Bligh were fated to *Bounty's* launch with a sextant and five days' worth of food. Bligh guided this 18-man crew to Timor, some 7000 kilometres west of the location of the mutiny.

The nine *Bounty* mutineers needed to hide from the British Admiralty, who would surely come after them. They took 21 Polynesian men and women with them on the *Bounty* and found a safe haven in Pitcairn Island (25° 04'S × 130° 06'W). The community lived there until they were discovered in 1808. By this time all but one of the mutineers and the Polynesian men had either died of drink, killed themselves, or had been murdered. The fact that this small community survived, even up to this date, is testament to the growing devotion to Christianity of Alexander Smith, who adopted the name John Adams on the *Bounty* and became the nascent community's

patriarch. The Pitcairn Island community continued living on the small island until 1856 when the entire population was moved to Norfolk Island. Because the Pitcairn language continues to be spoken on Norfolk Island and is called Norfolk, the Caribbean tinge of Young's influence endures not just on Pitcairn Island, but deep into the geography and cultural landscape of western Oceania and political Australia.²

Young was a well-educated man who had lived and worked in England. Obviously ambitious enough to achieve a position in the British navy at a time when such appointments were sought after, one assumes he was concerned with furthering his naval career and achieving upward mobility. There is every indication he spoke a variety of metropolitan English, most likely a London variety he would have learned when working in England. He almost certainly also spoke Kittitian Creole³, though one must ask why, among all of his shipmates, he would have reverted in any way to this mode of communication once arrived on Pitcairn Island rather than a universally-shared variety. Did he think that it would be easier for the Polynesians to understand? Was it his intimate register he used only with the children? And of great interest to my continuing research on language mixing, naming, and linguistic descriptions of space: are there any remnants of St Kitts Creole in Pitcairn Island placenames (toponyms) and in the use of spatial language in Pitcairn? I intend to keep my discussion accessible for the non-linguist.

Creoled (Pacific) Caribbeanisms

Having established our Kittitian Ned had made it fair and square to Pitcairn Island, I wish to leave much of this factual history. I surmise a more intricate take on the Caribbean sway felt in the linguistic outcomes on Pitcairn Island and Norfolk Island and of and in the Pitcairn and Norfolk varieties of the resultant post-*Bounty* language. The evolution of Pitcairn and its transportation to Norfolk has figured strongly in the mobilization and spatialization of what I argue was becoming, in part, a new Caribbean modernity and othering in the Pacific.

The case of language contact during the early development of Pitcairn and the concomitant interaction of possibly differing modes and means of talking about space, namely English, Polynesian, and St Kitts Creole, poses the language as a worthwhile micro case of 'creole' language and space interaction. I have corresponded with many linguists, creolists, and anthropologists in Australia, the Pacific, and elsewhere as to whether there is any comparable research forthcoming regarding not only the development and use of evolved or quintessential contact induced spatial languages, but how, where, and when the spatiality and emplacement of the speaking and existence of contact languages and their grammars may have developed. The Pitcairn Island and Pitcairn language case forms the basis of my thesis on creole spatiality and my relating the Pacific to the Caribbean. I define creole spatiality as *the theoretical idea and linguistic reality that social spaces are formed around and exist within the resultant contact language artefacts in specifically determined yet fluid and spatialised locations*.

I take Young's Caribbean influence to be more significant than that of all the Polynesian men combined. Because he outlived all of the males who made it to Pitcairn bar the sole surviving male when the Pitcairn community was discovered in 1808, John Adams, Young was

² Although nestled more than 1700 kilometers east of Sydney and 1100 kilometers north of Auckland in the southwest Pacific, Norfolk Island is administered as an Australian external territory. Hence it is an element of political landscape of Australia.

³ I use the language names 'St Kitts Creole' and 'Kittitian Creole' and adjectival 'St Kitts' and 'Kittitian' synonymically.

one of the most influential speakers of the language during its formative years, being the island's first school teacher and principal storyteller (Baker and Mühlhäusler 2013: 183). And because in 1800 he was the first European male to die a natural death, he potentially had some of the largest influences on toponymy and spatial language during the initial gelling stage of this mode of speaking.

As regards the Caribbean influence, a valuable source of St Kitts Creole contemporaneous of the arrival on Pitcairn is the texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews. That Mathews "had become an expert [in St Kitts Creole] owed its origins to the necessities created by the Anglo-French colonization of the Caribbean and plantation agriculture" (O'Flaherty 1998: 49). Of the more than 300 sentential examples taken from Mathews's eleven texts, lyrics, and dialogues published in Baker et al. (1998), there is one notable use where the Kittitian spatial preposition *daw* is used in a similar manner to 'down' in Pitcairn:

Shatterday nite aw bin daw my house man,
Saturday night I been [at] my house man
Bin daw my house man, shed down so softly,
been [at] my house man sit down so softly

Translation:

On Saturday night I was in my house, man

I was in my house, man, sitting down so comfortably (Baker et al. 1998: 11)

Among the six definitions of *daw* in the word index to Mathews's texts, definition #5 is: "*daw*⁵ [? < E *down, there?*] 'at, etc.'" (Bruyn and Shrimpton 1999: 422). The use of 'daw' in *daw my house* as a locational preposition in a prepositional phrase is distinct from *shed down so softly* in a phrasal verb construction. Although I hypothesise the locational *down* in Pitcairn is derived at least in part from St Kitts Creole, the use of *down* in what can be presumed to be a preposition-poor language situation when Pitcairn was developing, and where English would rarely use *down* but *at*, i.e. a direction-less preposition, indicates language contact in spatial description. This is a meagre amount yet some convincing evidence of the possibility of Young's Antillean influence on the language.

Baker and Pederson's wordlist of modern Kittitian from recorded interviews between 1998-2007 reveal several similar modes of talking about spatial relationships on and off the small Caribbean islands of St Kitts and Nevis:

out 3. Travel abroad. *I been out* 'I have travelled abroad' (Baker and Pederson 2013: 157).

Over Bath popular name for **Bath Village** q.v. on Nevis [Island – the other island which along with St Kitts comprises the Federation of St Kitts and Nevis] (Baker and Pederson 2013: 157).

park up the boat Secure the boat on shore (Baker and Pederson 2013: 158).

There are several placenames using what appear to be lexicalised spatial adjectives in a relative spatial fashion, i.e. based on places being topographically *up*: Upper Bourryeau, Upper Canada Estate, and Upper Conaree (p. 176). The spatiality of these placename compounds describes topographical space rather than representing any hint of an absolute system with locational descriptors fouded and based in or from a single point. However, the similarity between Upper

Conaree on St Kitts and Up Tibi's on Pitcairn Island is encouraging for the thesis that there is a Caribbean influence on the creole spatiality of and in the language and culture of Pitcairn Island.

Creole Spatiality and Pitcairn: The Caribbean Meets the Pacific

It was necessary to reveal some technical details in order to arrive at a synthesis and reconciliation. While there is much more to be written, I wish that these taste tests pique the reader's interest. Somewhere Young is present in Pitcairn and on Pitcairn Island. The Caribbean has met the Pacific. One man is a diaspora; and he lives in the ways of speaking and being of the Pitcairn Islander diaspora in Australia, New Zealand, and Norfolk Island. In addition to the Antillean linguistic connection, there are other more general statements about space and spatiality as an analogue implying mixture, contact, and a blend of disciplines of interest to Caribbeanists. Because Pitcairn did not develop in a spatially confined location like most documented pidgins and creoles, especially those on Caribbean plantations, strong ecological and social links were created within the geographically restricted five square kilometre island. In the typical plantation and slave environment, people did not have to search for sources of food in their new home nor for a suitable place to live. Such a situation promoted only weak ecological ties between pidgin and creole communities and their natural environment. The *Bounty* arrivals on Pitcairn Island, however, did need to establish long-lasting and functional connections to their new environment. This requirement had marked effects on the spatial language of and in placenames and the pragmatics of describing space and location in other domains of Pitcairn grammar. Being able to talk about space is paramount in a fledgling language where livelihood is sought and is dependent and contingent on the ability to manage, know, and work with the environment. Young pictured a Kittitian past somewhere in his Pitcairn Island and Pitcairn language present. How he conceived of space is crucial to this present-ing.

I infer that the hitherto unexplored examination of St Kitts-Kittitian Creole and the several possible other-language influences on the language(s) of space will reveal more the effect Edward Young and the (female) Polynesian population have had on Pitcairn Island and in Pitcairn. In the absence of any fluent Polynesian language and St Kitts Creole speakers on contemporary Pitcairn Island, and the dearth of data indicating any specific non-English elements which might have influenced Pitcairn spatial language influence, I am left to venture about the crossover of Caribbean (St Kitts Creole) and Polynesian ways of talking about space. Young is a part of the European-Polynesian-Caribbean language-culture triangle which developed on this small island.

We have seen some traces of Caribbean retention, a distant othering and mobility into the Pacific. Further afield we find Edward Young Road on Norfolk Island, an even more remote nostalgic remembering of our famed midshipman. Caribbean space and social dynamics become represented and entwined in Norfolk Island ways of being and speaking. There is retention of Caribbean names, ideas, and ideologies in language and place in the Pacific story of Kittitian distancing: Ned Young's Ground is up the hill from Adamstown on Pitcairn Island; Young's Rocks lie off the north coast of the island; Pitcairn's down, up, and out suggest Kittitian influence. Time, space, language, culture, and memory converge and culminate somewhere and somehow on Pitcairn Island. Whatever the case with the resultant methods of talking about space which came about from language and cultural mixing, the Caribbean made it to the Pacific. Although far from Tahiti, on Pitcairn Island there is an almost other-worldly connection to Polynesia, one which implies the stretching of the bounds of time-space-culture:

The beach at Tahiti had a grammar. Its meaning came out of the paradoxes of violence and quiet, sea and land, stranger and native, politics and cosmology. No one met on the beach at Tahiti without bending to that grammar. (Denning 1992: 179)

This grammatical bending seems to imply Polynesian influence over Caribbean, close over far. No doubt, there *was* more Polynesian influence in absolute numbers and in locational geography. Still, like a small amount of homeopathic medicine which can have a significant effect on an ailment, Young, St Kitts, and the scent of the Caribbean are present in the micro diaspora of Pitcairn Island and in a diluted form on Norfolk Island. I have asked the question: can a single man spawn a Caribbean linguistic and cultural diaspora in the Pacific? While my short answer is yes, the research continues.

Acknowledgement: The late Philip Baker, my PhD examiner, colleague, and friend, read an earlier version of this piece. I recognize his input here. I express my appreciation for his passion for pidgin and creole languages, especially St Kitts Creole, and for encouraging me to pursue my own linguistic interests. Pitcairn Island linguistics is one of these.

References

- Baker, Philip, Adrienne Bruyn, Neville Shrimpton and Lise Winer. The texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews. In P. Baker and A. Bruyn (eds.), *St Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles: The texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in perspective*. London, Battlebridge, pp. 5-47.
- Baker, Philip and Lee Pederson. *Talk of St Kitts and Nevis*. London: Battlebridge.
- Baker, Philip and Peter Mühlhäusler, The Creole legacy of a bounteous mutineer: Edward Young's Caribbean contribution to the language of Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 45: 170-186.
- Bruyn, Adrienne and Neville Shrimpton. 1999. Word index in Mathews' text. In P. Baker and A. Bruyn (eds.), *St Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles: The texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in perspective*. London, Battlebridge, pp. 419-430.
- Denning, Greg., 1992. *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Hancock, Ian. 2017. "Review of Mühlhäusler & Nash (2012) *Norfolk Island: History People Environment Language*," *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*.
- Mohammed, Patricia, 2009. The Asian *Other* in the Caribbean. *Small Axe*, 13(2): 57-71.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter and Joshua Nash, 2012. *Norfolk Island: History People Environment Language*. London/Colombo: Battlebridge.
- Nash, J. 2016. 'Inside(r)-outside(r): Toward a linguistics and sociology of space on Pitcairn Island', *Australian Folklore*, 31: 205-216.
- O'Flaherty, Victoria B. 1998. Samuel Augustus Mathews: his life and times. In P. Baker and A. Bruyn (eds.), *St Kitts and the Atlantic Creoles: The texts of Samuel Augustus Mathews in perspective*. London, Battlebridge, pp. 49-58.