

# *“Hem i Broken English nomo”:* Interrupting the same old story about pidgins and creoles in school



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# A quick summary ...

- Bislama, like many pidgins and creoles, is stigmatised in formal education (See Siegel 1999, 2007).
- (Most of) the arguments made against its use in schools can be dismissed relatively easily,
- And yet the negative attitudes persist.
- Therefore ... arguing that Bislama is different but equal to English (and French) doesn't seem to help.
- We have tried to move from 'deficit' to 'difference', but should we go beyond this to 'repertoire' (cf. Snell, 2013)?

# Background to Bislama

- An English-based expanded pidgin
- The national variety of Melanesian Pidgin spoken in Vanuatu (mutually intelligible with PNG Tok Pisin and Solomon Pijin)
- High status: Co-official language with English & French, and sole national language; language of national symbols/anthems
- Widely used outside school in numerous domains (as L2 for majority of the population, with approx. 106 other languages spoken)
- Unwelcome in schools ...

18<sup>th</sup> June 2004

## Re: College Language Policy

This notice serves to remind the community that the use of Bislama is banned from the whole campus. Anyone caught speaking Bislama in any area will be savagely punished.

This is essential because Bislama:

- 1.has minimal vocabulary
- 2.influences spoken and written English
- 3.confuses the structure and word order of English
- 4.disturbs the fluency of English in the college

Thank you for your attention  
College Administration

# Typical arguments made against the use of pidgins and creoles in education (1)

“Bislama is just broken English”

*Bislama hem i wan (.) **wan lanwis blong communication nomo.** Hem **i no gat** wan samting blong writing. Olsem yumi raetem yumi raetem **long own tingting blong grammaire blong yumi.** Vocabulary blong yumi nomo yumi raetem. Se yu wanem. Yu wantem save wanem nao yu raetem. Be **i no gat wan proper vocabulary** blong bambae yumi tokbaot o yumi lukluk long hem. Se no. Wod ia yu raetem **olsem wanem.***

(Francophone principal)

EXTRACT 1

# Bislama is just Broken English?

Bae mitufala i go long solwota.

*By-and-by me two fellows he go along saltwater.???*

Mi lukum man ia we hem i wok long bank.

*Me look man here where him he work along bank.???*

# Bislama is <sup>not</sup> just Broken English

Bae mitufala i go long solwota.

FUT 1EXCL-DL PRED go PREP sea

*By-and-by me two fellows he go along saltwater.???*

We're going to the sea.

Mi lukum man ia we hem i wok long bank.

1SG see-TRANS man DEM REL 3SG PRED work PREP bank

*Me look man here where him he work along bank.???*

I saw the man that works at the bank.

# Typical arguments made against the use of pidgins and creoles in education (2)

“Bislama is unstable”

*Naoia yumi stap speak/im uh Bislama? Naoia ol  
**broken wan nomo.** I no wan gudwan nating?  
**Yestedei** i gat wan expression blong one particular  
thing **tudei** bae hem i defren. **Tumora** yumi tok  
defren lanwis nao.*

(Francophone-educated  
Anglophone teacher)

**EXTRACT 2**

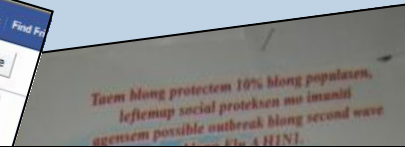
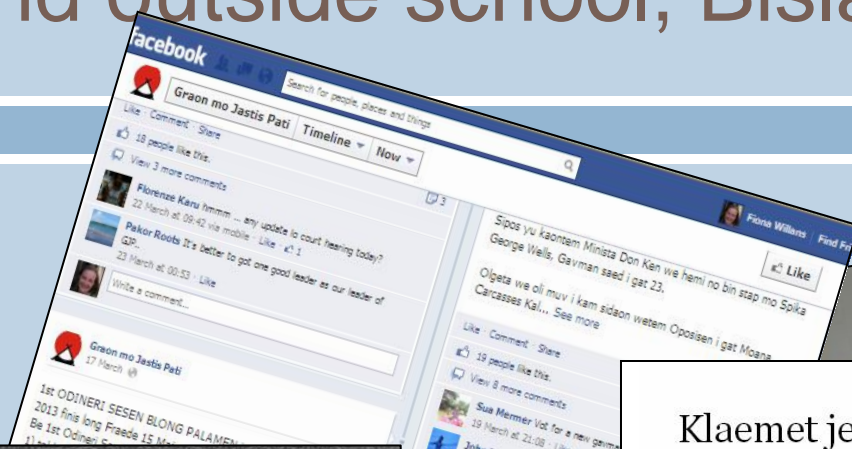


But the same seems true of other languages ...

*Mi save talem se mi save French from  
mi stap long environment blong yumi hemia.  
But (.) mi gat kwestin. Mi gat kwestin **sapos we  
mi go long wan environment we oli toktok  
French naeia?** Se bae mi catch up wetem  
olgeta? From actually **French hem i wan kaen  
lanwis we olsem hem i laef. Oli jenisim ol long  
ol expression olsem we yumi talem  
Bislama tudei.***

(The same  
Anglophone  
teacher)

# And outside school, Bislama seems just fine



Klaemet jenis hemi bisnis blong evriwan – even cartoon bats

Posted: [unclear] | Filed under: Video | Tags: climate change, global warming

And so on!



Here's a great **animated video** from [Live and Learn](#) about the impact of [global warming](#) and the need for adaptation and mitigation actions, explained through a fun and educational animation. Ideal for schools, classroom or community education programs. Starring some cartoon flying foxes.

BABOOL  
LONG BISLAMA  
GUD STUS BLONG VANUATU NERE



KOPU BLONG PRESBITERIAN JES  
BLONG VANUATU

BLONG SAVEN, OLOBA, UDIMA, JAKUSSEM, SUTU, GURESEN

NO GOVE, KAKO, KIDEN, KIDEN, KIDEN

1980-1984

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# Typical arguments made against the use of pidgins and creoles in education (3)

## “Time-on-task”

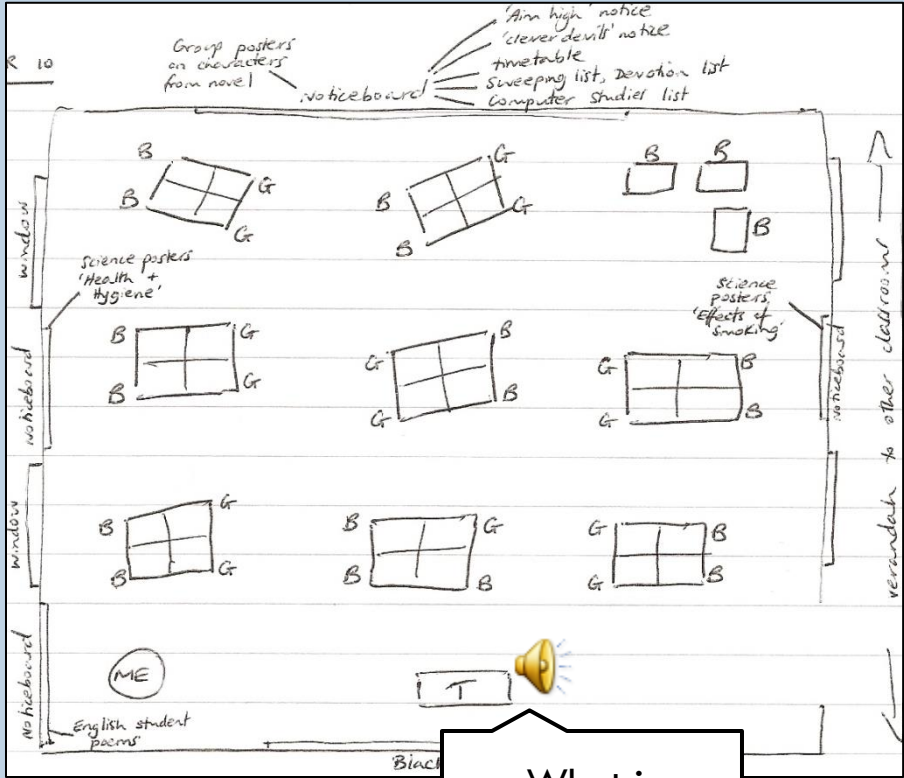
*Sapos yumi tij long Franis? Then yumi mas traem  
blong emphasise se (1) yumi **toktok** er **Franis nomo**  
blong helpem pikinini **blong hem i improve/m** (.)  
**Franis blong hem.***

(Francophone teacher)

EXTRACT 4

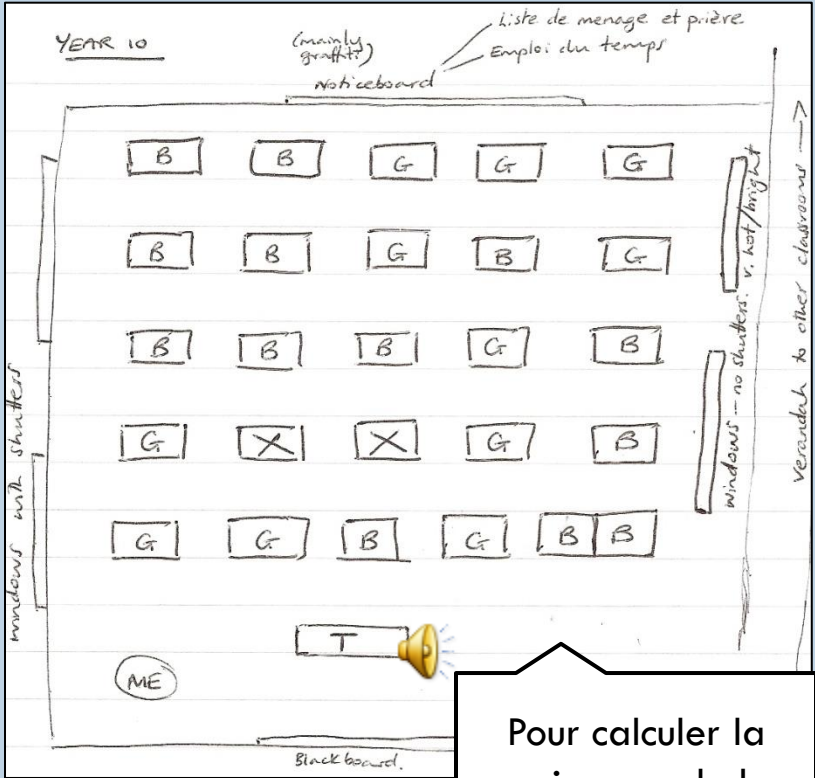
# But how much language is actually being used by the students?

Angolovo College Year 10 classroom



What is ruminantion?

Collège de Faranako Year 10 classroom



Pour calculer la croissance de la population ...

# Typical arguments made against the use of pidgins and creoles in education (4)

## “Interference”

*From wanem ol French oli lanem (.) oli speak **gud Inglis mo bitim yumi?** From oli lanem long ej we olsem oli mature. Oli lanem Inglis. Then oli lanem wan gud Inglis **oli speak wan gud Inglis.** Yumi from yumi statem long kindy i kam antap ia? Olsem **yumi miksim Bislama wetem Inglis (.) yumi miksim gogo** taem yumi kam antap ia?*

But, for Francophones, Bislama is an advantage

*Long saed blong mifala ol **Francophone**?  
Hemia blong lanem (.) **Inglis**? Hemia hem i isi  
**nomo**. That's why pikinini hem i? Yu toktok  
Inglis insaed long klas? I ansarem yu long  
Inglis. Hem i save ansarem yu long Inglis. Be  
hemia long saed blong ol (.) **Anglophone**?  
Blong yu givim **French** long hem? **Sore tumas**  
<others laugh>. **I had we i had we i had.***



# The jury is still out on this one ...

- There is likely to be some kind of influence on the use of English
- BUT pretending that Bislama doesn't exist will not make it go away (cf. Malaria eradication campaign)
- And why is there no interrogation of the use of French as a medium of instruction if it's so hard?
- Negative implications for EFL teaching if it's considered possible to simply pick it up

# Typical arguments made against the use of pidgins and creoles in education (5)

“No resources exist”

*Tudei ol sabjek blong yumi we yumi  
stap yusum long skul? Tugeta oli yusum Inglis  
wetem French. Yumi stap lanem blong yumi save  
andastanem ol wod/s we olsem oli had insaed long  
ol buk. From sapos yumi lanem ol narafala lanwis?  
Naoia bae i mekem i difficult blong yumi nao.  
Blong yumi andastanem ol wod/s  
insaed long buk.*

(Anglophone student)

EXTRACT 7



# But there are very few books in any language

- Most teaching is done using blackboard and chalk
- There are very few copies of textbooks
- Expensive resources would undoubtedly be useful, but the lack of multilingual resources cannot be used to justify continuing with poorly-resourced English-only or French-only education

# To sum up the anti-Bislama arguments

Bislama is thought to be a form of Broken English, with unstable vocabulary, that prevents fluency in the school language, and interferes with the learning of English. Since there are limited Bislama materials, it is considered impossible to use it in education

BUT linguists consider it to be a systematic language, subject to development like all others. They argue that banning Bislama leads neither to greater use of English/French, nor to greater learning of English. With so few resources in any language, the final argument is rather irrelevant.

# From 'deficit' to 'difference' ...

(now 50 years)

“Over the past 35 years, linguists have shown that these varieties are legitimate, rule-governed forms of language and in no way intrinsically inferior to the standard (e.g., Labov, 1969). But as Mackey (1978) has noted, ‘Only before God and linguists are all languages equal’ (p.7)” (Siegel, 1999, p.702)

... makes little difference

## Snell (2013) moves beyond ‘difference’ ...

“Sociolinguists have been fighting dialect prejudice since the 1960s, but deficit views of non-standard English are regaining currency in educational discourse. ... I argue that the traditional sociolinguistic response – stressing dialect systematicity and tolerance of ‘difference’ – may no longer be effective by questioning a key assumption that both deficit and difference approaches share, namely that there exist discrete varieties of English.” (Snell, 2013, p.110)

# e.g. Standard English vs. Tyneside English: Two discrete grammatical systems?

	STANDARD		TYNESIDE	
	Subject	Object	Subject	Object
1SG	I	Me	I	Us
1PL	We	Us	Us	We
2SG	You	You	Ye	You
2PL	You	You	Yous	Yous/Yees

Extract from a typical pronoun paradigm

(based on Snell, 2013, p.114, orig. from Beal, 1993)

1SG Obj	Ironsides School		Murrayfield School	
	N	%	N	%
Me	285	83.1	300	96.2
Us	58	16.9	12	3.8
	343		312	

Distribution of Standard and Teesside/Tyneside variants of 1SG Obj pronoun at two schools

(Snell, 2013, p.114)

# Snell's argument with regard to the speech of working class children in Teesside

- Children have access to both 'Standard' and 'dialect' variants
- e.g. Singular 'us' ("Give us my shoe back") is not simply the dialect equivalent of Standard 'me', as is suggested by dialect pronoun paradigms
- Children employ 'us' and 'me' in different ways, indexing solidarity/distance etc., and demonstrating communicative competence
- The 'Standard' and 'dialect' features interact within complex repertoires, rather than in a binary between two discrete varieties
- It is the educational response to 'dialect' features that is problematic, rather than pupils' lack of access to the Standard features

# Recent sociolinguistic challenges to the boundaries around separate 'languages'

- Distinct, named, bounded languages are considered to be “ideological constructions” based on sociocultural/ politico-historical, rather than linguistic, criteria (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Jørgensen et al, 2011)
- A shift towards thinking in terms of linguistic repertoires: the composite of resources that a speaker actually uses, and *knows how to use* appropriately (cf. abstract linguistic models) (Hymes, 1996)
- Snell (2013) applies this argument to the study of dialects of English
- How do English-based pidgins and creoles fit in?

# Linguistic distance?

- Bislama is lexically very close to English, but morpho-syntactically distant (easier to argue for a distinct grammatical paradigm)
- Some indication of a continuum between acrolectal and basilectal forms (but not to the extent seen in contexts where English is more widely spoken)
- Acrolectal forms might include English plural marking on the noun, in addition to the prenominal plural marker 'ol' (e.g. ol buk → ol buks)
- But also Bislama transitive marking on a verb not typically used in Bislama (e.g. implement-em)



# Linguistic usage



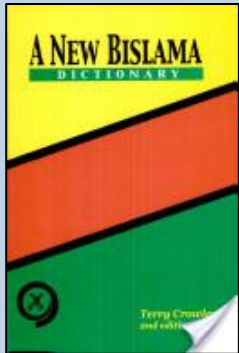
yes long wan uh lanwis polisi summit we i bin  
take place long Saratamata? olsem (.) gavman  
hem i reorganise/em lanwis/es blong yumi tijim  
long ol skul/s nao. wan nao hem i (.) wanem ia  
vernacular o wanem ia? ol lokol lanwis/es ia?  
then Inglis mo French. be (.) Bislama oli  
discourage/im. so hemia nao wan long olgeta  
samting (.) from why? olsem we mi bin talem  
finis. i no gat vocabulary blong hem (.) hem i (.)  
hem i no gat vocabulary. hem i too difficult.

# Educational responses

If Bislama is a separate language from English:

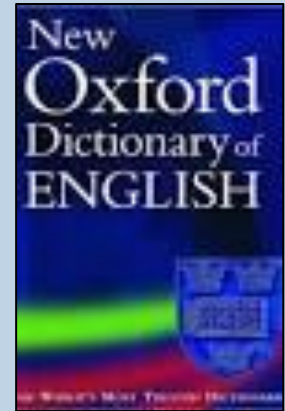
- English (or French) is the expected language of schooling and assessment, so all other languages are marginalised (by being OTHER languages)
- Lack of competence in 'the right language' shuts down classroom talk and participation (and thus potentially academic achievement)

# If Bislama is a separate language from English:



Both languages are validated as systems in their own right

Codification



Policies can make space for 'bilingual education'

M	T	W	T	F
Bis	Bis	Bis	Bis	Bis
Bis	Bis	Bis	Bis	Bis
Eng	Eng	Eng	Eng	Eng
Eng	Eng	Eng	Eng	Eng

Resources can be created

But ... there will always be more resources already available in languages with more established traditions in education, and these languages will remain in competition with each other.



# If Bislama, English, French, etc. are separate languages ...

Hours per week on the timetable (in a recent proposal)

Vernacular
Bislama
French
English

**“Multiple monolingualisms”**  
(Banda 2009; Heugh 2003; Makoni & Pennycook 2007)

Grades Kindergarten to 13	K																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																							
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... they are not all given equal space

# An alternative?

- Will it work to stop thinking about languages of instruction, and think instead of repertoires of instruction?
- Can we focus on learning/communication, rather than on language, allowing teachers and students to draw flexibly on whatever linguistic resources they have access to?
- Can we therefore work towards a learning-oriented form of language policy, rather than a language-oriented education policy?

A traditional  
model of  
language policy

No distinction is  
made between  
the teaching of  
content and the  
teaching of  
languages

English and French are necessary  
for perceived societal reasons



Students must demonstrate  
competence in these languages



Assessments are therefore in  
these languages *only*



Teaching is therefore in these  
languages *only*



High levels of competence are  
needed in these languages so that  
learning is successful



More effort must be put into  
teaching these languages and  
rules are needed to ensure they  
are practised



These languages must be  
introduced as early as possible  
and spoken as much as possible



*(Other languages banned)*

*(No time for others)*

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and spoken as much as possible



(Other languages banned)

(No time for others)

It is important that **learning** is  
successful



Children understand and engage  
more meaningfully when using familiar  
resources



'Familiar' is not the same for all  
children, and is likely to involve  
multiple resources



If content is taught using multiple  
resources, then children should be  
assessed using multiple resources



Teacher training must be provided,  
and materials must be developed, that  
enable these changes to teaching and  
assessment



The resources of less familiar  
languages are also considered  
necessary



Different ways must be found to  
incorporate these resources



A more flexible  
model, oriented to  
learning rather  
than language

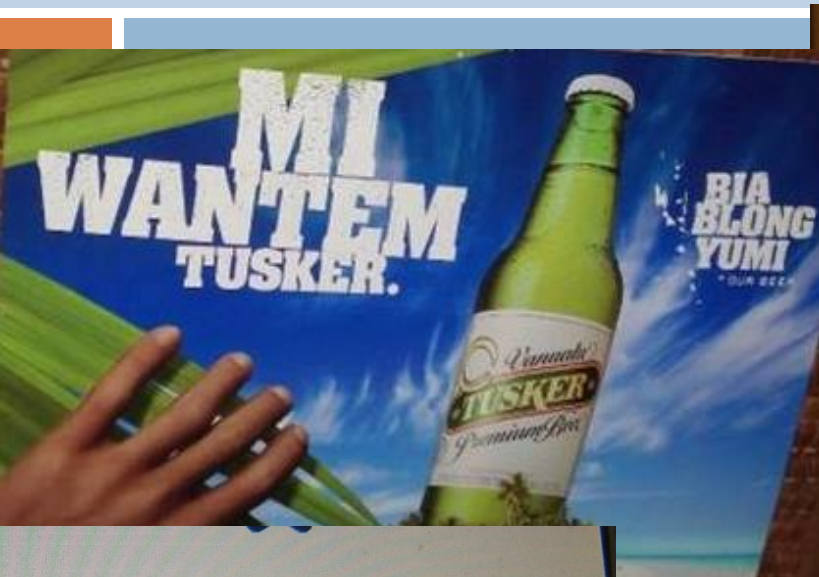
Teaching of  
content

Teaching of  
languages



# Tangkiu tumas

Thoughts or comments? ... [fiona.willans@usp.ac.fj](mailto:fiona.willans@usp.ac.fj)

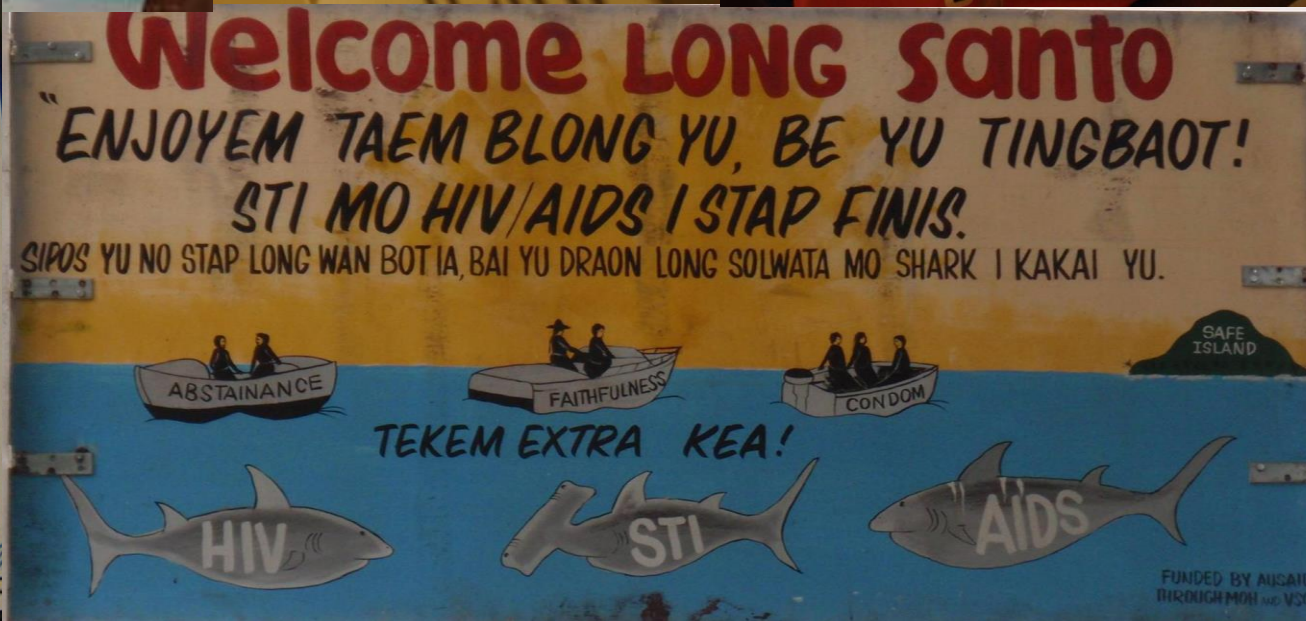


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