Pidgin and Creole

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Language varieties developed by speakers in contact who share no common language.

- **Pidgin**
  - Limited functions of use
  - Adjunct language (no one speaks only a pidgin)
  - Linguistically simplified
  - Develop their own rules and norms of usage

Examples

- West African Pidgin English
- Chinook Jargon, Native American, British, & French traders in the Pacific Northwest, 19th c.
- Solomon Island Pidgin, Solomon Islands

Examples cont.

On Caribbean slave plantations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, West African people were deliberately separated from others who used the same language so as to reduce the risk of their plotting to escape or rebel. In order to communicate with each other, as well as with their overseers, they developed pidgins based on the language of the plantation bosses as well as their own languages.

Cont.

Creole

- Languages developed from pidgins
- First language of some members of a speech community
- Used for a wide range of functions

Examples

- **Jamaican Creole** (also called *patois*)
- **Krio** (Sierra Leone, Africa)
- **Gullah** (South Carolina & Georgia)
- Tok Pisin is one obvious example of a pidgin which has developed into a creole language. This makes it clear that the label of a language is not an accurate guide to its status as pidgin or creole. Despite its name, Tok Pisin is a creole because it has been learned as a first language by a large number of speakers, and has developed accordingly to meet their linguistic needs.

Linguistic Structure of a Pidgin Language

- Pidgin languages are created from the combined efforts of people who speak different languages. All languages involved may contribute to the sounds, the vocabulary and the grammatical features, but to different extents, and some additional features may emerge which are unique to the new variety. Nevertheless, it has been found that when one group speaks a prestigious world language and the other groups use local vernaculars, the prestige language tends to supply more of the vocabulary, while vernacular languages have more influence on the grammar of the developing pidgin.
- The proportion of vocabulary contributed to Tok Pisin by English, for example, has been estimated at 77 per cent, compared to about 11 per cent from Tolai, the local vernacular which has contributed the largest amount of vocabulary. The language which supplies most of the vocabulary is known as the lexifier (or sometimes superstrate) language, while the languages which influence the grammatical structure are called the substrate. So in Papua New Guinea, English is the lexifier language for Tok Pisin, while Tolai contributes to the substrate.
- Pidgins develop to serve a very narrow range of functions in a very restricted set of domains, they tend to have a simplified structure and a small vocabulary compared with fully developed languages. Pacific pidgin languages have only five vowels, for example: [a, e, i, o, u] compared to around twenty in most varieties of English. Consonant clusters tend to be simplified (e.g. pes for ‘paste’), or vowels are inserted to break them into two syllables (e.g. silip for ‘sleep’). Affixes are dispensed with. So words generally do not have inflections, as in English, to mark the plural, or to signal the tense of the verb. Nor are affixes used to mark gender, as in Spanish and Italian. Often the information affixes convey is signaled more specifically elsewhere in the sentence, or it can be deduced from the context, or it is referentially redundant. Every learner of French or Spanish, for example, knows that the grammatical gender of objects is strictly dispensable if you are interested in communication as opposed to impressing people.

Sources of Linguistic Features

- Superstrate: the socially dominant language

  Most vocabulary from superstrate language (*lexifier language*)

- Substrate: socially subordinate language(s)

  Most grammatical structure from the substrate language(s)

Example: Solomon Islands Pidgin

Superstrate: English

Substrate: Oceanic languages

What does -im mean?

Mino	**<u>luk-im</u>**	**pikipiki**	**bulong**	**iu**	
I	*not*	*see-HIM?*	*pig*	*belong*	*you*

(“I didn’t see your pig.”)

***Mi no <u>luk</u> pikipiki bulong iu.**

English

I shot the burglar.

I shot ‘im.

*I shot’im the burglar.

Cont.

Solomons Pidgin	**transitive**	**intransitive**
luk	‘look’	
luk-im	‘see something	
sut	‘shoot’	
sut-im	‘shoot something’	
Kwaio (Oceanic language)		
aga	‘look’	
aga-si	‘see something’	
fana	‘shoot’	
fana-si	‘shoot something’	

Can you identify the superstrate of these Creoles?

1. **mo pe aste sa banan.** — ***I am buying the banana.***

   French: *Seychelles Creole*

2. **de bin alde luk dat big tri.** — ***They always looked for a big tree.***

   English: *Roper River Creole*

3. **a waka go a wosu.** — ***He walked home.***

   English: *Saran*

4. **ja fruher wir bleiben.** — ***Yes at first we remained.***

   German: *Papua New Guinea*

5. **olmaan i kas-im chek.** — ***The old man is cashing a*** **check.**

   English: *Cape York Creole*

6. **li pote sa bay mo.** — ***He brought that for me.***

   French: *Guyanais*

Development of Creoles

Structural Similarities:

1. zero copula

   di kaafi kuol

   the coffee cold

   (*The coffee is cold*.)

2. serial verbs: one verb fulfills a grammatical role

   Gullah Creole English (So. Carolina & Georgia)

   I tol pas mi

   he tall pass me

   (He's taller THAN me.)

Levels of creole/language status and the continuum

1. Acrolect "high speech"
2. Mesolect "middle speech"
3. Basolect "low speech"

In discussing the creole continuum in Guyanese English, Bickerton (1975, 24) has proposed a number of terms that may be used to refer to its different parts. He uses the term acrolect to refer to educated Guyanese English, a variety which really has very few differences from other varieties of Standard English. He uses the term basilect to refer to the variety at the other extreme of the continuum, the variety that would be least comprehensible to a speaker of the standard, perhaps even incomprehensible. Mesolects are intermediate varieties. However, these are not discrete entities, and there is variation within them. One important characteristic of these intermediate mesolects is that they blend into one another to fill the 'space' between the acrolect and the basilect. That space is, as we might expect, considerably socially stratified.

Creolization

1. When children learn a pidgin as their mother tongue, within a generation or two, native language use becomes consolidated and widespread. The result is a creole.

2. Major expansion in the structural linguistic resources: vocabulary, grammar, and style.

3. Shift in the overall patterns of language use in the community.

Decreolization

- Shift toward standard form of the language from which the creole derives.
- The standard language has the status of social prestige, education, wealth. Creole speakers find themselves under great pressure to change their speech in the direction of the standard.

Hypercreolization

- Aggressive reaction against the standard language on the part of creole speakers, who assert the superior status of their creole, and the need to recognize the ethnic identity of their communication. Such a reaction can lead to a marked change in speech habits as speakers focus on what they see as the "pure" form of the creole.

Linguistic features of Pidgins

Two pidgins for which English supplied much of the vocabulary

- **Cameroonian Pidgin**, Cameroon, West Africa
- **Korean Bamboo English**, Korea

Classifying Pidgins: Grammatical Complexity

- **Pre-pidgin** (or jargon)
- **Stable Pidgin**
- **Expanded Pidgin**

Pre-Pidgin

- When two or more groups who do not speak the same language come into contact, their needs to communicate to one another may lead to a pre-pidgin situation, in which one language, which is more dominant, becomes the source language. Pre-pidgin occurs before focusing leads to the achievement of stability and the development of shared norms, and where the pidginized forms are still relatively diffuse.

Stable Pidgin

- This is more regular and more complex and there are social norms regarding its use, was with *Russenorsk*, a trade pidgin used in northern Norway by Russian merchants and Norwegian fishermen over some 130 years (1785–1917). Because the language was used for seasonal trade, it did not expand much structuarally and had a core vocabulary of *c.*150–200 words.

Expanded Pidgins

- Pidgins that have developed a more formal role, as regular auxiliary languages. May have official status as lingua francas.
- Linguistically more complex to meet needs.
- Used for more functions in a much wider range of situations.

- Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea) c. 1880
  - **expanded pidgin** currently undergoing **creolization**. Now has about 20,000 native speakers.
  - about 44% of the population

Creole Formation

- Creole formation involves expansion of the morphology and syntax, regularization of the phonology, increase in the number of functions in which the language is used, and development of a larger vocabulary. Even though the processes are different, it is still not always clear whether we are talking about a pidgin, an expanded pidgin, or a creole in a certain situation. For example, the terms Hawaiian Pidgin English and Hawaiian Creole English may be used by even the same creolist (Bickerton 1977, 1983) to describe the same variety. Likewise, Tok Pisin is sometimes called a pidgin, an expanded pidgin, and a creole.

Mixed Language

Mixed language is Ma'a, also called Mbugu, which is spoken in the Usambara Mountains of northeastern Tanzania. In this case, the structure of the language is largely Bantu (the Bantu languages spoken in the region, and by the Ma'a people, are Pare and Shambaa), but the lexicon is at least half from Cushitic languages or Masai, a language related to neither Cushitic nor Bantu. Thomason (2001, 200) reports that earlier descriptions of the language noted more structural features that were not Bantu, so the language cannot be simply described as a Bantu language with borrowings, but is a mixed language.

Media Lengua is another frequently cited case of language mixture, and is described as being of predominantly Quechua grammatical structure and 90 percent Spanish-derived lexicon (Muysken 1981, 52). Like other mixed languages, it is an ingroup language, spoken by people living in villages in the central Ecuador highlands. Muysken describes the motivation for its creation as the desire to express a distinct group identity which was neither acculturated into Spanish-speaking urban society nor completely part of the traditional rural Quechua culture.