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When Cultures Clash

A Perspective on the Evolution of Pidgin Languages

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I. Introduction

- A. “Art emulates political and linguistic realities,” (Dreschel 7).
- B. Search for a video of native Creole speakers and you likely wouldn’t even be able to pick up more than a few words here and there. Despite this, English Pidgins exist all around the world, from the Pacific to the Carribean to Africa.
- C. In reality, however, for many of these languages, the power dynamics behind how they came to be are still apparent. These dynamics, among other factors, can be examined by observing the state of these languages at certain stages in their life and analyzing the evolutionary perspectives on each.
 - 1. Infancy - Language Contact in the Early Colonial Pacific (Dreschel, Lamb)
 - 2. Pidgin - Pidgin Languages as a Putative Window on Language Evolution (Botha)
 - 3. Creole - Creole Nationalism in Colonial Indonesia (Bosma)

II. Literature Review

- A. There exists a commonality between certain jargons (infant pidgins), often reflecting the context in how they’re created. Generally, earlier on in a relationship, one can assume both parties are on relatively equal footing as a foreign party tries navigating a new land. Imperialism can be considered an afterthought during these early days, and in the case of MPP and similar jargons like Chinook, the vocabulary and syntax much more closely resemble the native tongue (Lamb, 267).

B. Rudolf Botha helps to extend this idea by correlating pidgin languages to primitive languages, the former being a, “window on language evolution” (1).

1. Naturally, language evolution is a very slippery concept to grasp, and much of what we know about contemporary language evolution we know from observing protolanguages like pidgins and creoles (Botha 2).

C. By the time a creole comes to exist, there is a very distinct culture surrounding its speakers. Without a dedicated base of native pidgin speakers, a creole simply cannot exist. An example of pride to the point of nationalism in one’s creole heritage comes from Indonesia, where a restriction on obtaining citizenship lead Indonesian Creoles to unify (Bosma 658).

III. Conclusion

A. From the adoption of culture to the adoption of language, we’ve seen time and time again how these sorts of relationships play out. Empiricism not only smudged the boundary between cultures, but birthed new cultures and languages entirely, each with their own history to be told.

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