

## PIDGINS AND CREOLES

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### Summary

Pidgins and creoles are languages that arose in the context of temporary events (e.g., trade, seafaring, and even tourism), or enduring traumatic social situations such as slavery or wars. In the latter context, subjugated people were forced to create new languages for communication. Long stigmatized, those languages provide valuable insight into the mental mechanisms that enable individuals to use their innate capacity to achieve essential social contacts. One striking characteristic of pidgins and creoles is that they share some universal linguistic properties. Pidgins and creoles have emerged on every continent, and it is likely that many contemporary standard languages originated as creoles, and eventually gained recognition and status. Present-day creoles

are young languages that developed over the last two centuries and are mostly spoken around tropical zones (Central America, Caribbean, West and Central Africa, the Indian Ocean, South Africa and the Pacific islands). This geographical distribution reflects the economic conditions that motivated the forced transportation of cheap foreign labor to plantations and mines that enriched European colonies. The following contribution outlines some general sociolinguistic properties of pidgins and creoles, and provides linguistic examples of different varieties of pidgins (Chinese Pidgin English, Russenorsk, Hawaiian Pidgin English) and creoles (Belizean Creole, Tok Pisin, Mauritius Creole, Hawaiian Creole). Finally, it outlines some of the earlier and current theoretical models that attempt to explain the genesis and development of pidgins and creoles.[228]

## 1. Introduction

The contact languages that are commonly referred to as ‘pidgins and creoles’ (henceforth PC) were not recognized as full-fledged languages until recently. They were considered to be at best marginal languages, disdainfully labeled ‘baby talk,’ and more often than not they were dismissed by grammarians and dictionaries as mere distortions or corruptions of contiguous standard languages. This pejorative view can be attributed to the low social status of pidgin and creole speakers, who were generally members of subjugated groups — slaves or laborers — in their society, and viewed as simpletons unable to attain the higher abstractions of their masters' languages. The persistent — and inappropriate — use of the term ‘pidgin’ as an equivalent of ‘jargon’ to refer to inadequate language fluency is a vestige of a tenacious linguistic prejudice and racial bias. Indeed, PC are still undervalued even by their own speakers, who often refer to the local variety in derogatory terms, such as *broken English*, *brokop*, or *baragouin*, an obvious reflex of the persistent legacy of colonialism.

However, following pioneering studies conducted by such 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars as Adam, Coelho and Schuchardt, increased attention has been accorded to those long-neglected languages, and to the fascinating issues — theoretical and empirical, social and educational — that they raise. Over the last thirty years creole studies have extensively discussed competing explanations for the wide-ranging similarities exhibited in all creoles as they span the globe, as represented in a large number of publications that provide overviews of PC scholarship, and collections of articles documenting PC and their properties. Several venues are now exclusively dedicated to current scholarship on pidginization and creolization, including the Creole Library series at Benjamins, and the academic journal *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* (JPCL). Creole speakers are now regaining pride in their native languages and cultures, as a burgeoning literature in creole is developing.

It is now widely acknowledged that PC — or at least creoles, if not pidgins, see below — are on a par with other world languages, that in fact they meet all the systematic, structural, lexical and communicative requirements for an operational language. Yet they hold a unique position apart from non-creoles, mostly because they are young, fast growing, and based on several linguistic systems. They are also distinctive because they originated and developed, not through child native language acquisition, but through adult constructive processes under emergent stressful conditions. They offer testimony

to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity and the creativity and organization of the human brain. Those unique properties that distinguish PC from other languages are briefly illustrated, then broader issues in creole studies will be addressed.

## 2. Some general properties of pidgins and creoles

It has been said that thirty years in the life of a creole might well be equivalent to three centuries in the life of a non-creole (or a pidgin). This characterization evokes one of the most striking properties of PC: They have arisen and evolved rapidly in emergency situations — short term contacts such as trade or migration, or long-term social conflicts such as slavery, war and indenture. In such traumatic situations when no *lingua franca* is readily available to a group of people, the human language capacity can nevertheless function effectively even in the absence of adequate input. Thus, PC are believed to open a privileged window into the workings of the human brain, the organization of linguistic systems, and the impact of social events on the genesis of language.

Although it is true that all languages expand through contact, PC are different because they are relatively young, and their origin can be traced back to specific social events and language families. Most of the languages that can be identified as PC and are still in use or are somewhat documented are no more than two or three centuries old. Older, established languages, such as English, Chinese, or Russian, may well have originated as PC, or at least may have gone through a creolization stage, but it is difficult to assess their early stages of development other than by reconstruction. In contrast, the ‘parent’ languages of PC can more easily be inferred from their linguistic structure and the recent social history of their speakers, even though written evidence is relatively scarce.

PC are hybrids, in that they derive from contact between at least two language types (usually due to conflicts between two or more groups of people). PC usually incorporate elements of the language of the dominant group (called the *superstrate*) as well as elements of the language of the subaltern group (the *substrate*) in proportions that are generally predictable in terms of demographic and social aspects. PC are often labeled in terms of their lexifier, the superstrate language, that yields most of the vocabulary. For example, Jamaican Creole (Jamaica), Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea), Krio (Sierra Leone), and Guyanese Creole (Guyana) are all ‘English-based,’ whereas Haitian Creole (Haiti), Morisyen (Mauritius, Indian Ocean), Louisiana Creole (Southern US), and Guyanais (French Guyana) are French-based. On the other hand, major language components of those creoles (phonology, syntax, even discourse patterns) are likely to reflect substratal influences derived from the ancestral languages of the (now) creole speakers. Thus, West African elements are amply represented in Caribbean and African PC, and Melanesian components are part of Pacific creoles. PC are therefore the sum result of a creative assemblage of disparate pieces put together to form a harmonious, efficient communicative tool.

It has been pointed out that there are few Spanish-based creoles (in comparison to the linguistic influence of other European colonizers), and this situation may be due to the different sociolinguistic conditions that existed in Spanish America, and led to an early shift to European languages. However, some Spanish-based creoles developed (though they may have been based on prior or contiguous Portuguese varieties) in Colombia

(Palenquero) and in the Leeward islands of the Netherlands Antilles (Papiamentu), as well as in the Philippines (Phillipine Creole Spanish). In addition, Bozál Spanish appears to have arisen as a pidgin in Cuba at the end of the 18th century, though it does not seem to have become a creole, but may have led to a restructured Spanish. Exciting new (2004) research by A. Schwegler uncovered the surviving influence of Kikongo (a Central West African language) in the ritual language used in Cuba by Palo Monte priests (a religion akin to Santería). This language may be a vestigial form of an earlier pidgin or semi-creole.

All the properties uniquely associated to PC are dependent on social contacts and communicative needs. As far as the linguistic status of PC is concerned, there is now consensus that creoles (but not pidgins) are not linguistically distinguishable in principle from other languages (non-creoles). They display universal meaning-form mapping strategies. However, creoles are structurally more similar to one another — regardless of their lexis — than they are to non-creoles. In particular, non-creoles vary in their choice of linguistic strategies for the expression of basic notions such as tense, aspect, case or number, but creoles use a systematic subset of those mechanisms, so it is possible to define linguistic features common to most creoles. For example, to mark tense or aspect, some languages use preverbal elements (Chinese *(ta)kan /yao kan* ‘(s/he) looks/ will look’), others use postverbal flections (French *(il/elle)regarde/ regarder<sub>a</sub>*), or a combination of the above (English, *(s/he)looks/ will look*). Most creoles tend to use universally preverbal morphemes — *(i)de luk/ wan luk* in Belizean Creole; *(l)ap vwa/ va vwa* in Haitian Creole. The difference here is that English-based Belizean Creole derived its morphemes from English (imperfective/durative marker *de* < ‘there’ and future *wan* < ‘want’), whereas Haitian Creole acquired its own from French (imperfective *ap* < ‘après’ [dial. ‘ongoing’], and future *va* < ‘va’ [‘go’]). Since PC originated to cope with emergency communication, it has been suggested that PC analysis can help us highlight mental priorities in language formation. The striking similarities among creoles have been amply documented and often illustrated in creole verbal systems. The data presented below display an invariant ordering of two tense-aspect preverbal particles: The past/anterior (ANT) morpheme precedes the imperfective (IMP) morpheme — the same item often marks habitual or progressive —, then followed by the verb. This ordering occurs regardless of the lexical base of the creole (English for Belizean, Hawaiian, Krio; Jamaican and Sranan; French for Haitian and Lesser Antillean (e.g., Martinique); Spanish for Palenquero; Portuguese-based for Papiamentu and São Tomé, and Dutch-based for Negerhollands).

(Engl)	Belizean	<i>a</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>kom</i>
	Hawaiian	<i>ai</i>	<i>bin/wen</i>	<i>stei</i>	<i>kum</i>
	Jamaican	<i>a</i>	<i>bin</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>kom</i>
	Krio	<i>mi</i>	<i>bin</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>kam</i>
	Sranan	<i>mi</i>	<i>ben</i>	<i>(d)e</i>	<i>kon</i>
(Fr)	Haitian	<i>m</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>ap</i>	<i>vini</i>
	Martinique	<i>m</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>vini</i>
	Morysien	<i>m</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>pe</i>	<i>vini</i>
(Port)	Papiamentu	<i>mi</i>	<i>tabata</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>va</i>
	São Tomé	<i>mi</i>	<i>tava</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>vay</i>
(Sp)	Palenquero	<i>mi</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>va</i>

(Du) Negerhollands *mi ka le kon*  
 1SG ANT IMP V  
 'I was going/coming.'

Such regularities have provided the impetus for research on the history and structure of PC. Some possible distinctions between pidgins and creoles are presented below, followed by a selection of current linguistic issues in pidgin and creole studies:

- Pidgins are short-lived varieties or restricted to limited social contexts. The social contacts that surrounded the creation of the pidgin are represented in its structure.
- Creoles are expanded and stabilized versions of pidgins. Because of their continued and ambiguous relationship to a dominant standard language, creoles exhibit an astonishing degree of linguistic variability.
- Theoretical models and current issues: The search for explanations is interdisciplinary.

### 3. Pidgins: Incipient communication

Pidgins are start-up languages, restricted to specific social domains or seasonal events, such as trading. They are essentially pragmatic means of communication and remain limited in their structure and vocabulary, in as much as interactive needs are met. Since the new pidgin is only used in one context, and its speakers use other languages apart from the trade event, there is no reason for the pidgin to develop. It survives as long as it is needed, then disappears when the trade is discontinued. This was the case for Chinese Pidgin English, a pidgin that developed in Canton (Guangzhou) in southern China, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to facilitate seasonal trade between British and Cantonese merchants. The resulting *lingua franca*, with English lexicon and Chinese substrate influence, was essentially a business tool (the origin of the word 'pidgin' is often thought to be derived from the Chinese pronunciation of 'business'). Russenorsk is somewhat different in that it has no dominant source language, and that the lexicon is almost equally distributed between Russian and Norwegian. This variety developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for bartering during the short summer season between Russian and Norwegian fishermen along the Arctic coast of northern Norway. Other extinct trade pidgins include the original *Lingua Franca*, or Sabir (Romance-based, used around the Mediterranean from the Middle Ages onward); Pidgin Eskimo (used between Inuit and American whaling crews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century); and Amerindian-based pidgins such as Chinook Jargon (British Columbia), Delaware Jargon and Mobilian Jargon (United States). Since trade was often conducted along sea routes, some pidgins can also be classified under the label of nautical or maritime pidgins.

Other pidgins developed to enable contacts between colonial masters/supervisors and workers/slaves. Some examples are Butler English and Bamboo English in India, Fanagalo, and Pidgin Ewondo (Zulu-based) used in South African mines, Vietnamese Pidgin French, and varieties of Français Populaire in West Africa (Sénégal, and Ivory Coast). Hawaiian-based and English-based pidgins developed in Hawaii in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, either as nautical pidgins, or/and when laborers (Japanese, Filipino, Portuguese, Chinese) were brought to the island to work on plantations.

When pidgin speakers stayed, their incipient language expanded to meet daily needs as the community's regular *lingua franca*, and the pidgin mutated into a creole. It is commonly said that a pidgin is a language without native speakers (transplanted adults cannot use their native language, and are forced to create a new tongue where no oral mode of communication exists), whereas the creole has acquired native speakers (in the course of a generation or so, the developed language has become the native language of new-born children). Pidgins have simple grammars, as compared to their source languages, but they are not devoid of organizational structure. They have basic rules and vocabulary, as illustrated in the following excerpts from three pidgins.

### 3.1. Chinese Pidgin English

Most of the lexicon is English (except for Chinese words such as *taipan* 'master' and *coolie* 'servant'), but the structure displays Chinese morphology and syntax: for example the use of the classifier *piece* before nouns (silk, coolie), and the use of serial verbs, such as *look see*, but also *can do*, *can see*, *can know*, because *can* — so widely used in CPE — may be related to the Chinese verb *kan* 'to see,' and thus function as a co-verb in serial structures.

Foreigner:

- (1) *patchee wun piece sulek insigh all popa; wanchee finis chopchop can do*  
 patch one piece silk inside all proper; want do quick can do  
 'Line (the garment) with silk properly. I want it done at once, if you can.'

Chinaman:

- (2) *Can see, can sabee; skure you day afoo mollo*  
 can see can know assure you day after tomorrow  
 'I'll see. I can promise it to you for the day after tomorrow.'
- (3) *taipan can sen wun piece cooly come my sop look see*  
 master can send one piece coolie come my shop look see  
 'Sir, you can send a coolie to my shop to see to it.'

[excerpted from A. Bauer 1974: 154, based on an 1857 text, *Das melanesische und chinesische Pidginenglisch*, Regensburg: Verlag Hans Carl].

### 3.2. Russenorsk.

Russenorsk is a pidgin that is equally based on Russian and Norwegian (with Lappish/Sami fish names, and some English words, such as *skaff* 'eat' <dial. English 'scoff'). The personal pronouns *moja* (1S) and *tvoja* (2S) are borrowed from adjective feminine forms in Russian, but reassigned as invariant pronominal forms as well as possessive adjectives. A common strategy in pidgins (and creoles) is to select words similar in form and meaning in the source languages: The preposition *po* has the same phonetic form and similar functions in Russian and Norwegian. It is an all-purpose preposition ('on/to/for'), as can be seen below. Although pidgins do not generally exhibit any evidence of inflectional morphology, the verb suffix *-om* that functions as a

transitive marker — see *kopom* in (5); *skaffom* in (6) — appears to be an exception. In fact it may be a type of clitic similar to the post verbal element common in Tok Pisin — *gatin* in (9), which is assumed to be derived from English ‘him.’ Pronominal elements also often appear in the same position (following the verb and preceding the object) in other creoles (e.g., Belizean Creole *dem* ‘them’ in *Yu no dem gofwid?* ‘You know this type of gulfweed?’):

(4) *kiøp i seika, traeska, tiksa, og balduska*  
 buy you coalfish cod haddock and halibut  
 ‘Do you buy coalfish, cod, haddock and halibut?’

(5) *da, moja kopom altsamma, davai po skib kom, po tjei driki*  
 yes, me buy-it everything, please on ship come, for tea drink  
 ‘I buy everything, please come on board and have some tea.’

(6) *vil ju po moja stova po morradag skaffom*  
 will you at me place on tomorrow-day eat-it  
 ‘Do you want to eat tomorrow at my place?’

[excerpted from J. A. Fox 1983: 102, “Simplified input and negotiation in Russenorsk.” In R. Andersen (ed.), *Pidginization and Creolization as Language Acquisition*, Rowley; Newbury House].

### 3.3. Hawaiian Pidgin English

This Pacific pidgin displays a common pragmatic feature of pidgins: Emphasis is marked through fronting and reduplication of information (*haus-haus*). There is also evidence of grammaticalization, that is, assignment of a grammatical function to a lexical morpheme: Here, *stay* has become a preverbal aspect marker (for habitual, or continuous action).

(7) *haus haus ai stei go in Jaepen taim*  
 house house I stay go in Japan time  
 ‘When I was in Japan I used to stay/was staying at home.’

(8) *oni tu yia mi ai stei wrk had*  
 only two years me I stay work hard  
 ‘I was working hard for two years.’

[excerpted from D. Bickerton 1981: 27, *Roots of Language*, Ann Arbor: Karoma Press].

The previous examples illustrate the construction of a grammar even in newly invented varieties. Some common linguistic features of pidgins found in early Pacific varieties, but widespread elsewhere as well, include:

- (i) Reduced tenses with only past and future particles
- (ii) Limited number of personal pronouns
- (iii) Rare use or omission of articles

- (iv) Postnominal position of adjectives and zero copula
- (v) Initial position of the negative
- (vi) Absence of subordination
- (vii) Basic SVO order.

When the pidgin mutates into a creole, the incipient grammar further develops and stabilizes, while the repertoire of creole speakers expands. This issue is discussed in the following section.

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enormous amount of information on creole varieties, and its translation constitutes essential reading].

### **Biographical Sketch**

**Geneviève Escure** is a professor of English and Linguistics at the University of Minnesota (Department of English), Minneapolis, U.S.A. She has studied in France (University of Paris) and in the United States of America, where she received her Ph.D. in Linguistics (Indiana University-Bloomington) in 1975.

Escure has a primary interest in language contact and language universals. She has worked extensively with pidgins and creoles, especially the English-based creoles spoken in Belize and Honduras on the Caribbean coast of Central America. She has studied the effect of gender roles and ethnic identity on language development in the context of marginalized groups. She has conducted fieldwork in rural communities of the Caribbean coast of Central America, with emphasis on morpho-syntactic and discourse aspects of Belizean Creole (topicalization, serialization, TMA markers).

Besides English-based Caribbean creoles, her research interests include African-American English in the United States, sociolinguistic variation in the People's Republic of China, Garifuna, an endangered language of Belize and Honduras, and issues related to language attrition and language death.

Her investigation of variation in Chinese, specifically Beijing Mandarin (Putonghua), Southwestern Chinese (Wuhan, Hubei) and Wu, has led her to note extensive pragmatic similarities between Chinese — one of the oldest known contact languages — and creoles.

She is also documenting Garifuna, a mixed language spoken by older Afro-Indians (Garinagu) in Belize and Honduras. Garifuna has a primary Arawak base, but contains important components traceable to Carib, Spanish, French, English and various creoles, which encapsulates the extensive diaspora of its speakers: they originated in the Amazon area, settled in the Caribbean, intermarried with African maroons, and were eventually deported to Central America during colonization. Garifuna is now on the brink of extinction because of the dominance of contiguous varieties, Spanish and Belizean Creole. Escure is investigating the sociolinguistic processes that lead to language attrition, and working with local communities on issues of language maintenance and revival.