Language variation
Contact phenomena: Creoles
http://www.ling.cam.ac.uk/li2/

1 PIDGINS AND CREELOS

- extreme case of interference through language shift

Pidgins
- contact languages with no native speakers developed to aid communication
- result from contact between two language groups where neither group is able or willing to learn the language of the other group
- lexical items come from the language of the group with greatest power
  *(superstrate*, typically English, French, Portuguese, Spanish or Dutch)*
- superstrate speakers modify this language to make themselves more easily understood *(cf. foreigner talk)*
- *substrate* speakers (the group with less power) have poor access to the target language and modify that language either through interference from their native language, or by adopting universally unmarked features
- with time, the pidgin acquires conventions *(a pidgin without conventions is a jargon)*, and complexity *(an elaborated pidgin)*.

Creoles
- pidgins that have gained native speakers
- children exposed to a pidgin as their main linguistic input *(e.g. because it is the only language that their parents have in common)* acquire it as their native language
- the pidgin is not adequate for acquisition of a natural language, so children modify and elaborate it, creating the creole
- result depends on relative mix of speakers of different language e.g. contrast of Réunion Creole and Mauritian Creole, and on the relative homogeneity of the substrate language(s) e.g. more marked features in Gulf of Guinea Creoles *(e.g. São Tomé Creole Portuguese)*

2 TYPICAL FEATURES OF PIDGINS AND CREELOS

Remarkable structural cross linguistic similarities, couples with significant individual differences.

2.1 Linguistic features of pidgins and creoles

**Phonology**
- no regular sound correspondence between the sounds of the superstrate and the creole e.g. *Sranan* aj 'eye' but *ten* 'time'
- reduced phoneme inventory *(loss of cross-linguistically marked phonemes)* e.g.

  - French /y/ ≠ /i/ is lost in Mauritian Creole Fr. *pur* 'pure' and *pire* 'worse' both > Mauritian *pir*
  - English /f/ ≠ /p/ is lost in Tok Pisin *finish* > *pinis*

- words of the lexifier language are often reshaped to a CV syllable structure e.g.

  - by deletion of word-initial consonants *(English* *stand* > *Sranan* *tan)*
  - or vowels *(Portuguese* *ocupar* > *Príncipe CP* *kupa)*
  - omission of consonants in clusters *(English* *sister* > *Sranan* *sisa)*
epenthetic vowels (Portuguese alma > Príncipe CP álima ‘soul’) addition of word-final vowel (English dog > Saramaccan CE dágu).

• either seven- /i e ɛ a ɔ o u/ or five-term oral vowel system, plus sometimes nasal vowels

Morphology
• general lack of inflection, specifically

  loss of agreement e.g. Tok Pisin

  Sikspela man i kom ‘Six people are coming’
  Wanpela man i kom ‘A man is coming’

  loss of gender e.g. Tok Pisin em ‘him, her, it (object pronoun)’

  emergence of circumlocutions in place of inflections e.g. Tok Pisin
  haus bilong John in place of John’s house

Syntax
• fixing of word order, generally SVO: Dutch creoles (e.g. Negerhollands and Berbice Creole Dutch) are SVO even though Dutch is V2/SOV

2.2 Linguistic features that distinguish creoles from pidgins
• limited development of morphology: Tok Pisin distinguishes transitive verbs by the suffix -im, and has a plural and adjective marking suffix -pela (< English fella)

• the development of syntactic complexity through emergence of such features as relative and embedded clauses e.g. Krio se ‘that’ < se ‘say’:

  A no se yu bizi. Krio (Gambia)
  I know that you busy
  ‘I know that you’re busy.’

• invariant preverbal particles emerge expressing negation, tense, mood and aspect in that order e.g. Sranan (Surinam):

  ben = past tense
  sa = future mood
  e = continuous aspect

  Mi taki ‘I talk(ed).’
  Mi ben taki ‘I (had) talked.’
  Mi e taki ‘I am talking.’
  Mi ben e taki ‘I was talking.’
  Mi sa taki ‘I will talk.’
  Mi ben sa taki ‘I would have talked.’
  Mi sa e taki ‘I will be talking.’
  Mi ben sa e taki ‘I would have been talking.’

• expansion of lexicon, initially by circumlocution (in pidgins)
Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea)
gras  grass  
gras bilong fes  beard  
gras bilong pisin  feather

later by conventionalising and shortening circumlocutions e.g. TP *ma bilong mi* 
‘my husband’ > *mambomi*

and creation of new compounds e.g. TP  
*kot bilong ren* ‘raincoat’ > *kotren*  
*man bilong pait* ‘fighter’ > *paitman*

3 ORIGIN THEORIES

3.1 Monogenesis theories

Common African substrate (see also language contact)

- African slaves were multilingual, speaking a number of African languages with similar grammatical structure but different vocabulary  
- they treated European languages in the same way, producing pidgins of similar structure  
- some plausible African substrate features in Atlantic creoles:  
  serial verb constructions e.g. use of ‘take’ to express instruments e.g. Ndjuka

\[ \text{Ndjuka (Surinam)} \quad \text{Yoruba} \]

A teke nefi koti a meti.  \( Ò \) fi òbe gé ěran  
he took knife cut the meat  he took knife cut meat  
‘He cut the meat with the knife.’

clause-initial sentence markers (but could be universally unmarked cf. below)

\[ \text{Haitian Creole} \quad \text{Yoruba} \]

Apa ou kontan?  Ñjé iṣu pò lóní.  
Q you happy  Q yams plentiful today  
‘Are you happy?’  ‘Are yams plentiful today?’

- but many features of creoles (e.g. the tense-aspect system) cannot be traced back to any such source  
- it is unclear why any one particular group of African languages should have been dominant  
- even creoles with clearly no African component (e.g. Hawaiian Creole, Pitcairnese) have the same characteristics

Sailors’ jargon

- there was a single original pidgin that evolved in sailors’ jargon  
- accounts for some lexical similarities, but does not address structural issues

Mediterranean pidgin substratum

- all creoles are relexifications (i.e. same structure but with new lexicon) of an original Portuguese-based pidgin (Sabir) used in the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages  
- its vocabulary was replaced with one based on English, French etc., hence the structural similarities, alongside lexical differences
• relexification does occur e.g. Saramaccan is relexifying from Portuguese to English
• again, some creoles clearly do not have this substrate (e.g. Hawaiian Creole, Pitcairnese).

3.2 Polygenesis theories

Shared circumstances
• shared features arise from the shared circumstances of origins e.g. need to communicate during trading

Universal language learning (the Bioprogram Hypothesis, Bickerton 1981)
• children who develop creoles use innate knowledge to fill in the gaps left by the inadequate linguistic input of the pidgin they hear around them
• this innate knowledge is the ‘bioprogram’, common to all children
• innate properties of language emerge most clearly in creoles, whereas they have to be suppressed in the acquisition of languages like English and French

Creolisation as language contact (interference through shift): Abrupt creolisation (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 147–66)
• abrupt creolisation (e.g. some Caribbean creoles): the emerging contact language becomes the primary language of the community very quickly
• gradual creolisation: substrate languages continued to be used for a long time, leading to an elaborated pidgin, from which a creole emerges e.g. Jamaican Creole

Abrupt creolisation:
• rapid language shift to the European language
• very few substrate items incorporated, because no individual substrate language numerically dominant
• target language is learned imperfectly because of lack of social integration with the target language community / lack of access to native speakers
• as in normal language shift, shifting speakers guess at the structure of the target language, and make errors which may persist in speech after the shift
e.g. speakers see a distinction in the target language, but interpret it in the light of their first language e.g. in São Tomé Creole, Portuguese pé ‘foot’ and mão ‘hand’ turn up as /ɔps/ ‘foot and leg to knee’ and /mõ/ ‘hand and arm’ because this in the semantic range in Bantu and Kwa substrate languages.

Factors affecting the outcome:
• degree of access to target language: high proportion of target language speakers to substrate speakers leads to shifting speakers incorporating more of the target language grammar into the creole.
e.g. on Réunion (Indian Ocean), French speakers outnumbered the slaves, but on Mauritius there were fewer French speakers in the development of Isle de France Creole. Réunion Creole displays a significant number of French grammatical categories. Similar contrasts exist between Barbados and Jamaica, and Cape Verde and São Tomé.
• diversity and typological range of the substrate
a homogenous substrate has greater influence on the creole e.g. Gulf of Guinea creoles emerged with slaves speaking Bini (Kwa) and KiKongo (western Bantu) e.g. negative construction with one negative particle before the verb and another at the end of the sentence, mirroring KiKongo.

more diversity means fewer marked features or the emergence of features common to most or all of the substrate languages. Where the substrate languages do not coincide typologically, unmarked features are most likely to emerge

**Markedness in Korlai Portuguese pronouns (Clements 1986)**

Marked features are removed, except where both input languages agree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MIDDLE PORTUGUESE</th>
<th>MARATHI</th>
<th>KORLAI PORTUGUESE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SING</strong></td>
<td><strong>PLUR</strong></td>
<td><strong>SING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 eu</td>
<td>nós</td>
<td>mi amhi (excl.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-FAM tu</td>
<td>vós</td>
<td>tu tumhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-FORM voce</td>
<td>voces</td>
<td>=2pl =1pl incl.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3M ele</td>
<td>eles</td>
<td>to te</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3F ela</td>
<td>ekas</td>
<td>te ti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3N –</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>ti tya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**READING**


**Textbooks on creoles**


**Case studies of creoles**


**More advanced**


