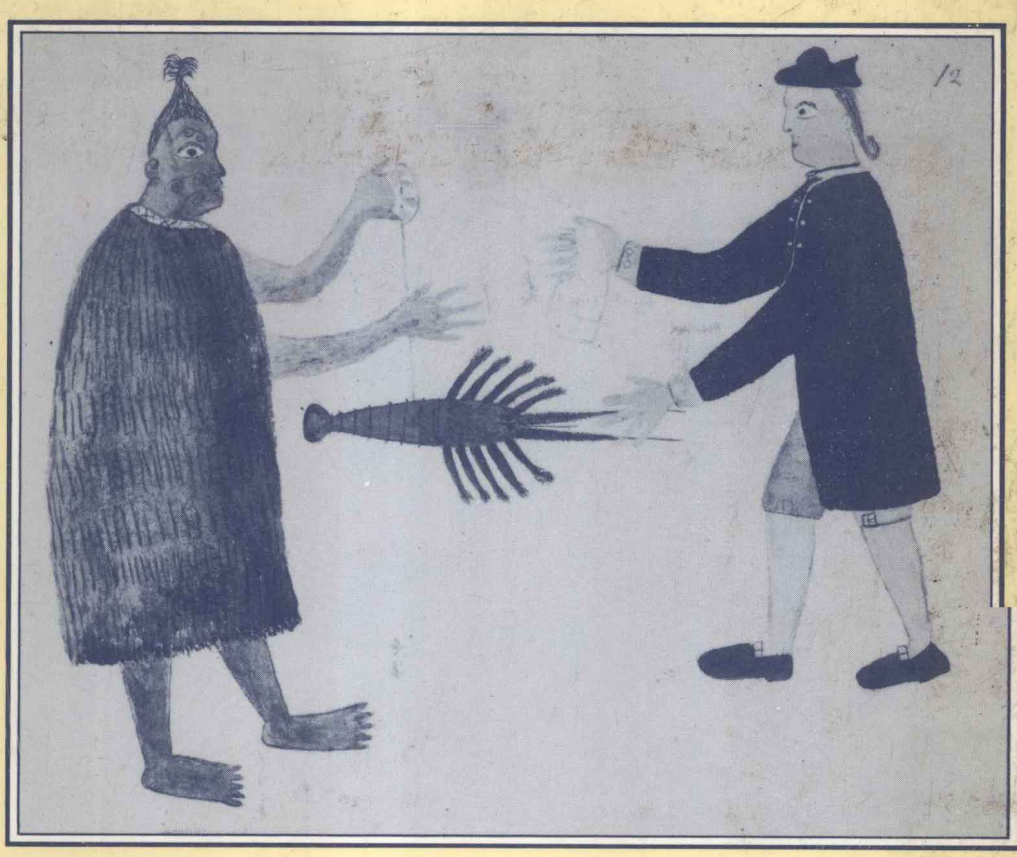

PIDGIN & CREOLE LINGUISTICS

Peter Mühlhäusler

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To Jackie, Beverly and Tim

Editor's Preface

The investigation of pidgin and creole languages offers one of the most exciting of all those areas of study that can be included under the heading of language and society. These languages provide a very clear example of how essential it is to study language within its social matrix if we are to achieve a clearer understanding not only of the social forces at work in language change and development but also of the mental and linguistic factors that are involved. They also give us an opportunity to relate our linguistic studies to the study of social history and geography in a way that is truly interdisciplinary and that has a breadth and scope denied to many of those who are working within more narrowly confined areas of linguistics.

The present book is written by a scholar who knows more than most about pidgin and creole languages and the processes of pidginization and creolization, and one who has gained this knowledge at first hand through extensive and often very difficult fieldwork, as well as through a deep and wide-ranging study of the work of other creolists. His book provides a comprehensive, insightful and up-to-date discussion of all the central theoretical issues connected with pidgin and creole languages: it investigates the often very difficult and controversial problems of terminology; it discusses the history of pidgin and creole study and plots its course from an undervalued and peripheral activity to one that is today at the heart of a number of important linguistic concerns; it investigates the origins and development of pidgin and creole languages from both a social and linguistic point of view; and it relates the findings of linguists working in this field to general linguistic theory. The book will certainly offer novices an excellent introduction to the topic, but the author's original approach and depth of understanding mean that it will also have a lot to say to scholars already working in the area. It is also possible – and most sociolinguists would certainly hope that this will be the case – that theoretical linguists will find there is something for them here too.

Peter Trudgill

Preface

Writers on pidgins and creoles find it difficult to escape from two limitations imposed on them by the very nature of their work. The first involves what Bickerton (1981: 83) has called the First Law of Creole Studies, which reads: 'Every creolist's analysis can be directly contradicted by that creolist's own texts and citations'. Despite my efforts, this law may well be found to apply at some point in this book. A second limitation is what I would like to call the Second Law of Creole Studies: 'Given the choice between neat and untidy data, creolists feel compelled to deal with the latter'. In addition, and this is what makes them invidious to their publishers, creolists tend to insist that whatever argument they put forward should be illustrated with an extensive list of examples. The book you hold in your hands is no exception. Such was its size when the first draft was completed that it was no longer an economically viable proposition. Of the two remedies suggested to me, either to condense the volume as a whole or to drop a few chapters, I have opted for the second strategy as the less painful one. As a consequence, the chapters on the sociology of language, pidgin and creole literature and education have disappeared. What remains is a detailed description of the processes of pidginization, creolization and pidgin and creole development, and a discussion of the major theoretical issues related to these languages. I have not given up hope of publishing my findings in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, and I would not wish to argue for a strict separation of theoretical and applied creolistics. However, the greatest need I perceived in pidgin and creole studies is to clarify what constitutes their dynamic character and to isolate the most important forces underlying it.

The cut-off point for writings considered in this book is about October 1984. Since then some quite significant work has appeared, particularly in the area of substratum grammar and language and identity. However, at the time of writing this introduction, I do not feel that my arguments stand in need of major revision. Since creolistics is almost as dynamic and changing as its subject matter, some such revision will no doubt become necessary eventually and I hope that this book will stimulate such changes.

Acknowledgements

This book is the product of many years of involvement with pidgin and creole languages and it is not possible to mention all those who have influenced my thinking during these years. However, I would like to give particular thanks to Stephen Wurm of the Australian National University, who first provided me with the opportunity to carry out fieldwork on pidgins and creoles and who has encouraged my work in this area ever since. I am grateful to those who influenced my linguistics as teachers and colleagues: Rudie Botha at Stellenbosch, Peter Trudgill at Reading, Don Laycock and Tom Dutton at the Australian National University, C.-J.N. Bailey at the Technische Universität Berlin, and Roy Harris, Tony Bladon and Suzanne Romaine at Oxford. I am indebted to those who have over the years regularly supplied me with their data and writings, in particular Derek Bickerton, Annegret Bollée, Michael Clyne, Manfred Görlach, John Holm, Roger Keesing, Jürgen Meisel, John Rickford, Bruce Rigsby, John Sandefur, Gillian Sankoff, Anna Shnukal, Jeff Siegel among many others. I would also like to thank my mother for supplying me with many hard-to-obtain archival materials on pidgins and creoles, and my wife Jackie for a great deal of advice and editorial help with this book.

The author and publishers would like to express thanks for permission to use the following tables and figures: figures 1.1, 4.1, 6.2 are from R. A. Hall jr., 'How Pidgin English has evolved', which first appeared in 1961 in the *New Scientist*, London, the weekly review of science and technology; figure 1.4 is from Ross Clark, 'In search of Beach-la-Mar', *Teo Reo*, 1979; table 2.1 is taken from D. DeCamp, 'Analysis of a post-creole speech continuum', in D. Hymes (ed.), *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

Above all, I am indebted to my informants in various parts of the Pacific and Australia for their patience and for letting me study their language. It is my hope that this book will be of help to them.

Contents

1

Names and Definitions

> To a creolist, almost everyone else's definition of a creole sounds absurd and arbitrary; yet creolists communicate and collaborate with their colleagues just as Slavicists and Amerindianists do.
>
> (DeCamp: 1977:4)

The term 'pidgin'

When telling a new acquaintance that I have spent most of my academic career studying Pidgin English, this statement is met either with an outburst of laughter or else the question 'Where does the word pidgin originate?' I hope that this book will dispel any notion that the study of pidgin and creole languages is a frivolous waste of time, although I may need several chapters to convince the more sceptical of my readers. My reply to the second reaction is much more straightforward.

There have been a number of proposals as to the etymology of the term 'pidgin'. The more widespread of these include:

1 the definition given by the *OED* of a 'Chinese corruption of English "business"';
2 a Chinese corruption of the Portuguese word *ocupação*: 'business';
3 Hebrew *pidjom*: 'exchange, trade, redemption';
4 Yago (a South American Indian language spoken in an area colonized by Britain) *pidian*: 'people';
5 South Seas pronunciation of English 'beach' (*beachee*) from the location where the language was typically used.

I have come to the conclusion that all of these etymologies may be genuine, the reason being that such a conclusion is most in agreement with the nature of pidgin languages. Because they emerge as vehicles of intercommunication between speakers of many different languages, coincidence of form and similarity of meaning across languages will give a word a high survival rate. I have

found, for instance, that in the early formative years of Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin English), up to 50 per cent of the lexicon could be traced back to more than one language, including the following examples of lexical encounter between English and Tolai:

Tolai	*English*	*Tok Pisin*
atip 'thatched roof'	on top	antap 'on top, roof'
bala 'belly, bowels'	belly	bel 'belly, seat of emotions'
ikilik 'small'	little bit	liklik 'small, little bit'
mari 'pretty'	Mary, marry	meri 'woman'

More than two sources appear to have been involved in some instances. A particularly intriguing case of lexical conflation is that of *sanga* 'pliers, hand of crayfish, forked post, slingshot', which appears to be related to German *Zange* 'pliers', Malay *tiang* 'forked branch' and Australian English *Shanghai* 'slingshot'. Lexical encounters in other pidgins are probably equally numerous, although they have not always been identified. The earliest reports of this phenomenon are by Schuchardt (1979: 30; originally 1909) for the Lingua Franca, where he observes that 'many [Arabic loans] give the impression that they were introduced due to similarity with corresponding Romance forms'. For Eskimo Trade Jargon, Stefánsson observes in the same year on the entry *miluk*:

> This is in a way, an interesting form. The whites who use it consider it a corruption of the English 'milk', while to the Eskimo it is their own word 'mi'-lūk', which refers to any milk (human, caribou, etc.). (Stefánsson 1909: 227)

Other well-known examples include Jamaican Creole *dati* 'dirty', which can be traced back to English 'dirty', and West African Twi *doti* 'dirty', or the term *kanaka* 'black labourer' in Queensland Kanaka English, which some linguists relate to both Polynesian *kanaka* 'human being' and English 'cane hacker'. Australian Kriol *kan* 'can't' has recently been traced to both English 'can't' and Walmajarri *kaya* a 'negative used to express inability', and many similar cases have become known. Sometimes pidgins also develop compounds of dual origin such as Fanakalo *tshisa-stik* (fuse lighter) from Zulu (Z.) *shisa* (set alight, burn) and E. *stick*; *makaza-mbitshan* (cool) from Z. *amakhaja* (cold) and Afrikaans (A.) *bietjie* (slightly); *tshisa-mbitshan* (warm from Z. *shisa* (burn) and *mbitshan*; *sokismude* (stocking) from E. *socks* and Z. *omude* (long). Such compounds are reminiscent of those produced by some bilingual children.[1]

Lexical encounters and mutual reinforcement may continue throughout the history of a pidgin. I have met many speakers of Tok Pisin who insisted that the name of the language meant 'language of the birds' (from English 'pigeon'), because it was given to human beings by birds, a very common account of the origin of languages throughout Melanesia.

A name, as we shall see shortly, is not in itself a reliable indicator of the existence of a language, language form or any other linguistic entity. Pidgin languages were used long before the label 'pidgin' was invented (in 1850 according to the *OED*). Examples of such early pidgins include Mediterranean Sabir or Lingua Franca, Pidgin Portuguese of West Africa, and an as yet ill-documented plantation pidgin spoken in medieval Cyprus. Indeed, little is known about the many contact pidgins in use in the countries of the Third World before the arrival of the European colonizers. As regards the label 'pidgin', even today it is not used with consistency. In the speech of non-specialists, it overlaps with terms such as 'lingua franca', 'argot', 'sabir', 'patois' or 'koine', and the definitions and delimitations given by professional linguists also differ. This, I feel, should not upset us, for it is the common fate of everyday expressions which assume a more specialist meaning within a field of scientific inquiry. The vagueness of the term 'pidgin' is thus no different from that of other metalinguistic labels, such as 'text', 'sentence', 'construction' or 'topic', as can easily be ascertained by consulting one of the numerous lexicons or encyclopaedias of linguistics. For the time being, however, I suggest we accept the popular view of a pidgin as a structurally reduced trade language. How this popular definition is elaborated in the scholarly discussion of pidgin languages will be the topic of the next section.

Terminological issues: 'pidgin'

Pidgin studies have suffered for a long time from terminological and definitional problems, as has been discussed by Mühlhäusler (1974: 11–25) and Samarin (1975). Since definitions often determine the direction of research, it would seem profitable to look at some of them in more detail. The term 'pidgin' has been defined, among other things, as:

> A variety whose grammar and vocabulary are very much reduced . . . The resultant language must be native to no one. (Bloomfield 1933: 474)

> A language which has arisen as the result of contact between peoples of different languages, usually formed from mixing of the languages. (Unesco 1963: 46)

> The vocabulary is mainly provided by the language spoken by upper stratum [*sic*] of a mixed society, adapted by the lower stratum to the grammar and morphology of their original language. (Adler 1977: 12)

> the grammatical structure has been simplified very much beyond what we find in any of the languages involved in their [pidgins'] making. (Jespersen 1922: 227)

> Two or more people use a language in a variety whose grammar and vocabulary are very much reduced in extent and which is native to neither side. Such a language is a 'pidgin'. (Hall 1966: xii)

> It [i.e. Pidgin English] is a corrupted form of English, mixed with many morsels from other languages and it is adapted to the mentality of the natives; therefore words tend to be simply concatenated and conjunction and declension are avoided. (Baessler 1895: 23–4, translated from German)

Note that there are a number of problems with such definitions. First, those who stress the makeshift character of pidgins – a 'supplementary tongue for special forms of intercourse' (Reinecke 1964: 537) – ignore the fact that pidgins can develop to a considerable degree of stability and complexity.

Second, there is a tendency to confuse simplification (greater grammatical regularity) with impoverishment (lack of referential and non-referential power). There is also considerable uncertainty as to whether simplification is greatest in incipient or extended pidgins. Studies in the area of interlanguage (e.g. Corder 1976; Traugott 1977: 132–62) have drawn attention to the insufficiency of the notion of simplification (or simplicity) in some pidgin and creole studies. The complex problem as to the relationship between simplification in the sense of rule generalization, on the one hand, and naturalness and markedness, on the other, cannot be solved here. However, data from developing pidgins support the view that impoverishment and simplification are inversely related: as the referential and non-referential power of a language increases, so its content must become more structured. A basic jargon used to exchange information in a limited contextual domain does not need structure. In its initial phase it is little more than a list of phrases or lexical irregularities. We thus get the following picture:

incipient pidgin	maximally impoverished	minimally simple
	↓	↓
	fully expanded	maximally simple
developed pidgin		(regular)

One can therefore no longer uphold Agheyisi's view that:

> It is possible that most of the factors which contribute to the development of the simplified variety known as the pidgin are most active during the pidginization process. This process is said to extend chronologically from the period of initial language contact through the stage when the resulting pidginized speech becomes sufficiently regularized and stabilized. (Agheyisi 1971: 24)

The third problem to note is that pidgins are not mixed languages in the sense most often intended. It appears that the most mixed component of grammar is the lexicon, where syncretisms of various types are common, and not syntax. In addition, mixing at the syntactic and morphological levels is virtually absent in the formative phase of pidgins and becomes more important only after stabilization and considerable expansion have taken place. It is most pronounced in the post-pidgin phase, that is when a pidgin comes into renewed contact with its original lexifier language.

Finally, pidgins are classified and often defined as being based on a principal lexifier language, typically the language spoken by the socially dominant group. Two objections can be levelled against this view (for a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Walsh 1984). As pointed out by Dennis and Scott (1975: 2), 'we will avoid calling the creoles "English-based" or "Portuguese-based" etc., since we can see no grounds for deciding that the lexicon is the base of the language, as opposed to the semantic–syntactic framework of the language.' The second objection is that the mixed or compromise character of pidgin lexicons is typically ignored.

In view of the above considerations, I would like to propose a new definition of pidgin:

> Pidgins are examples of partially targeted or non-targeted second-language learning, developing from simpler to more complex systems as communicative requirements become more demanding. Pidgin languages by definition have no native speakers, they are social rather than individual solutions, and hence are characterized by norms of acceptability.

Implicit in this definition is the assumption that there are qualitatively different stages in the development of a pidgin. These have been given labels by a number of scholars. Here follow my own preferred labels, side by side with others commonly in use:

jargon	pre-pidgin, multilingual idiolect, secondary hybrid
↓	
stable pidgin	pidgin, basilectal pidgin, tertiary hybrid
↓	
expanded pidgin	extended pidgin
↓	
creole	

The term 'creole'

The origins of the term 'creole' are not much less complex than those of 'pidgin'. According to Valkhoff (1966: 38–46), it is widely held that the word

originated in one of Portugal's colonies in the sixteenth century. Both form and meaning suggest an etymology *criar* 'to nurse, breed, nourish', but there may also have been reinforcement from another, as yet unknown, source language. Originally the meaning of *criolho* was 'slave in European employment, particularly around the house, white man or woman originating from the colonies', but the word has since adopted a number of additional meanings. Its most common meaning in English, according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, is '(descendant of) European or Negro settler in W. Indies, or stemming from these areas' and is used with nouns referring to something like 'exotic' or 'spicy'.

Perhaps the linguistic layman's most common association with the term creole is that of mixture of culture and race, and it is commonly assumed that linguistic mixture goes hand in hand with these.

The terminological debate in creole linguistics

Problems with the linguistic definition of creoles are legion and many of the central issues remain unresolved. The uninitiated reader will probably agree with Givón's (1979: 4) characterization of creole studies as something like a 'mythological safari across the equally mythological African jungle of lore' and will find them 'liberally strewn with boobytraps and quicksands of idiosyncratic linguistic features'. Still, it would seem that the numerous characterizations and definitions of creole can be reduced to three major types:

1 creoles are regarded as mixed languages typically associated with cultural and often racial mixture;
2 creoles are defined as pidgin languages (second languages) that have become the first language of a new generation of speakers;
3 creoles are reflections of a natural bioprogram for human language which is activated in cases of imperfect language transmission (cf. Bickerton 1981).

As in the case of the definition of 'pidgin', both social and linguistic aspects tend to be found in the above categories. Let us now consider each type in some more detail.

In discussing the question whether English is a creole language, Bailey and Maroldt (1977) state: 'by creolization the authors wish to indicate gradient mixture of two or more languages; in a narrow sense, a creole is the result of mixing which is substantial enough to result in a new system, a system that is separate from its antecedent parent system' (1975: 21). A number of researchers, including Bailey and Maroldt, have concluded from their assessment of the role of mixing in the emergence of Middle English from Anglo-Saxon that English is indeed a creole. Very similar arguments have been put

forward in the case of Italian as spoken in the USA (Haller 1981: 181–94) and in the case of Afrikaans, a Dutch-derived language spoken in Southern Africa. Valkhoff (1966: 26) increased the controversiality of the debate by declaring that there is 'an ancient relation between miscegenation and creolization', implying that Afrikaans developed in the context of intense racial mixture in the early years of Dutch colonization of the Cape. This view was understandably unpopular with the large group of white pro-apartheid speakers of Afrikaans, who prefer to regard their language as a continuation of white dialects of Dutch (cf. Raidt 1983). In discussing issues such as these, we should heed Schuchardt's cautionary remarks on the relationship between linguistic and racial mixture:

> Linguistic mixture tends to be connected with a more or less pronounced mixture of culture. With the crossing of races, which at least has no influence upon the latter, it coincides only externally; or, to express myself more cautiously, it is not associated in any demonstrable degree with it. (Schuchardt 1889b: 508)

Indeed, inasmuch as pidgins and creoles develop as indicators of social distance between members of two different races (as they have done over and over again), one is tempted to suspect that large-scale racial mixture tends to discourage the development of creoles.

Leaving aside the problem of correlating linguistic with social factors, there is another issue which has not as yet been addressed by the proponents of the equation creolization equals language mixing: that is, the possibility that not every linguistic consequence of linguistic encounters is alike. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that one is dealing with many different types of language mixing, some increasing and some decreasing the naturalness of the affected linguistic systems.[2]

A creole, according to the second definition, is a pidgin that has acquired a community of native speakers. This occurs, for instance, when parents from different linguistic backgrounds communicate among themselves and with their offspring in a makeshift pidgin, which is elaborated and adopted as a means of intercommunication by the next generation. Thus the children in this situation: are exposed to imperfect, reduced language input; elaborate this input using new grammatical devices gleaned from internal resources, that is, by appealing to their innate linguistic knowledge; and eventually speak a language that is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from that spoken by their parents and, in many cases, not intelligible to them.

Creolization in this sense thus appears to be an ideal test case for claims about the nature of the human language acquisition device and universal linguistic knowledge. It can be represented schematically as follows: