



Pidgin & Creole Languages

SUZANNE ROMAINE

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Suzanne Romaine



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Pidgin and Creole Languages

SUZANNE ROMAINE

Preface

This book is about pidgin and creole languages. In writing it, I had a number of aims and audiences in mind. In Chapter 1 I explain why the study of pidgins and creoles is of major concern to linguists. Chapters 2 to 5 describe the linguistic features of these languages and the dynamic developments that bring them into being and lead to changes in their structure. These chapters can be read by anyone who wants an introduction to the subject and who has an elementary knowledge of linguistics. Chapters 6 and 7 place these languages within the context of current issues of central concern to linguistic theory; namely, language acquisition, universals and change. This reflects my own reasons for being interested in these languages. At the risk of being egocentric, I would argue that linguists who study pidgin and creole languages cannot afford to neglect research on language acquisition (both first and second), and vice versa. Historical linguistics should not dismiss these areas of research either. These two chapters are rather more difficult. I hope they will be of interest to researchers in language acquisition as well as to creolists and historical linguists.

Pidgins and creoles are spoken mainly in Third World countries. Their role and function there is intimately connected with a variety of political questions concerned with national, social and economic development and the problems of transition into a post-colonial society (*cf eg* Hall 1972 and Samarin 1980). My main difficulty in writing this book lay in deciding whether to deal with some of the more social issues at the expense of more theoretical ones. The former merit a book in their own right. Valdman (1978) has managed to treat both theoretical and social issues relating to the French-based creoles, but in a book

considerably larger than this one. Due to limitations of space, I have unfortunately had to neglect some of the more sociolinguistic aspects of these languages (*cf* however Ch. 8). Although I have tried to provide samples from a wide range of pidgins and creoles, inevitably I have stuck close to the languages I know best in illustrating basic points.

At the time of writing, the question of how large a role creative innovation, transmission or continuity of pidgin structures, or borrowing plays in creole formation has not been resolved. The bioprogram hypothesis proposed by Bickerton (1981a) has figured prominently in discussions of creole origins. In Chapter 7 I have given a review of the research relating to this issue. However, only time will tell how important the research generated by this question will remain in the history of the field.

There are a number of people who have aided me during the preparation of this book, whose help I would like to acknowledge. I am grateful to the series editors R. H. Robins and Martin Harris for suggesting that I write this book. It has forced me to bring together in a fruitful way some of my various research interests over the past few years. I would also like to acknowledge a number of sources of help and encouragement in connection with my research on Tok Pisin, some of which is discussed in this book. The Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistik in Nijmegen provided the primary financial support for this research project [A sociolinguistic study of creolization, language acquisition and change in Tok Pisin], which is still on-going. The results of the first phase are discussed in Romaine and Wright (1986). I received a lot of encouragement and practical help from the Institute directors, W. J. M. Levelt and Wolfgang Klein. The project was conceived while I was a research scientist at the Institute and was launched in cooperation with the Max-Planck-Institut für Verhaltensphysiologie in Seewiesen. Additional financial support was provided by the English Faculty Board of Oxford University and the Higher Studies Fund of Merton College.

Various people in Papua New Guinea were of assistance. I am very grateful to the Papua New Guinea University of Technology for providing me with a research base, accommodation and transport. I would like to thank in particular Moseley Moramoro, the Vice-Chancellor, for allowing me to be attached to the University as a visiting research fellow, and Stewart Marshall for providing facilities in the Department of Language and Communication Studies. The Department was a congenial atmosphere for my

work. I would also like to thank Geoff Smith, John Swan, Geraldine Terry and Robynne Walsh in that department for their help. I am also grateful to Sael Misilagen for providing technical assistance and Jill Bebe for helping out with some difficulties in transcription. There were many others from other departments and branches of the university who aided me, whom I would like to thank: Lorna Moramoro provided an introduction to Taraka School; Bob Johns of the Forestry Department helped with the fieldwork in Bulolo; Doug Mackrell of the Department of Civil Engineering assisted with the fieldwork in Indagen and Sid Patchett, head librarian, allowed me to distribute Asia Foundation materials to schools where I worked. These were much appreciated. I am also very grateful to the headmasters who cooperated so willingly with the research: Mr Kaengeri of Taraka School, Mr Elok of Indagen School and Mr Apo of Hompiri School. I owe thanks too to all the teachers who assisted me, in particular, Mrs Boni Vue of Taraka School. Brian Peters of Talair kindly organized travel within Papua New Guinea. It goes almost without saying that I am indebted to all those speakers of Tok Pisin who took part in the study, but I owe a great debt to Sali Bafinu and his family who acted as guides and hosts in Indagen village. Mi laik tokim tenkyu tumas long en na long ol lain bilong en. I would also like to thank the Provincial Government of Morobe Province for granting me permission to conduct research in the province, and in particular, I am grateful for the help of Benson Nablu.

The final stages of the book were written at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, while I was teaching in the Department of English as a Second Language. Various people there provided both practical assistance and intellectual stimulus. I am particularly grateful to Charlie Sato for my knowledge of various aspects of Hawaii pidgin and creole English, and for access to a number of data sources. Byron Bender of the Linguistics Department allowed me to use computer facilities. Mrs Au of the Pacific Collection at the Sinclair Library of the University of Hawaii made available for consultation John Reinecke's collection of pidgin and creole materials. I would also like to thank Martha Pennington for enlightening discussions on a number of topics related to this book. I am also grateful to Roger Andersen for comments on the issues in Chapter 7. I would like to thank too Joseph P. Balaz for contributing the poem on *Da History of Pigeon* which appears in Chapter 3. I am grateful also to Bob Le Page for comments.

At Oxford I am most indebted to my colleagues Peter

Mühlhäusler and Fiona Wright. To the former I owe my interest in Tok Pisin. I have benefited a great deal from many discussions with him about the language and a variety of related issues in linguistic theory. He also made available a draft of his book on pidgins and creoles (1986). Fiona Wright, who collaborated in the Tok Pisin research, provided personal and intellectual support as well as unlimited good cheer when it was needed under what were at times rather arduous field conditions.

Suzanne Romaine
Oxford, September 1986

For Roger

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the study of pidgins and creoles

In his speech to the English-Speaking Union Conference in Ottawa (29 Oct. 1958) the Duke of Edinburgh made reference to Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin English), in observing that 'I am referred to in that splendid language as "Fella bilong Mrs Queen"' (Cohen and Cohen 1971:67). This book will deal with a group of languages which linguists call pidgins and creoles, and some of the issues arising from their study.

It would be logical to begin a book on pidgins and creoles by offering definitions of these languages; however, this is easier said than done. Although all scholars would agree that there is such a group of languages, perhaps one of the biggest disputes at present among those who study them centres on how they are to be defined, how they originated and what their relationship is to one another. It is partly for this reason that research in this area is at the moment one of the most exciting and rapidly growing fields of linguistics. Indeed, some now refer to a field of study called **creolistics** (*cf eg* Mühlhäusler 1985d).¹

Although pidgins and creoles were long the neglected step-children of linguistics because they were thought to be marginal, and not 'real' full-fledged languages, they have now emerged as the centre of attention for a number of reasons. In fact, one creolist, Bickerton (1981a) believes that creoles hold the key to understanding how human languages originally evolved many centuries ago. But even as early as 1914 Schuchardt (who is regarded as the founder of the field of pidgin and creole studies *cf* 1.2) noted that the significance of creoles for general linguistics was not fully appreciated.

If we pause to think for a moment of the circumstances in which pidgin languages arise, (by comparison with so-called

'natural' languages) very suddenly in contact situations, where they are used by speakers with different language backgrounds to fulfill certain basic communicative functions (eg trade), it is not hard to imagine that their rise, spread and development should reveal things of interest for linguists concerned with language acquisition, language change and universal grammar.

Hymes (1971:84), for example, describes pidginization and creolization as complex processes of sociolinguistic change. Pidginization involves reduction of linguistic resources and restriction of use, while creolization involves expansion along both these dimensions. Bickerton (1977a) has more recently characterized both pidginization and creolization as processes of acquisition under restricted conditions. In pidginization the acquisition process involves the learning of a second language by speakers of different language backgrounds who have limited access to the language of the dominant group. In creolization the restricted input occurs as part of the first language acquisition process. Bickerton's (1981a) hypothesis is that under such conditions children have recourse to innate universals which govern the process of expansion of the pidgin into a fully adequate native language. Thus, one can justify treating both pidgins and creoles as related phenomena. Both involve developing systems which arise in different contexts of language acquisition (*cf* Chs 6 and 7)

Another kind of link between these languages is historical. Hall (1966), for instance, includes a pidgin origin as an essential feature of creoles. He elaborated the notion of a linguistic life cycle, discussed in Chapter 4, linking the development of pidgins and creoles. Others such as Bickerton, however, have been concerned to identify creole features which have no origin in a prior pidgin stage (*cf* Ch. 2) My discussion in Chapter 2 of various attempts to define and type pidgin and creole languages in terms of shared features shows that there is a great deal of overlap between the two. Chapter 3 treats theories of origin, while Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate the dynamic nature of developments which characterize the pidgin-creole life cycle.

1.1 Some introductory issues and problems

My introductory anecdote about the Duke of Edinburgh's encounter with Tok Pisin serves as a convenient point of departure for some of the theoretical issues to be dealt with in subsequent chapters. There is some truth and falsehood in his remarks.

Elsewhere in his speech the Duke wrongly includes pidgin as a dialect of English. In doing so, however, he touches on some issues of interest to those who study pidgins and creoles: namely, whether these languages are to be regarded as dialects (*ie* socially and linguistically subordinate varieties) of the language which appears to contribute most of their lexicon (*ie* the superstrate, lexifier language or lexical base). In this case, for instance, the question would be whether Tok Pisin is a dialect of English, on a par with say, Scottish English, or whether it is a language in its own right (*cf eg* Chambers and Trudgill 1980 on the problem of defining the terms **language** and **dialect**). From a linguistic point of view part of the problem in coming to a decision on this matter lies in the fact that the vocabulary of a pidgin is usually drawn primarily from the prestige language of the dominant group in a situation of language contact. Its grammar, however, retains many features of the native languages of the subordinate groups. The prestige language which supplies the bulk of the vocabulary is the one which is usually thought of as being pidginized, hence, the name Pidgin English for Tok Pisin and Chinese Pidgin English etc. (*cf* 1.3).

The process of pidginization, as I will argue, involves some universal principles for putting together linguistic material of different origins by speakers trying to communicate over linguistic barriers. Schuchardt addressed these and other questions fairly early, but concluded that in the case of creoles we are dealing with independent systems. Questions about the relatedness of creoles, in particular, to their superstrate languages are still a concern of the field, *eg* in the debate about Black English in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (*cf* 5.4). Schuchardt included Black English in the category of creole languages.

Thus, the Duke is right in this quotation to refer to Tok Pisin as a language. He is, interestingly, wrong about his designation; he would be referred to as **man bilong (misis) kwin**.

There is, however, still a bit more I can add to the anecdote at this stage, and that is to note the increasing anglicization of some varieties of Tok Pisin through renewed contact with English. Thus, it is probably more likely that the Duke of Edinburgh would be referred to in this kind of Tok Pisin as the **Duke of Edinburgh** or perhaps the **Duke bilong Edinburgh**. In fact, Hall (1966:45) noted the 'weird mixture' in the following report of the Duke's arrival in Rabaul:

Today i bikpela de bilong ol i welcomim Duke of Edinburgh i kamap long aerodrome bilong citi Rabaul.

He says that in 'normal' Melanesian, this should be:

Tude i bikpela de bilong ol i heloim Dyuk bilong Edinboro i kamap long ples balus bilong siti Rabaul.

'Today is the big day for all to welcome the Duke of Edinburgh to Rabaul airport.'

Hall remarks (1966:45-6) that:

Dyuk 'Duke' and *Edinboro* 'Edinburgh' would presumably be inevitable loanwords in any case, but the phrase *Duke of Edinburgh* is a crass Anglicism, as are also *welcomim* for normal *heloim* 'to greet', and *aerodrome* for *ples balus* 'airport'; and *today* and *city* are Anglicised spellings for normal *tude* and *siti*.

These kinds of developments will be discussed in Chapter 4.

1.2 Early studies in pidgin and creole languages: a brief history of the field

The study of pidgin and creole languages goes back more than a century. DeCamp (1971a:31) and others recognize Schuchardt as the greatest of the early scholars and the founding father of the field. Schuchardt (1842-1927) is more generally known for his contributions to Romance philology and Basque studies, but within the field of pidgin and creole studies he is known for a series of papers entitled *Kreolische Studien* published in the 1880s. Significant studies have continued to appear since that time. For example, Hesseling's (1897) controversial study of Afrikaans, which claimed creole ancestry for the language, deals with issues which are still being debated today (*cf eg* Markey 1982, and 2.9). Linguistic descriptions of Capeverdean Crioulo also date from the latter part of the nineteenth century, when Coelho published a series of three articles on what he called the **Romance** or **Neo-Latin** dialects of Africa, Asia and America. This study inspired two further descriptions by native speakers, also published at the end of the century (Costa and Duarte 1886 and Brito 1887). Brito's study is actually written in Capeverdean Crioulo with an accompanying translation into Portuguese. Studies of pidgin and creoles written by native speakers of these languages are rare today (*cf* however, Silva 1985 and Rickford 1979 for two examples). As far as I know, no scholarly treatments have been written by native speakers in their own languages except for Brito (1887) and Veiga (1984) on Capeverdean. One volume which deserves mention, even though it is not written by native speakers, is the special issue of **Kivung**