

## Pidgins and Creoles

Limited contact between languages occurs where explorers, missionaries or merchants make irregular visits. In such situations there are 3 solutions to bridging the communication gap:

1. learn the language of the other community

2. use a third language—a **lingua franca**

The term ‘lingua franca’ derives from medieval trade language used in the Mediterranean based on Romance languages (Italian, French & Spanish with elements of Greek & Arabic)

English is the most widely used lingua franca today

French once the lingua franca of diplomacy

Latin & Greek served as lingua francas of christianity

Swahili is the trade language of East Africa

Hindi & Urdu are the lingua francas of India & Pakistan respectively

3. make up a new language—mix languages together to form a **pidgin**

This is why pidgins are considered ‘grammarless’ or ‘broken’ forms of other languages

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* once defined pidgin English as ‘an unruly bastard jargon, filled with nursery imbecilities, vulgarisms and corruptions’

The textbook states that in the **prepidgin jargon** stage ‘there is little or no consistent grammar and rampant variation among speakers.’ The jargon becomes **crystallized** when the speakers establish grammatical conventions.

The conception of pidgins as lesser languages leads to movements to eradicate them.

The pidgin spoken in New Zealand by Maori was replaced through massive education in standard English.

Chinese pidgin English was forbidden in China and died out.

These prejudices miss the virtues of pidgins.

**Tok Pisin** serves the role of a lingua franca in New Guinea where there are over 500 mutually unintelligible languages.

English, and the other Germanic languages display some simplified features that preserve some characteristics of a pidgin phase in their development

Most importantly, pidgins demonstrate how principles of Universal Grammar can operate in languages with restricted lexicons of ~500 words. Pidgins demonstrate the same generative features found in other languages.

Contact situations may differ in terms of the **prestige** or social power of the language speakers.

Where the speakers of the two languages have equal prestige, their languages are in an **adstratal** relationship. The contact between English and Norse in England resulted in an adstratal

relationship.

Where speakers of the two languages have unequal prestige, the language of the dominant group is the **superstratum language** while the language of the group with less prestige is the **substratum language**.

The words in pidgin languages usually come from the superstratum language.

Tok Pisin has about 1500 lexical items; ~80% come from English

There are exceptions:

**Kitchen Swahili** (East Africa) was used to communicate with servants in British colonies.

The best way to understand the expressive capabilities of a pidgin is to look at a text.

See Jay Powell 'Chinook Jargon' IJAL 56.

**Chinook Jargon** was a pidgin that developed among the Native American tribes of the Pacific Northwest and was passed along to British and French traders in the nineteenth century. Lower Chinook contributed most of the words to this pidgin language.

Powell's article looks at the words that never made it into dictionaries

- a. **regionalisms** not found in wider areas
- b. English and French **loans**—not considered 'proper' jargon
- c. '**crude**' vocabulary—body reference, sexual slang
- d. Jargon **argot**—confined to religion, clothing and food
- e. Jargon used by Indians

Powell collected data from speeches, jokes, plays (1 opera!), letters, advertisements, sermons, bible translations and transcripts of Jargon conversations.

There are still a few people who can converse in Chinook Jargon today.

Speakers draw on any available resources, even other languages, if they know hearers will understand their message

There is no real limit to what constitutes the 'real' Jargon

Even though Chinook Jargon only has ~500 words it contains many synonyms:

English	French	Chinook
apple, haplis	lapome	powitsh
aunt	(la)tant	kwalh
cup	latahs	ooskan
wiskee		lum
tumtum		etshum
		yakala, chakchak 'eagle'

You'll have to look up the article to find out what the 'crude' vocabulary is.

## A lesson in Chinook Jargon (Jay Powell)

### Lesson 1 "Siwash pee Boston"

Boston: Klahowya, tillikum nika  
 Siwash: Klahowya. Kahta mika?  
 Boston: Hyas kloshe nika. Kahta mika?  
 Siwash: Wake kloshe nika.  
     Hyas sick nika okoke sun.  
 Boston: Sick tumtum nika.  
 Siwash: Alta coolie nika kopa takta.  
 Boston: Kloshe. Klahowya.  
 Siwash: Klahowya, tillicum.

"Hello, my friend."  
 "Hi. How are you?"  
 "I'm very well. How are you?"  
 "I'm not well."  
 "I'm very sick today."  
 "I'm sorry (lit. my heart is sick)."  
 "I'm going to the doctor (now)."  
 "Good (Ok). Goodbye."  
 "Goodbye, friend."

### Vocabulary:

alta /altə/ 'now'  
 boston /bahstən/ 'white'  
 coolie /kuli/ 'to run, walk, go' (< Fr courir)  
 hyas /haiyəs/ 'very' (< Ch hyiu 'much') hyak 'fast'  
 kahta /kahtəh/ 'how, how much, when, where'  
 klahowya /kləhowyəh/ 'hello, goodbye'  
 kloshe /klosh, klush/ 'good, well, pretty tasty'  
 kopa /kopəh/ 'to, for, by, at, in ...'  
 mash /maf/ 'leave' (<Fr. marcher)  
 mika /maikəh/ 'you, your, yours (sing.)'  
 nika /naikəh/ 'I, me, my, mine'  
 okoke /okuk/ 'this, that, the'  
 opitsah /opitsəh/ 'knife'

sicks, sikhs, six /sɪks/ 'friend'  
 opitah yaka sikhs 'friend of knife' (=fork)  
 sick /sɪk/ 'sick'  
 sitkum /sɪtkəm/ 'half'  
 siwash /siwəʃ/ 'Indian'  
 spose /spoz/ 'suppose'  
 sun /sʌn/ 'sun, day, daylight, 24 hour period'  
 takta /taktəh/ 'doctor'  
 tillikum /tɪl.ɪə.kəm/ 'friend, people'  
 tumtum 'heart, soul, center of emotions'  
 wake /wek/ 'no, not'  
 waum sick col sick 'fever and chills'  
 nihwa- 'let's' (< nawitka?)

hyiu muckamuck 'place to eat'

muckamuck chuk 'eat water' (=drink)

### Pronouns

1 nika 4 nesika  
 2 mika 5 mesika  
 3 yaka 6 klaska

### Tense Markers

alta 'now'  
 alki (bymby) 'future'  
 ahnkuttie 'sometime ago'

### Numbers

ikt, iks 1	taghum 6
maks 2	sinamokst 7
klone 3	stotekin 8
lakhit 4	kwaist 9
kwinnum 5	tahtlum 10

Pronoun	Independent form	Suffix form	Example	Meaning
I	nika	na-	na-chako	'I come'
you	mika	ma-	ma-wawa	'you talk'
he, she	yaka	ya-	ya-mamook	'he/she makes'
we	nesika	ntsa-	ntsa-kow	'we tie'
you all	mesika	mtsa-	mtsa-klatawa	'you all go'
they	klaska	klas-	klas-klap	'they arrive'

There is one object suffix:

them	klaska	-klas	na-elahan-klas	'I help them'
			ntsa-kow-klas	'we tie them'
			klas-kopet-klas	'they stop them'

The demonstrative pronoun is also abbreviated and used as a prefix:

this/that	okokey	uk-	uk-ya-klootchman	'that wife of his'
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### Compound Words

alta-na-lolo-klas	now-I-carry-them	'I'm carrying them'
alki-ntsa-elahan-klas	future-we-help-them	'We'll help them'
waka-pos-ya-klatawa	neg-suppose-he-go	'He shouldn't go'
pos-wake-na-klatawa	suppose-neg-I-go	'I shouldn't go'
kopa-uk-ma-chope	to-that_one-you-grandfather	'to your grandfather'

**Text** (Melville Jacobs 'Notes on the structure of Chinook Jargon', Language (1932) 8.45-48)

Klas-mitlait ikt-lamai pee-ya-tenas-ya-tenas. Uk-tenas-klootchman  
They-lived, one-old\_lady and-her-grandchild. That-girl-little

kwonesum ya-klatawa hokometl lacamas. Kwonesum ya-chako kilapee  
always she-went to\_gather camas. Always she-came returned (home)

kopa-klas-house. Alta-ya-piah uk-lacamas. Alta-ya-potlatch-klas  
to-their-house. Then-she-baked the-camas. Then-she-gave-them

kopa-ya-chitsh. Alta-pos-klas-muckamuck. Tomolla-weght  
to-her-grandmother. Then-suppose-they-eat. The next day also

ya-klatawa hokometl lacamas. Alta-pos-ya-chako kilapee kopa-klas-house  
she-went to gather camas. Then-when-she-came home to-their-house

alta-pos-ya-potlatch-klas kopa-uk-ya-chitsh. Kwonesum kahkwa ya-mamook.  
then-suppose-she-give-them to-that-her-grandmother. Always thus she-did.

Alta ikt-sun uk-lamai ya-kloshe-mamook-iktaikta. Ya-mamook-baloom  
Then one-day that-old\_woman she-well-prog-clean. She-prog-weep

wake-siah kopa-klas-piah. Ya-klap uk-lacamas ya-skin. Hyas uk-skin.  
note-far from-their-fire. She-find that-camas its-skin. big that-skin.

It can be difficult to identify the source of the grammatical features in pidgin languages. Although English contributed most of the vocabulary to Solomon Islands Pidgin, many of its grammatical features come from the Oceanic substrate languages. Consider the transitive marker /-im/ on verbs:

Solomons Pidgin	Gloss	Kwaio (Oceanic)
luk	look	aga
luk-im	see something	aga-si-
hamar	pound, hammer	gumu
hamar-im	pound, hammer something	gumu-ri-
sut	shoot	fana
sut-im	shoot something	fana-si-

mi no luk-im pikipiki bulong iu  
 I not see-TV pig belong you  
 'I didn't see your pig(s).'

## Creole Languages

In some situations pidgin languages become common enough to be passed on to children. This **nativization** process distinguishes pidgins and creoles. Most creole languages came into being on plantations that used slaves drawn from different language communities. Hawaiian Creole English, the Caribbean creoles, Torres Straits Creole and Tok Pisin are examples of languages that seem to have emerged in this way. These Type 1 creole languages emerged from unstable, rudimentary jargons.

Derek Bickerton claims that the language acquisition process is responsible for the grammatical features that are found in the widely dispersed Type 1 creole languages:

BASE FORM	Hawaiian Creole	Haitian Creole	Sranan
he walked/s	He walk	Li maché	A waka
ANT(erior)			
he had walked	He bin walk	Li té maché	A ben waka
IRR(eal)			
he would/will walk	He go walk	L'av(a) maché	A sa waka
NON(punctual)			
he is/was walking	He stay walk	L'ap maché	A e waka
ANT + IRR			
he would have walked	He bin go walk	Li t'av(a) maché	A ben sa waka
ANT + NON			
he was/had been walking	He bin stay walk	Li t'ap maché	a ben e waka
IRR + NON			
he will/would be walking	He go stay walk	L'av ap maché	A sa e waka

Different substrate languages contributed to these creoles. Sranan (spoken in Surinam) and Haitian Creole had a substrate derived from African languages, while Hawaiian Creole had a substrate derived from various Philippine languages and Japanese.

One problem with Bickerton's account is that it is inconsistent with basic features of the acquisition process (Paula Shaver, pc). Children learning English commonly omit subject pronouns and auxiliary verbs in addition to tense markers.

An alternative explanation would be that these features are due to a common linguistic tradition shared by the managers of the plantations in these different settings.

## **References**

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