

The Origin of Creoles

¹Helen Ugbogbo & ²Magdalene Akwemoh

^{1&2}General Studies Unit, Edo State Polytechnic, Usen.
Edo State. Email:ugbogbohelen@gmail

KEY WORDS

origin, Creole,
Pidgin, language
and
communication

ABSTRACT

Pidgin and Creoles are languages of communicative convenience that may arise from language contact, mixing, minimization of communicative process of a language or may develop separately. Creoles is a standardized pidgin. There are divergence of opinion amongst scholars on some aspects of origins, functions, transition process of Pidgin to Creole and sometimes a Creoles or Pidgin may become extinct in some communities when necessary to adopt another language by a process of de-creolization. Pidgin, initially thought to be a corrupted version of a standard language of a dominant trade group, more insights have arisen from research on origin, peculiarities, expanded functions, scope of acceptability and mode of transitions of this seemingly limited variety of languages to standard versions. The paper explores issues of origin, peculiarities, functions, mode of transitions and associated relevant theories or assertions on developments of Pidgin and Creole.

Introduction

To understand the pidgin and Creole origins issue, we need to have some idea of what pidgins and creoles are, and for this, we will draw on Rickford and McWhorter. "Pidgins and creoles are new varieties of language generated in situations of language contact...."(238). Some generally fairly limited anecdotal accounts of pidgins and creoles were written by travelers, administrators and missionaries as long ago as the early sixteenth century. Although some early reports were written with the explicit aim -of teaching Europeans something about the structure of a pidgin or Creole so that they could use it to communicate with its speakers, the serious study of pidgins and creoles began with Schuchardt's series of papers on Creole studies. *Kreolische Studien*, published in the 1880s(Schuchardt 1882, 1883), and Schuchardt (1842-1927) is regarded by many as the founding father of pidgin and Creole linguistics [Romaine 4 qtd in Malmkjaer 95]. However, pidgins and creoles tended to be regarded as merely inferior, corrupt versions of donor languages, and the study of them did not gain generally perceived respectability until 1959, when the first international conference on Creole language studies was held in Jamaica by a group of scholars who recognized themselves as Creolists and the proceedings published in *Linguistic Encyclopedia*. Growing interest in the relationship between American Black English, and pidgin and Creole also helped establish the discipline as a proper academic concern, and the publication in 1966 of the first undergraduate textbook on pidgins and creoles greatly helped to secure its place (*Linguistic Encyclopedia*). A second conference was held in Jamaica in 1968 and since then conferences on pidgin and Creole linguistics have been held regularly.

Note that the words 'pidgin' and 'creole' are technical terms used by linguists, and not necessarily by speakers of the language. For example, speakers of Jamaican Creole call their language 'Patwa' (from patois) and speakers of Hawai'i Creole English call theirs 'Pidgin.'

Pidgin

A pidgin is a language which has arisen by a process of mixing a simplified form of a language spoken by people who travelled and colonized extensively (such as English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch), with a simplified form of a language of the countries, particularly in the mines. There are several other indigenous pidgins in Africa and elsewhere.) Africans who did not share a language were working together on plantations and chose to communicate using what they could glean of the colonizer/slave-owner's language, to which they added elements of their own native languages.

In the development of a pidgin language, the superstrate language typically provides most of the vocabulary. The superstrate language will commonly be that of the socially, economically and/or politically dominant group, and will be considered the language that is being pidginized, so that a pidgin is often referred to as, for instance, Pidgin English or Pidgin French. The other language or languages involved are referred to as the substrate language(s). The pidgin tends to retain many of the grammatical features of the substrate language(s). In spite of the fact that pidgins thus arise as two or more languages that are mixed, so that speakers of any one of these languages may perceive the pidgin as a debased form of their own language (an attitude clearly expressed by the superstrate-language-speaking authors of many early studies), it is important to note that it is now generally agreed among scholars of pidgin languages that they have a structure of their own which is independent of both the substrate and superstrate languages involved in the original contact (Malmkjaer 93). Once a stable pidgin has emerged, it is generally learned as a second language and used for communication among people who speak different languages. Examples are Nigerian Pidgin and Bislama(spoken in Vanuatu).

Another important fact about the Pidgin languages is that they lack prestige and most people who don't understand/use them see them as less prestigious and funny. Holmes noted that "they have been described as mangrel Jargons and macaroni lingos" (93).

Creoles

Creoles, on the other hand, Holmes opines to mean "A Pidgin which has acquired native speakers. Many of the languages which are called Pidgins are-in fact now Creole languages" (95). What this suggests is that some Pidgin languages which have outstayed their basic functions now become a dominant language of a speech community and children grow up to acquire such as their first language, they now perform more communicative functions aside trade and administration and when this is achieved, the language can now be called a "Creole", no longer Pidgin. This is in line with what Holmes says below:

As a result of their status as some group's language, Creoles also differ from Pidgins in their range of functions, in their structure and in some cases in the attitudes expressed towards them. A Creole is a Pidgin which has expanded in structure and vocabulary to express the range of meanings and serves the range of functions required of a first language.(95)

Crystal agrees with the above view by saying that:

A Creole is a Pidgin language which has become the mother tongue of a community-a definition which emphasizes that Pidgins and Creoles are two stages in a single process of linguistic development. First, with a community, increasing number of people begin to use Pidgin as their principal means of communication. As a consequence, their children hear it more than any other language, and gradually, it takes on the status of a mother tongue for them. Within a generation or two, native language use becomes consolidated and widespread. The result is a Creole, or a 'creolized' language.(336)

The above clearly gives us the Creolization process, as starting from Pidgins. Some of the most widely used 'expanded' Pidgins as Crystal puts it are "krio (in Sierra Leone), Nigerian Pidgin English, and Bislama (in Vanuatu), In Papua New Guinea, the local Pidgin (Tokpisin) is the most widely used language in the country" (334).

Like a pidgin, a Creole is a distinct language which has taken most of its vocabulary from another language, the lexifier, but has its own unique grammatical rules. Unlike a pidgin, however, a Creole is not restricted in use, and is like any other language in its full range of functions. Examples are Gullah, Jamaican Creole and Hawai'i Creole. A Creole, in the classical sense, is a pidgin that has acquired native speakers. usually, the descendants of pidgin speakers who grow up using the pidgin as their first language. In keeping with their extended social role, creoles typically have a larger vocabulary and more complicated grammatical resources than pidgins. Other examples of creoles include Sranan, an English-based Creole spoken in coastal areas of Surinam (Trudgill 170). and the English-based West Indian creoles used mainly by people of African origin in the Caribbean (Sutcliffe 219) Malmkjaer 94]. Non-English-based creoles derived from other European languages include French-based creoles spoken in, among other places, Haiti, Trinidad,

Grenada, French Guiana, Mauritius, the Seychelles, and some parts of Louisiana. There are also creoles based on Portuguese and Spanish [(Trudgill 170)Malmkjaer 98].

The Origin and Theories of Pidgins

One of the most important theories to surface at the first conference on pidgin and creole linguistics in Jamaica in 1959 (see above) was the idea that all or most pidgins or creoles could be traced back to one common source, a Portuguese-based pidgin developed in the fifteenth century in Africa, which was later relexified, translated word for word, into the pidgins with other European bases which gave rise to modern creoles. This theory is known as the theory of monogenesis (one origin) or relexification, and it originates in its modern form from observation of the strong similarities in terms of vocabulary and structure between Philippine Creole -Spanish and Ternate (Indonesian) Creole-Portuguese.

Others noted that many of the features of Philippine Creole -Spanish were also present in Caribbean creoles, in Chinese Pidgin English and in Tok Pisin, but that these had been relexified. Some others pointed out that, while speakers from opposite ends of the Caribbean were able to converse in their French-based creoles, neither would easily be able to converse with a French speaker. So, whereas the similarity of vocabulary could account for some mutual intelligibility, it was in fact syntactic similarity which was the more important factor, and this syntactic similarity pointed to a common origin for the French-based creoles.

In contrast to the monogenesis theory, some linguists argue that pidgins would arise spontaneously wherever and whenever a need for a language of minimal communication arose, and that these could then be creolized. This view is known as the theory of polygenesis (multiple origin), and it found support in the argument that there are 'certain pidgins and creoles which clearly developed without any direct Portuguese influence. In fact, few Creolists would argue for a pure monogenesis theory, but most accept that a certain amount of relexification is an important element in the development of pidgins and creoles, particularly when closely related lexicons. Such as Creole Spanish and Creole Portuguese, are involved.

Largely, other theories exist (which we will not fully discuss here) and they include:

1. The baby-talk theory: This acknowledges similarities between Pidgin and the baby learning to speak, in that, it pidgin shave low number of function words. little morphological marking, flexibility of word classes, number of inflection minimized. etc.
2. Independent parallel development theory: This view maintains that the obvious similarities between the world's pidgins and Creoles arose on independent but parallel lines due to the fact that they all are derived from Indo-European languages stock and in the case of Atlantic varieties, due to their sharing a common West African substratum.
3. Nautical jargon theory: This point of view maintains that pidgins are formed as a result of multiple migration that demanded

communication and so a lot of different vocabularies were produced out of nothing in the advent of voyage which are still in use today e.g. capsise for turnover in the West Atlantic and Pacific pidgins etc.

The Creolization process

A particularly interesting and provocative explanations for the developments and characteristics of creoles have been offered and they argue in favor of a language bioprogram hypothesis (henceforth LBH) that suggests that the infrastructure of language is specified at least as narrowly as Chomsky has claimed. The arguments for LBH are drawn from Bickerton's observations about the way in which a Creole language develops from a pidgin which is in an early stage of development [Malmkjaer 101].

The data Bickerton uses to support his hypothesis shows early-stage pidgin to lack any consistent means of marking tense, aspect and modality, to have no consistent system of anaphora, no complex sentences, no systematic way of distinguishing case relations, and variable word order (175). Children faced with this type of input impose ways of realizing the missing features, but they do not borrow these realizations from the language which is dominant in their environment, nor from the substrate language(s), and Bickerton concludes that "the LBH or some variant thereof seems inescapable...[and]the LBH carries profound implications for the study of language in general, and for the study of language acquisition and language origins in particular"(ibid).

Thus From the above, we can go away with the notion that Creoles developed from Pidgins but there is a contrary view. Current researches have shown that Creoles developed separately from Pidgins and not as a result of the standardization of Pidgins. Although it was assumed for a long time that creoles evolved from pidgins, [Thomason and Kaufman (147-166) quoted by Rickford n.p.] and others have argued that many creoles, particularly those in the Caribbean and in the Indian Ocean, represent "abrupt creolization," having come into use as primary or native contact languages before a fully-crystallized pidgin had had time to establish itself. A Creole may arise from a jargon, a stable pidgin or an expanded pidgin. Since these differ in the respects broadly outlined above, the degree of repair needed before they can function as adequate first languages for their speakers- is also different. A/creolized jargon will have undergone repair at all the linguistic levels, to bring about natural phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic systems. In the case of a creolized stable pidgin, pragmatic rules will have been arrived at, and the systems already at play in the stable pidgin will have been developed. Once a Creole is in existence, it may, according to DeCamp (1971b): continue almost without change, as appears to be the case for Haitian Creole; become extinct; evolve further into a normal language; gradually merge with its acrolect through a process known as decreolization.

Pidgins and Creoles are considered as separate language varieties that come to play due role to contacts between colonial 'nonstandard varieties' of a European language and several other non-European languages around the Atlantic and in the Indian and Pacific oceans in the 16th-19th centuries. Mufwene reiterates that Pidgins typically emerged in trade colonies which developed around trade fronts or

along trade routes, such as on the coast of West Africa. They are reduced in structures and specialized in functions (typically trade), and initially they served as nonnative lingua francas to users who preserved their native vernaculars for their day-to-day interactions.

When these Pidgins expand into regular vernaculars, especially in urban settings: they become expanded Pidgins and here examples include Bislama and Tok pisin (in Melanesia) and Nigerian and Cameroon Pidgin Englishes which are structurally as complex as Creoles (Mufwene 314). The structural complexity here is measured in terms of the communicative functions/values. Creoles, on the other hand, is said to have developed in settlement colonies whose primary industry consisted of sugar cane plantations and rice fields and whose majority populations were non-European slaves, in the case of the Atlantic and Indian oceans, or indentured labourers, in the case of Hawaii. (Mufwene 314)

The argument thus is that the fact stands that the term Pidgin emerged in Canton, thousands of miles away from American Iberian colonies where the term Creole originated in the 16th century. This should make one doubt the process of creolization as starting from jargon to Pidgin and the eventual maturation of Pidgins and acquisition of native speakers which then make the language a Creole.

Chaudanson and Mufwene argue that "Creoles developed by basilectizing away from the base language ie by developing a basilect-the variety that is the most different from the acrolect, the variety of the upper class" (qtd in Mufwene 315).

It is important to emphasize here that Creoles and Pidgins developed in separate places 今た where Europeans and non-Europeans interacted differently. The later mostly in finesettlement colonies and the latter in trade colonies.

Mufwene puts it this way:

The main justification for this position is that plantation settlement colonies typically developed from homestead societies, in which the non-Europeans were minorities and well integrated and their children spoke the same colonial koinés as the children of Europe descents. It is only during the later stage of plantation phase that the basilects, typically identified as Creoles, developed by regular process of gradual divergence from earlier form of colonial language.

Based on this, the process of creolization is summarized in the hypotheses below. The three major competing hypothesis are: the substrate, the superstrate and the universalist hypothesis as outlined by Mufwene (318).

1. The Substrate Hypothesis

This historically relates to the baby talk hypothesis which is traced back to 19th century French Creolists - Bertrand, Baconde, Baissac, Vinson, and Adam. The African languages spoken by those enslaved on New World and Indian Ocean plantations were considered to be primitive, so, there was need for the French Creolists to speak to the Africans as if to babies. Thus, the 'baby-talk' as different from their original "foreign talk".

2. The Superstrate Hypothesis or Dialectologist

This views the sources of the Creole language as non standard variety of their base languages. For example, AAE, according to Krapp and Kurath (qtd in Mufwene 319) claim that "this variety was an archaic retention of the non standard speech of low class whites with whom the African slaves had been in contact."

3. The Universalist Hypothesis

This is gotten partly from Bickerton's Language Bioprogram Hypothesis (as qtd in Mufwene 320) which states that Creoles "own their origin to the operation of psychological or physiological laws that are everywhere the same, and not to the influence of the former languages of the people among whom these dialects are found." This can be further explicated to mean that children make Creoles by replacing the parameters of their base language by that of the new varieties of language in their 'unmarked' or 'default setting' as specified by Universal Grammar.

The Function/Status of Pidgin in ESL Contexts

Pidgin is used generally in every ESL society because of the vast linguistic background. It is now used as a unifying factor ie as language of inter/intra ethnic communication, business transaction, politics, mass media, entertainment, phatic communion etc.

The Nigerian variety of pidgin (NP) we want to state categorically here for example, is no longer restricted to any class or group of people in a particular social setting. This is in sharp contrast with previous postulations of NP being reserved for people of lower social status. Currently, educated people, even university dons use NP in communication. Agheyisi is of the opinion that a speaker of NP has little or no formal education. She defined the group of NP speakers as "generally made up of unskilled laborers in government project agencies, such as the public works department; petty traders; store keepers; market women; taxi and lorry (truck) drivers etc" (qtd in Elugbe and Omamor 50). Striking Similarities of Pidgins and Creoles

Crystal avers that "the world's Pidgins and Creoles display many obvious differences in sounds, grammar, and vocabulary, but they have a remarkable amount of similarities in common." (336)

1. "Every Creole is a unique independent development, the product of a fortuitous contact between two languages" (334)

2. The similarities between the world's Pidgins and Creoles can be explained only by postulating that they had a common origin (ie are 'monogenetic') notwithstanding the distance that exists between them.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have been able to establish the origins, developments, similarities, differences and other peculiarities about Pidgins and Creoles from the materials we could access. Strikingly, we cannot exhaust all the encompassing notions of these terms but

the fact is that we have been able to bring to the fore, those things that are basic and foundational to their information to those who may have never thought of looking into this particular study in general and to those who have in particular.

We could also conclude that pidgins and creoles are varieties of language that emerged through contact situation during trade, war, plantation and eventual colonization among speakers with different linguistic background. It is also asserted above that creolisation is a process whereby a pidgin language gains first speakers and is being used as the lingua franca of a speech community. A contrary view is also accommodated that creoles developed independently from pidgin. The paper also pointed out how the variety of pidgin spoken in ESL societies like Nigeria has gained more ground than what it used to be in earlier years due to its advanced communicative value and can no longer be seen as a corrupted version of a given language. Several other people have viewed NP in that line like Adheyisi. Among such supporters is Obilade who describes NP as "restricted almost exclusively to the underprivileged or those who consider themselves underlings for the purpose of particular occasions" (qtd in Elugbe and Omamor 51). Obilade went on to describe the language as that of solidarity among university students. The language of the politician who would identify with the people (51).

These claims, according to Elugbe and Omamor are totally out of tune with the reality that it purports to describe. Although it may well have been true at some point in time in its history, it bears no relevance whatsoever to the situation of NP in Nigeria since independence. No one with anything but the vaguest familiarity with typical speakers of NP anywhere in Nigeria in the last one quarter of a century can, with any degree of credibility, describe them in Adheyisi terms "the truth of the matter is that they span the different strata of society and include highly literate people in the different professions including university dons" (50).

Marchese and Schnukal further explain this when they said that:

University students reported using Pidgin in all situations except when discussing courses... our own observations confirm the NP English is very definitely the lingua franca of Warri. We heard it being spoken in the market place, in government offices, department stores, schools, hotels, petrol stations... (qtd in Elugbe and Omamor 51)

How NP differs from Pidgin

NP has moved far away from the meager function that Pidgin performed in the past. It is no longer a language of communication between two persons from different linguistic background but it is now being used by people who speak the same language and otherwise.

It is important to note here also that NP which was originally Portuguese based has given way to an English based Pidgin. This is as a result of the termination of the Portuguese activities in the Nigerian coasts thereby a huge reduction in the use of the Contact Language between the two groups. Gradually, the English finally took over and there was definitely a need for a language of interaction but then the Portuguese based Pidgin coloured the speech of the Nigerian speakers.

Reference

Crystal, David. (1987). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. USA: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elugbe, B. O. and A. P. Omamor (1991). *Nigerian Pidgin: Background and Prospects*. Abeokuta: Heinemann.

Hall, Robert (1966). *A Pidgin and Creole Languages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Holmes, Janet (1992) *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Longman.

Language Varieties (2014). *Definitions of Different Kinds of Language Varieties*. School of

Languages: University of New England. Web.20 May. 2024.

Malmkjær, Kirsten (2002). *The Linguistics Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Mufwene, Slikoko S. (2006): "Pidgin and Creoles" *The Handbook of World Englishes*. (Ed. Braj Kachru et al). 1.18, 313-322.

Pidgins and Creoles. N.p. n.d. Web. 20 June. 2024.

Rickford, John R. (1998). *The Creole Origins of African American Vernacular English: Evidence from Copula Absence*. Salikoko S. Mufwene et al. London: Routledge. Web.20 April. 2024.

Rickford, John R. and John McWhorter (1997). *Language Contact and Language Generation: Pidgins and Creoles*. Florian Coulmas, 238-256. Oxford: Blackwell.