Structural characteristics of a pidgin or creole

Phonology

- The sounds of a pidgin or creole are likely to be fewer and less complicated than those of related languages
  - Tok Pisin has only five basic vowels, unlike the dozen or so found in English
  - Papia Kristang has seven basic vowels — rapidly being reduced to the five found in neighboring Bahasa Malaysia

Morphology

- Pidgins have very little morphophonemic variation, that is, the type of variation found in the final sounds in *cats, dogs*, and *boxes*. The development of such morphological alternations is a sign that the pidgin is undergoing creolization.
- In pidgins and creoles, there is almost a complete lack of inflection in nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives.
  - nouns are not marked for number and gender
  - verbs lack tense markers
  - transitive verbs may, however, be distinguished from intransitive verbs. For example, in Tok Pisin transitive verbs are marked with the suffix *-im*.
  - pronouns will not be distinguished for case. In Tok Pisin, *me* is either ‘I’ or ‘me’.
  - However, the first person plural may distinguish between inclusive and exclusive. Again, using an example from Tok Pisin, *mipela* is exclusive, while *yumi* is inclusive, as an examination of their morphology makes clear.
  - In Tok Pisin, there are only a few required endings on words. One is *-pela* on adjectives, as in *wanpela man* ‘one man’, *-pela* ‘plural’, as in *yupela* ‘you (plural)’, and the transitive suffix *-im*, already mentioned.
  - There are virtually never alternations such as *break, broke, broken*. 
Syntax

- Sentences are likely to be uncomplicated in clausal structures.
- Pidgins do not have relative clauses. Their development is a sign of creolization. Pidgins do not have embedding.
- Negation may only include a single particle. In Krio, an English-based creole, the only negation marker is *no*. Cf. *i no tu had* ‘It’s not too hard’.
- TMA (Tense-Modality-Aspect). Creoles do, however, have a tense-aspect marking system. This usually includes a continuous marker of some sort, cf. *de* in English-based creoles, *ape* in French-based creoles, and *ka* in Portuguese-based creoles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Creole</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>a de go wok</em></td>
<td>‘I’m going to work’</td>
<td>Krio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mo ape travaj</em></td>
<td>‘I’m working’</td>
<td>Louisiana French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>e ka nda</em></td>
<td>‘He’s going’</td>
<td>St. Thomas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocabulary

- The vocabulary is quite similar to the standard language with which it is associated, although there may be considerable morphological and phonological simplification.
- Reduplication is often used to indicate, among other things, intensity, pluralization, habituality, and so on.
- Syntactic devices are often employed to extend the vocabulary.
- Pidgins and creoles often draw their vocabulary from more than one language.