Chapter 2: Structural characteristics of a pidgin or creole

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.

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\begin{align*}
a de go wok & \quad \text{‘I’m going to work’} \quad \text{Krio} \\
mo ape travaj & \quad \text{‘I’m working’} \quad \text{Louisiana French} \\
e ka nda & \quad \text{‘He’s going’} \quad \text{St. Thomas}
\end{align*}
\]

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.

Tok Pisin
- *gras bilong het* ‘hair’
- *gras bilong fas* ‘beard’
- *gras bilong pisin* ‘feathers’

• Pidgins and creoles often draw their vocabulary from more than one language.