Structural characteristics of a pidgin or creole

Pidgins verus creoles

Pidgins are typically contrasted with creoles in terms of differences in their uses, their speakers, and their origins. What are these differences?

1. Pidgins have no native speakers; creoles have native speakers. Creoles have no native speakers; creoles have native speakers.
2. Pidgins have a limited range of uses; creoles have a considerably expanded range of uses.
3. Pidgins typically evolve out of contact situations; creoles typically evolve out of pidgins.

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

Notes: This phrase means that nouns have neither a plural marker nor have noun classes. The term gender means kinds rather natural gender e.g., male and female, but instead refers to the classes that nouns belong to. Polish, for example, has masculine, feminine, and neuter; despite the terms, however, these only marginally refer to natural gender and instead refer primarily to the phonological shape of the nouns. Swahili nouns, as another example, have 26 classes (or, if one wishes, 26 genders).

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’.

subject   verb    object

I, *me     like     *she, her; *he, him;
she,*her   like     *he, him; you
he,*him    like     *they, them
they,*them like     *she, her; *I, me
you       like     *they, them

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 wapela 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.
Vocabulary

• 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’} & \text{Krio} \\
  mo \ ape \ travaj & \quad \text{‘I’m working’} & \text{Louisiana French} \\
  e \ ka \ nda & \quad \text{‘He’s going’} & \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. However, in many cases one of the languages is the primary source of vocabulary; in this sense, Tok Pisin is an English-based creole, as English is its main lexical source.

  Question: Pidgins are typically contrasted with creoles in terms of differences in their uses, their speakers, and their origins. How do they differ along these three parameters?
Various Pidgins and Creoles

Cajun

Cajun French is the French patois spoken in Louisiana. Beginning in 1755, the Grand Dérangement forced Acadians to leave their homes in eastern Canada. Many settled in Louisiana and their French language gradually evolved into what we call Cajun French.

The word cajun comes from acadien. Acadia was colonized by the French in the eastern region of Canada in 1604. It was the first European colony in North America.

Chinook Jargon

Chinook Jargon was a trade language (or pidgin) of the Pacific Northwest, which spread quickly up the West Coast as far as Alaska. It is related to, but not the same as the indigenous language of the Chinook people.

Jargon was derived from a great variety of indigenous words, as well as English and French. Many of its words are still in common use in the Western United States and Canada. The Jargon words of published lexicons only numbered in the hundreds, and so it was easy to learn. It has its own grammatical system. In Kamloops, British Columbia hundreds of speakers also learned to read and write the Jargon- as a result, Jargon also had its own literature.

There is some controversy about the origin of the Jargon, but all agree that its glory days were during the early 1800s. During this era many dictionaries were published in order to help settlers interact with the First Nations people already living there. American leaders sent communiques to each other, stylishly composed entirely in The Chinuk. Many residents of Fort Vancouver choose to speak Chinook Jargon as their first language, even using it at home in preference to English. Loggers incorporated it in their jargon.

Chinook Jargon is still spoken as a first language by some residents of Oregon State, much as the Métis language Michif is still spoken in Canada. Hence, Jargon is now a creole language.
Some believe that the Jargon (without European words) existed prior to European contact. Others believe that the Jargon was formed within the great cultural cauldron of this contact. Current opinion holds that a trade language of some kind probably existed prior to European contact, which morphed into the more familiar Chinook Jargon in the late 1700s. Many words in Chinook Jargon clearly had different meanings and pronunciations at various points in history, and continued to evolve into interesting regional variants. A few scholars have tried to improve the spelling, but since it was mostly a spoken language this is difficult (and the users tend to prefer the sort of spelling they use in English).

Local West Coast historians are well acquainted with the Chinook Jargon. For everyone else, the fact that Chinook Jargon ever existed is relatively unknown, perhaps due to the great influx of newcomers into the influential urban areas. However, the memory of this language is not likely to fade entirely. Many words are still used and enjoyed throughout Washington State (ie. Seattle), British Columbia, and Alaska. Oldtimers still dimly remember it, although in their youth, speaking this language was discouraged as slang. Nonetheless, it was the working language in many towns and workplaces, notably in ranching country and in canneries on the British Columbia coast where it was necessary in the strongly multiethnic workforce. Place names throughout this region bear Jargon names and words are preserved in various rural industries such as logging and fishing.

The Chinook Jargon was multicultural and functional. There was no Official Chinook Jargon, although the past publishers of dictionaries would have had you believe otherwise. To those familiar with it, Chinook Jargon is a wonderful cultural inheritance. For this reason, and because Jargon has not quite died, enthusiasts actively promote the revival of the language in everyday western speech.

A few Jargon words

* cayuse: a horse or pony
* olallie: berry
* high muckimuck(s): the chief, the boss, management (modern usage). In modern blue-collar usage, this word is one of many mildly sarcastic slang terms used to refer to bosses and upper management (British Columbia, Interior region). Var. "High Mucketymuck".
* tyee: leader, chief, a really big chinook salmon (Campbell River)
potlatch: a ceremony of giving away or destroying one's possessions to gain social status.

Hawai‘i Creole English

Hawai‘i was first visited by Europeans in 1778, and it quickly became an important stopover for ships involved in whaling and trading with Asia. At this time, some of the expressions from the Pidgin English of China and the Pacific were introduced to Hawai‘i. Tragically, diseases were also introduced which drastically decreased the indigenous Hawaiian population. The first sugarcane plantation was established in 1835, and the industry expanded rapidly in the last quarter of the century. Thousands of laborers were brought from China, Portugal, Japan, Korea, Puerto Rico, Russia, Spain, the Philippines and other countries. With so many nationalities, a common language was needed on the plantations. At first, this was Hawaiian and Pidgin Hawaiian, but later in the century a new variety of pidgin began to develop.

In the 1870s immigrant families began to arrive and more children were born on the plantations. Children learned their parents' languages and picked up English at school. But the kind of English they spoke on the playground was influenced by the Pidgin English earlier brought to Hawai‘i, by the Hawaiian spoken by their parents, and by their own first languages, especially Portuguese. By the turn of the century a new Hawai‘i Pidgin English began to emerge with features from all of these sources. This pidgin became the primary language of many of those who grew up in Hawai‘i, and children began to acquire it as their first language. This was the beginning of Hawai‘i Creole English. By the 1920s it was the language of the majority of Hawai‘i’s population.

VOCABULARY

Since English is the lexifier language of HCE, most of the words come from English. But they are often pronounced in a different way (see Sounds), and some may have different meanings. For example: beef can mean 'fight'. Also, some combinations of words have different meanings: e.g. stink eye means 'dirty look' and chicken skin means 'goose bumps'.

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HCE also includes words from many other languages, especially Hawaiian. Here are some examples:

from Hawaiian:

- pau 'finished'
- lanai 'verandah'
- puka  'hole'
- akamai 'clever'

from Japanese:

- obake 'ghost'
- shi-shi 'urinate'

Michif (Mitchif, Metis Creole, French Cree)

About 500 Metis people in North Dakota and scattered locations in Canada still speak Michif, a unique French-Cree creole using French nouns, Cree verbs, and some local vocabulary borrowed from Indian languages like Ojibway or Dene. Unlike most creoles, Michif shows little if any grammatical simplification—the polysynthetic verb phrases of Cree are preserved in their full complexity. It's likely that Michif originated, not as a pidgin between Crees and Frenchmen trying to communicate with each other, but as a badge of identity and occasionally-necessary secret code among Metis raised in both languages. Most Michif speakers today are fluent in neither Cree nor French. Children are no longer learning Michif, leading linguists to class the language as "moribund" (headed for extinction), but there have been efforts to revive its use as a cultural language in some Metis communities.

The word "Metis" has two different meanings in Canada: any mixed-blood Indian ("métis" just means "mixed" in French,) who have their own Aboriginal status in Canada; or a
Michif (Mitchif, Metis Creole, French Cree)

member of a particular cultural group of mixed ancestry, the descendants primarily of French traders and Cree Indians. Only the latter group speaks the Michif language.