

PIDGINS AND CREOLES

INTRODUCTION

Can you guess what language this is?

These lines are taken from a famous comic strip in Papua New Guinea:

"Sapos yu kaikai planti pinat, bai yu kamap strong olsem phantom."

"Fantom, yu pren tru bilong mi. Inap yu ken helpim mi nau?"

"Fantom, em i go we?"

Translation:

"If you eat plenty of peanuts, you will come up strong like the phantom."

'Phantom, you are a true friend of mine. Are you able to help me now?'

Phantom, Where did he go?'

A simplified language derived from two or more languages is called a **pidgin**. It is a contact language developed and used by people who do not share a common language in a given geographical area. It is used in a limited way and the structure is very simplistic. Since they serve a single simplistic purpose, they usually die out. However, if the pidgin is used long enough, it begins to evolve into a more rich language with a more complex structure and richer vocabulary. Once the pidgin has evolved and has acquired native speakers (the children learn the pidgin as their first language), it is then called a Creole. An example of this is the Creole above from Papua New Guinea, Tok Pisin, which has become a National language.

Reasons for the development of Pidgins

In the nineteenth century, when slaves from Africa were brought over to North America to work on the plantations, they were separated from the people of their community and mixed with people of various other communities, therefore they were unable to communicate with each other. The strategy behind this was so they couldn't come up with a plot to escape back to their land. Therefore, in order to finally communicate with their peers on the plantations, and with their bosses, they needed to form a language in which they could communicate. Pidgins also arose because of colonization. Prominent languages such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, English, and Dutch were the languages of the colonizers. They traveled, and set up ports in coastal towns where shipping and trading routes were accessible.

There is always a dominant language which contributes most of the vocabulary of the pidgin, this is called the superstrate language. The superstrate language from the Papua New Guinea Creole example above is English. The other minority languages that contribute to the pidgin are called the substrate languages.

In the United States, there is a very well known Creole, Louisiana Creole, which is derived from French and African Languages. You most likely have heard of "Cajun" which is a developed dialect of this Creole.