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Colonization, globalization, and the emergence of Creoles and Pidgins from an evolutionary perspective

Population movements have fostered contacts of hitherto separate populations and of their languages. Colonization has typically amplified both the size of the migrating populations and the extent of ensuing language contacts, though the outcomes of the encounters also vary depending on the colonization style. For instance, during the past half millennium, the European settlement colonies of the Americas, the Indian Ocean, and Australia produced language shifts and creoles; whereas their trade colonies of the Pacific produced several English pidgins.

Even the same colonization style was not implemented uniformly, as the specific economic regimes the colonists adopted and the population structures these generated influenced language evolution in different ways. Thus, for instance, the Portuguese and Spanish colonies of South and Central America have produced no varieties associated particularly with descendants of enslaved Africans (except for Palenquero); whereas the English, French, and Dutch coastal/insular plantation colonies have produced quite a few creoles. A geographic complementary distribution also obtains between European-lexifier creoles and pidgins. In addition, the pidgins that emerged in the hinterlands of Africa and the Americas are all lexified by indigenous languages.

There are other interesting cases of differential evolution, as the Europeans did not interact uniformly with the Native in their settlement and trade colonies. While contributing to the emergence of world-wide economic globalization, trade colonization relied on interpreters, all the way into the exploitation colonization of Africa and Asia in the 19th century. In fact, the latter colonies perpetuated this practice till the early 20th century, whereas settlement colonies spread European languages as vernaculars. With Portuguese then acting as the (dominant) trade lingua franca along the African coast and all the way to China till the late 18th century, this restricted practice of the European languages to a few indigenous interpreters prevented the emergence of pidgins before the 19th century.

As a matter of fact, European-lexifier pidgins became an English specificity, as there is no evidence of pidgins lexified by other European languages on this trade route. Portuguese creoles did indeed emerge but on the offshore islands, where the Portuguese developed settlement colonies. Some Asian Portuguese varieties also emerged in India, Malaysia, and Macau in indigenous communities of Natives that cohabited with the Portuguese trade colonists. It is debatable whether they should be called creoles, but they probably did not start as pidgins. Also, Cameroon and Nigerian Pidgin Englishes appear to have emerged in the mid-19th century, as offshoots of Sierra Leone Krio, after the abolition of the slave trade, around the same time as their counterparts in the Pacific. *Le français tirailleur* appears to have been an invention of the French colonizers themselves, in the late 19th century, and appears to have failed too, except in the French imagination of African recruits in their army.

Interpreters played an important role in the Pacific trade as well, with the emergence of English pidgins being associated with the later development of sugarcane plantations. The use of interpreters was actually pervasive in the trade between the Europeans and the indigenous populations, even in the Americas, along the trade routes, where pidgins lexified by indigenous languages emerged or spread.

In light of all the above, it is not surprising that, contrary to the received doctrine, pidgins lexified by European languages appear to have evolved by basilectalization, like their creole counterparts. The indigenous interpreters spoke closer approximations of the European languages, which they had learned by immersion in Europe. Pidgins emerged later after the wider population targeted these L2 varieties, just like basilectal creoles emerged later, when

population growth on the plantations depended more on importations than on births, while population replacement was rapid (owing largely to short life expectancy), and the Creole-to-Bozal ratio became lopsided in favor of the Bozals. In Africa, the earliest evidence cited by J. L. Dillard dates from the 18th century. The utterances appear to be L2 approximations of their non-standard lexifiers, showing little similarity to present-day pidgins, which are structurally quite different. We may assume that pidgins did not emerge before the 19th century, least of all, that they were not ancestors of creoles. The latter are the outcomes of different contact ecologies, in which the European languages have always functioned as vernaculars, causing the loss of the substrate languages.