This teaching material has been made at the University of Szeged, and supported by the European Union. Project identity number: EFOP-3.4.3-16-2016-00014.

Pidgins and creoles

Unit 4

1. Pidgins and creoles

1. The topic of this unit:

The present unit discusses a very unique type of languages, namely, pidgins and creoles, their characteristics, and some interesting insight into the structure of Tok Pisin (a well-known English based creole).

2. What are pidgins and creoles?

Pidgins and creoles are basically mixed languages that arise in very specific sociolinguistic circumstances. From a linguistic point of view, they are literally mixtures of two or more languages (also called "contact languages"). In the simplest case, one language typically supplies the words (the lexicon), another language the grammar. The language that supplies the lexicon is usually called the lexifier language, while the language that supplies the grammar is called the base language, after all, the words are "inserted" into this base.

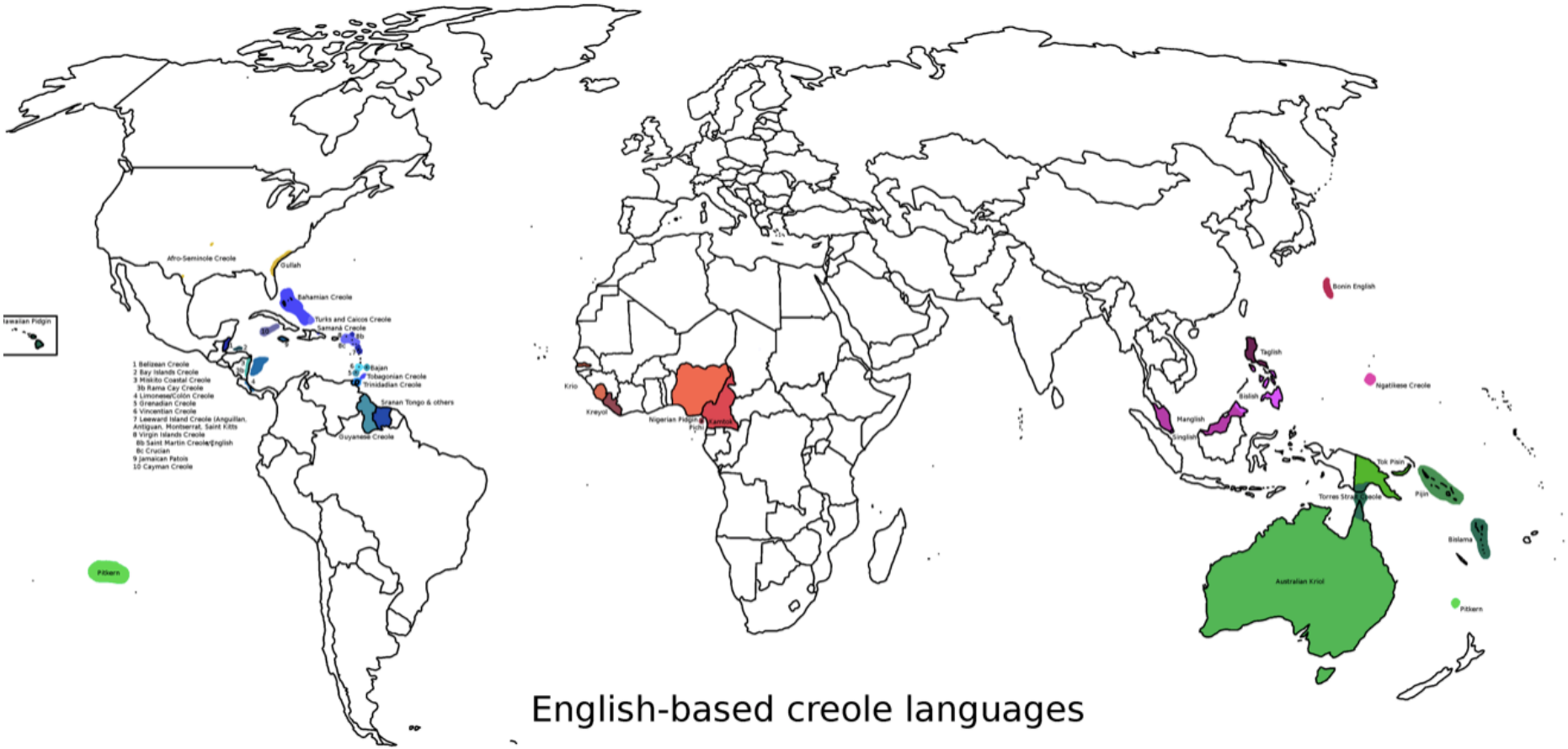
What makes pidgins and creoles sociolinguistically interesting (or even relevant) is the fact that they arise in (historical, political, economic) situations in which the speakers of one language dominate the speakers of the other, and the language of the former, dominant, group is the one that is the lexifier language, and the language of the latter, the dominated group is the base language. Because of the dominance relations, they are also called superstrate vs. substrate languages, respectively. That is, it is the social position of the speakers of one language in relation to that of the other that determines what happens linguistically.

2.1. Circumstances of development

Pidgins and creoles typically arise in situations of colonization, in which almost by definition one group of people comes to consciously dominate another group. They arise from the need to communicate, with no widespread bilingualism (that is, it is not the case that the speakers whose languages participate in the pidgin development learn each other's languages.) Most pidgins and creoles have occurred as a result of European colonization in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific islands. In these situations, the lexifier language is the European language of the colonizers – English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, etc. – while the base language is the indigenous language of the colonized territory. (Despite the fact that the "base" language is the indigenous language in the equation, somewhat confusingly linguists often refer to

the pidgin or creole as being “English based” or “French based” when naming the lexifier language of a pidgin or creole, as I did above when mentioning Tok Pisin.)

Here is a map of the English based creoles of the world:



You can see this map in greater detail here: https://external-preview.redd.it/PTapTkYMiKTkpDXhaMtYdwa0wlHArer1m2vF8jbDoXc.png?auto=webp&s=a430711a419101cf85dfa3b8a3c70f271d9ba0d9

2.2. Pidgins

Pidgins arise from the need to communicate in situations where two or more groups of people do not share a language. Pidgins are trade languages – i.e. languages whose only function is to be the vehicle of the exchange of goods – and they are very simplified compared to languages that are people's native languages. They typically lack tense markers (since the only tense that is used is the present) and inflections (since they communicate only very basic messages in which meaning typically conveyed by inflections, such as person, number, tense, are not crucial to communicate), and use simple sentence (but no subordinate clauses, for instance). Pidgins are second languages to everyone involved, no one speaks a pidgin as their mother tongue.

Geographically, pidgins often develop on islands and along coast lines, after all European colonization was most often carried out on the ships of the colonizing powers.

2.2. Question to think about:

1. Can you think of other situation besides basic trade where people simplify language in their communication in similar ways to what happens in a pidgin?
2. Sometimes pidgins are likened to motherese (i.e. speech produced in speaking to babies and small children) or to foreigner-talk (that is, the way people sometimes speak a foreign language when they just have the basics of it down). What characterizes these types of speech from a linguistic point of view? What do you see as common features of motherese and foreigner-talk?

2.3. Creoles

Creoles usually grow out of pidgins, although there are also cases when a creole does not have a preceding pidgin stage. Creoles are languages that have developed into full-fledged languages as far as both their functions and structures are concerned. They are used for all everyday purposes that native languages are used for, not just in the trade situation. A creole has all the features of a full language and is capable of referring to various times (not just the present), expressing person and number, and producing complex sentences.

A creole is the native language of a new, mixed group of speakers, the offspring of the colonizers and the colonized, and as such, it is the hallmark of this new group. Just like pidgins, creoles are unwritten languages – after all, writing involves the use of a writing system adopted (and possibly adapted) for a language, literate speakers, and the conventions of the use of orthographic symbols for the sounds of the language. In very rare cases creoles do become written languages – but that is the result of a long process of social and historical development in which the speakers of the creole are acknowledged as a recognized social group in their society.

2.3. Questions to think about:

1. What can be the reason for pidgin/creole situation to have such a clear division of status between the participating groups so as to result in a clear differentiation of how each language contributes to the development of the pidgin/creole?

2. Can you think of any situations in Europe where language use between groups of people similar to a pidgin situation develops? For instance, do you think the Chinese markets that are found in so many European cities nowadays produce a similar situation? What are the similarities, and what are the differences?

2.4. The names of pidgins and creoles

The names of pidgins and creoles often indicate where they arose and what their base language is: Nigerian Pidgin English, Hawaiian Creole English, Solomon Island Pidgin, etc. Whether the name of a language has "pidgin" or "creole" in it does not necessarily indicate its true pidgin vs. creole status but is just a label of convention. A lot of pidgins and creoles exist in situations where some people speak them as a 2nd language (pidgin) while for others in the same society they constitute a 1st language (creole). The naming situation is even more complex in Hawaii, for instance: even though Hawaiian Creole English is truly a creole (people's first language), popularly the name of the language used by its speakers is "pidgin".

2.5. Processes of development in pidgins and creoles

The emergence and development of a pidgin from mixing the lexifier language and the base language is called pidginization. It is basically a simplification process compared to both full-fledged languages that contribute to its emergence, accompanied by loss of functions and loss of linguistic material (vocabulary and grammar).

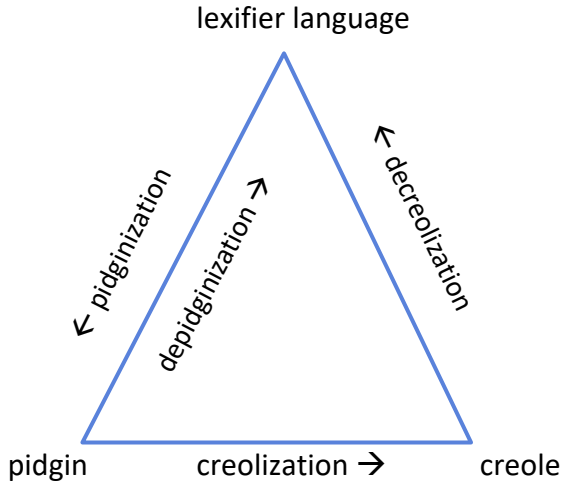
The development of a creole is called creolization. It is the process of the development of new functions and new linguistic features which the pidgin did not have but a full-fledged language must have.

Sometimes creoles also become decreolized, that is, their speakers gradually shift towards speaking a variety that is closer to the original lexifier language. This happens when creole speakers are given access to education and are taught in the lexifier language in school. As a result, they start speaking a variety that is more and more similar to the lexifier language. The stages of the decreolization process are sometimes identified, with the creole variety before the decreolization process being termed the basilect, the intermediary stage the mesolect, and the form of the creole close to the lexifier language being called the acrolect.

When a creole undergoes decreolization, very often a creole continuum arises with the various stages (basilect, mesolect, and acrolect) existing within the same society at the same time. Basically, the more educated a creole speaker is, the closer their variety of the creole will be to the lexifier language. In such cases usually the younger speakers, who receive education, speak an acrolect, their parents, who may have had some schooling but not very much, speak a mesolect, and the uneducated grandparents speak a basilect.

If a pidgin becomes more similar to the original lexifier language (for instance because its speakers start to use the lexifier language, with the colonized speakers learning it), that process is called depidginization.

All of these processes can be modeled with a triangle:



3. Tok Pisin

Tok Pisin (also called New Guinea Pidgin and Neo-Melanesian Pidgin) is a mixed language spoken in Papua New Guinea, a country of about 3 million people situated on the eastern half of the island of New Guinea. It had a long history of European colonization, first by the Portunuege, then by the Spanish, the Dutch, and finally by the English. It gained independence in 1975. Tok Pisin is an English-based pidgin/creole spoken or understood by about one-third of the country's population. Some speak it as a second language, some as a first language. Because Papua New Guinea is highly multilingual, with over 800 indigenous languages, Tok Pisin is also used as a lingua franca, that

is, as the language of communication between speakers of other languages. It is a written language that received its orthography and was standardized in the mid-20th century.

3.1. "Tripela liklik pik"

In order to get a closer look at the linguistics of Tok Pisin, we'll analyze a short text in order to see which of its features show its English origins and which are clearly not English.

Below you can read the beginning of the story of the "Three little pigs" translated into Tok Pisin. Please note that the unnumbered lines contain the English translation of the story in Tok Pisin in the numbered lines. You can also listen to the story via the link below.

Audio task:

Listen to the beginning of the story of "The three little pigs": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H61y75G0A24

Tripela liklik pik

The three little pigs

1 Bipo tru tripela liklik pik i stap long buš. Ol i no gat haws, na i gat wanpela waildok tu. Em i stap long dispela buš, em i bikpela mo. Na
A long time ago three little pigs lived in the forest. They had no house and there was a wolf there, too. He lived in this forest, he was very big. And
2 em i man nogut tru. Em i save kilim plenti abus bilong dispela buš. Na i save kaikai. Na em i laikim tumas long kaikai dispela tripela liklik
he was a really bad male wolf. He killed many of the animals of the forest. And he ate [them]. And he wanted very much to eat these three little
3 pik. Oltaim oltaim em i bihainim lek bilong en long buš insait. Olrait naw, tripela liklik pik ol i laik wokim haws. Ol i go
pigs. Again and again he followed their footprints within the forest. Anyhow, the three little pigs, they wanted to build a house. They left
4 nabawt, wanwan, ol i laik painim samting bilong wokim haws. Wanpela, em i wokabawt long rot... na em i painim wanpela man
in various directions, one by one they wanted to find something in order to build a house. One of them, he walked down the road... and he found a man
5 i karim kunai i kam.
[who was] carrying grass.
6 Olrait, pik i tok.
Well, the pig spoke:
7 "O pren, yu ken givim mi sampela kunai? Mi laik wokim haws."
"Oh, friend, will you give me some grass? I want to build a house."
8 Na man em i gat bel sori long dispela liklik pik, na em i givim kunai long en. Na pik i go wokim haws long dispela kunai.
And the man felt sorry for this little pig, and he gave grass to him. And the pig went to build a house with this grass.
9 Na nambatu pik em i go long narapela rot. Na em i painim wanpela man i karim wanpela mekpas stik. Na dispela pik i tok:
Then the second pig, he took another road. And he found a man [who was] carrying a bundle of sticks. And this pig spoke:
10 "O pren, yu ken givim mi sampela stik? Mi laik wokim haws."
"Oh, friend, will you give me some sticks? I want to build a house."
11 Na man em i gat bel sori long dispela liklik pik, na em i givim dispela mekpas stik long en. Na pik i go wokim haws long dispela stik.
And the man felt sorry for this little pig, and he gave this bundle of sticks to him. And the pig went to build a house with these sticks.

3.1.1. The lexicon and grammar of Tok Pisin

Make three lists below, of words that are clearly of English origin, words that are clearly NOT of English origin, and words that you are unsure of. Write their meanings next to the words in quotes, e.g.: haws “house”.

(1) Words of English origin:	(2) Unsure:	(3) Words of non-English origin:
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……	……	……
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Hopefully, you have the largest number of words in column (1), the smallest in column (3), and maybe some in column (3). Your lists should look something like this:

(1) Words of English origin:

tripela “three”
liklik “little”
pik “pig
stap “live”
buš “forest”
ol “they”
gat “have”
haws “house”
wanpela “one”
waildok “wolf”
tu “too”
dispela “this”
bikpela “big”
man “male”
kilim “kill”
plenti “many”
bilong “of”
laikim “want”
tumas “very much”
bihainim “follow”
lek “footprint”
wokim “build”
nabawt “in various directions”
painim “find”
samting “something”
wokabawt “walk”
rot “road”
karim “carry”
tok “speak”
pren “friend”
yu “you”
ken “??”
givim “give”
mi “me”
sori “sorry”
nambatu “second”
narapela “another”
stik “sticks”

(2) Unsure:

long “in”, “to”, “within”, “for”, “with”, “down”

(3) Words of non-English origin:

kaikai “eat”
kunai “grass”
mekpas “bundle”

As you can see, the vast majority of the words are from English, and only a few are not: for instance, the word *kunai* is of Austronesian origin. Now, let's make a list of verbs:

verbs with extra material:	unchanged verbs:
kilim "kill"	stap "live" (from *stop*)
laikim "want" (from *like*)	tok "speak" (from *talk*)
bihainim "follow"	gat "have" (from *got*)
karim "carry"	
painim "find"	
wokim "build" (from *work*)	

As you can see, the verbs on the left have some extra material, the *-im* ending, even though they are definitely from English where no such ending exists. This ending is a Tok Pisin development from the English pronoun *him*, which is often pronounced as '*im* in informal speech, and it marks transitive verbs (i.e. verbs that can have an object). The unchanged verbs are all intransitive, they never take objects. So what happened here is that English origin verbs received derivational endings in Tok Pisin, to express meaning in a way that has no parallel in English.

There are some curious changes in the phonological form of the English origin words in Tok Pisin. The greatest is probably the pronunciation of *f* as *p* in *pren* "friend" and *painim* "find". Some word-final consonant clusters and consonants also change (the *d* of *friend* is lost, cf. *pren*), and voiced word-final stops are devoiced (*pik* "pig", *lek* "footprint", from *leg*). All of these changes are instances of phonological adaptation of loanwords which happened because the languages of the Papua Guinea locals probably lacked *f*, word-final consonant clusters, and word-final voiced consonants.

There is a group of words – numerals, determiners, adjectives – where something interesting happened. Words such as *wanpela, tupela, tripela, sampela, dispela,* and *bikpela* all seem to have an English word for a first part (*one, two, three, some*, *this*, and *big*, respectively), and *pela* for a second part. What is this second part? Well, it is also of English origin: it is the adapted form of *fellow* (often pronounced as *fella* informally), with the *f* being replaced by *p*, just as it is in *pren* "friend" and *painim* "find". So, here also we see something happening to English origin words that does not happen in English.

The form *narapela* "another" exhibits a curious instance of phonological adaptation. Its first part is from English *another*, with the first, unstressed syllable being lost, and the [ð] changing to *r*.

The word *long* IS in fact of English origin: it is derived from *along*, also through the loss of the unstressed initial syllable. It functions as a multipurpose preposition: it carries a variety of meanings. Many pidgins and creoles have multipurpose prepositions. The other preposition of Tok Pisin, *bilong*, is also of English origin (from *belong*) and is used for possession only.

The development of the transitive marker *-im* and the formation of numerals, pronouns and adjectives using pela are grammatical features of Tok Pisin that have no parallel in English.

The way past tense is expressed in Tok Pisin, with *i* plus the verb, is not of English origin – we would not even expect it to be, since grammatical features in pidgins and creoles come from the base language.

4. Other pidgins and creoles

Other notable English based pidgins and creoles are Gullah (a creole spoken by African-Americans in the southern US: the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida), Hawaiian Creole English (a mixture of Hawaiian and English spoken in Hawaii), Pitcairnese (a language that used to be spoken on Pitcairn Island in the south Pacific, by the descendants of nine mutineers of the British ship Bounty and local Tahitian women), and several others.

According to one hypothesis, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE, or Black English) also has creole origins and is in fact a decreolized creole that exhibits features of the West African languages of the original slaves as well as of English. However, according to another hypothesis, AAVE is just a dialect of English and is not a mixed language.

The only mixed language, a pidgin, that has been recorded in Europe is Russenorsk, the mixture of Russian and Norwegian spoken by Russian traders and Norwegian fishermen in the Arctic in the 18th and 19th centuries.

5. Other mixed languages

In addition to pidgins and creoles, there is yet another group of mixed languages, called “bilingual mixed languages”. These are also spoken in situations of language contact, but are different from pidgins and creoles in a number of ways.

Linguistically speaking, in bilingual mixed languages there is no clearcut separation of sources (with the grammar coming from one language, and the lexicon from another), instead, the two languages contribute both grammar and lexicon in chunks. For instance, in Mednyj Aleut (spoken in Alaska, where it developed between Russian colonists and Aleut natives) Russian contributes finite verb morphology, some loanwords, and some syntax, whereas Aleut provides the rest of the language. Or, in Anglo-Romani, the lexicon is mixed, containing both English and Romani words, and the grammar is also full of English grammar. In Michif (a mixture of French and Cree, a Native American

language of the Algonquian language family spoken in Canada, North Dakota, and Montana earlier) the noun morphology is mostly French, the verb morphology is mostly Cree, and each is used with source language phonology and lexicon.

The bilingual mixed languages are not used as lingua francas but are typically symbols of a new identity of a group of speakers who stand apart from both the Europeans and the unassimilated natives.

Research task:

1. Watch this 25 minute video about Hawaiian Creole: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itgd9Q6G8Qc. Make a list of sociolinguistic issues mentioned in the video – that is, all of those points which have to do with language but require a social (or historical) explanation.
2. Watch the video again and now concentrate on all the linguistic features of Hawaiian Creole: characteristics of pronunciation, grammar, and lexicon that make it different from English.
3. Listen to 4 or 5 songs performed by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, or IZ, a Hawaiian musician popularly known for his unique rendition of *Somewhere over the rainbow* mixed with *What a wonderful world*. He was a native speaker of Hawaiian Creole, traces of which can be detected in his speech and singing. You can find a lot of his songs here: https://www.azlyrics.com/i/israelkamakawiwoole.html. What features of Hawaiian Creole that you identified through the video about Hawaiian Creole can you trace in IZ's songs?

6. Summary

Pidgins and creoles are mixed languages that arise in situations of colonization. Pidgins are trade languages created by the need to communicate, with the socially more dominant language (usually a European language, that of the colonizers) contributing the lexicon, and the dominated language (that of the colonized people) contributing the grammar. Pidginization involves simplification, with the pidgin using only very limited linguistic material from its source languages and being used for only limited functions.

Creoles are the languages that often develop from pidgins when a new generation of speakers adopts it as its first (native) language. Creolization involves the development of a full-fledged language, which is used for all the functions of a natural language.

Bilingual mixed languages are contact languages that also mix features of two languages, but they do so differently than pidgin and creoles: the mixture is such that chunks of each are adopted, without a clean division along the grammar vs. lexicon line. Bilingual mixed languages are symbols of a new, mixed group, which is distinct from the groups of speakers of the two languages that they draw on.

Review questions:

1. What differentiates pidgins and creoles from other languages like English, Russian, Hungarian, or Spanish?
2. What is the difference between pidgins vs. creoles vs. bilingual mixed languages?
3. What is pidginization and what kind of processes characterize it?
4. What is creolization? In what ways is it different from decreolization?

Glossary of terms:

Base language: the language that contributes the grammar in the development of a pidgin or creole; typically the language of the dominated, i.e. socially subordinated group of speakers.

Bilingual mixed language: a mixed language, different from a pidgin or creole, in which the language mixture cannot be predicted; it usually serves as an identity marker of a group of speakers distinct from the speakers of the two source languages.

Creole: a mixed language that usually develops out of a pidgin, the first language of a new generation of speakers.

Creole continuum: the situation in which different varieties (the acrolect, mesolect, and basilect) of a creole language are spoken in the same society. These varieties are closer or further away from the lexifier language, and are spoken by more or less educated speakers, respectively.

Creolization: the process during which a pidgin becomes a creole, i.e. the first language of a new generation of speakers.

Decreolization: the process during which speakers of a creole

Lexifier language: the language that contributes the lexicon in the development of a pidgin or creole; typically the language of the dominant, i.e. socially superordinate group of speakers.

Pidgin: a mixed language that is used for very limited purposes (trade) and has very limited grammar and vocabulary.

Pidginization: the development of a pidgin from the mixing of the lexicon of one language and the grammar of another.

Quizzes:
see separate files

Further reading:

Mesthrie, Rajend. 2000. Language contact 2: Pidgins, creoles, and "New Englishes". In: Mesthrie, Rajend, Joan Swann, Andrea Deumert, and William L. Leap. *Introducing sociolinguistics.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 279–315.

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