Ideas in Transition: Multidisciplinary Explorations

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1. Sociolinguistics to Language Variations

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Abstract

In daily life, we employ languages for a variety of reasons. The majority of individuals speak multiple languages, and they can be classified as multilingual (speaking more than two languages) or bilingual (speaking two languages). As Wardhaugh explains, language can be simply described as a system or code that societies use to communicate with one another. They are compelled to cooperate by figuring out their shared code, even if this system may be the same for two persons or completely different. Communities and their cultures influence any linguistic or speech changes. In addition to studying the relationship between language and society, sociolinguistics also addresses phenomena that are specifically related to this field of study, such as pidgins and creoles.

Key words: pidgin, creole, lingua franca, language

Introduction

Since researchers know very little about pidgins, creoles, and lingua franca, they are frequently viewed as unnatural and forgotten languages (even Wardhaugh refers to them as marginal). However, it should be noted that these languages are important for understanding languages and that many people do use them on a daily basis. It's possible that some people wouldn't be able to interact with others or have the opportunity to acquire a second language without them. Furthermore, it is claimed that these languages are biased, that those from lower socioeconomic classes and those from darker backgrounds speak them, and—above all—that they are merely systemic derivatives rather than distinct languages.

Certain scholars use terms such "as 'degenerate offshoots', 'linguistics dodos', and 'special hybrids'" to describe pidgins and creoles, yet more and more of them start thinking about their prominence as it occurred that they are fundamental matters invaluable for people who use them as a necessity for everyday living and markers of their own identity. Due to pidgins and creoles people are aware of constant changes in languages and attractiveness of exploiting and using them (Wardhaugh 2010: 53-54).

Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society, examining how social factors influence language structure and use (Holmes, 2001). It provides valuable insights into language variation, change, and the ways language reflects and shapes social identities (Wang et al., 2023).

Understanding Language Variation

Variationist sociolinguistics focuses on the systematic patterns of variation within a language (Bayley, 2013). The core principle is that language is inherently variable, and this variation is not random but structured and influenced by linguistic and social factors (Johnson & White, 2019). Key aspects include:

Structured Heterogeneity: Linguistic variation is characterized by orderly patterns rather than randomness. These patterns are often influenced by social factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, and age (Preston, 2002).

Synchronic Variation and Diachronic Change: Variation observed at a single point in time (synchronic) often reflects changes occurring over time (diachronic) (Bayley, 2013). Studying present-day variation can provide clues about how language changes.

Quantitative Analysis: Variationist sociolinguistics employs quantitative methods to analyze large datasets and identify correlations between linguistic variables and social factors (Velde et al., 2021).

Pidgins

A pidgin is called a 'contact language' because it does not have native speakers and basically it is a first language to no one. It forms as a consequence "of a multilingual situation in which those who wish to communicate must find ... a simple language system" (Wardhaugh 2010: 57-58). However, it is not possible because each person uses different language and the only solution is to find a new, common language for everybody. Therefore, people have to improvise, adapt, and overcome a linguistic barrier by creating a pidgin – a new code, system to communicate verbally. Worth mentioning is that pidgins are produced in a specific situation when there is no other possibility to communicate and the need for this communication is really high. Moreover, it often happens that speakers of one language dominate speakers of other languages in social and economic context. As a general rule dominant languages are those highly codified so pidgins may be treated as an easier and simplified version of a normal language, for instance characteristics of a dominant language such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation are reduced and simplified to meet the requirements of the group (Wardhaugh 2010: 58-59).

Holmes, on the other hand, tries to present the other definition of pidgins. They are compared to reduced languages with the result of being a product of contact between a group of people who do not share a common language. They become languages in a situation when people have need for verbal communication, for example for trade, but it has to be remembered that people do not learn mother tongues of any person in the group, perhaps, for social reasons such as lack of trust or close contact. For instance on slave plantations West African people were separated from others who could speak the same language "to reduce the risk of plotting to escape or rebel" (Holmes 2013: 85). In that situation people created a pidgin language which was based on bosses' language and working people's languages. A similar situation is presented with the example of traders who travelled to different countries for business and had to adjust their language to communicate with Americans, Indians, Chinese, Spanish, etc. Some scholars believe that the term 'pidgin' was used in communication between traders, derived from the very word 'pidjom' from Hebrew, and meant 'trade or exchange' (Holmes 2013: 85-86).

According to Waldhaugh, a pidgin may be created on the condition of three or more languages (one of them being dominant to others) because in a situation in which there are only two languages involved there might be a struggle for dominance. A perfect example are English and French, in which the fight won inferior language but after more than two centuries of co-existence. In the case of three or more languages, with one being dominant, the other inferior languages play a salient role in the development of a pidgin. Speakers of these 'weak' languages have to communicate with each other but also with speakers of a dominant language. In order to do this they need to produce their own rules based on process of simplification of a dominant language as all speakers are separated from each other because of language differences (Waldhaugh 2010: 58).

Another point about pidgins is connected with a structure of this artificially created language. Speakers of different languages have to combine their efforts to agree on rules of pronunciation, terminology, and grammar, and sometimes there may occur additional features which are unique only for newly created variety of languages. However, Holmes argues that while a certain group speaks prestigious language and other group uses local or minor language those prestigious endorse a pidgin with more words and expressions, whereas local ones have more impact on grammatical structure of a pidgin.

Languages like pidgins do not have many functions, they are rather restricted, and "tend to have a simplified structure and a small vocabulary compared with fully developed languages" (Holmes 2013: 87). For example, pacific pidgins have only five vowels, short words without inflections, and no tenses or markers of gender either. Moreover, when English is compared to Tok Pisin on the basis of verb forms, it is easy to notice the process of simplification: English 'I go', Tok Pisin 'mi" or English 'they go', Tok Pisin 'ol'. However, pidgins tend to minimise grammatical signals which is helpful for the speaker but, on the other hand, bothers a listener. Nevertheless, they are very difficult to learn as they are full of irregularities, and what is interesting one word in a pidgin language may refer to many things, for example "in Cameroon Pidgin English the word 'water' can mean 'lake', 'river', 'spring', 'tear', or 'water'" (Holmes 2013: 87-88).

The most common yet false image of pidgins is widely discussed by people all over the world, not only researchers. Usually they are portrayed as a 'bad' version of a standard or highly developed language or even called a 'baby-talk' language because of very simplified forms of words which are difficult to understand and divine their meaning. But after all, it has to be acknowledged that pidgins originate in the middle of a hard situation in which speakers need to manage to produce a language and also know how to use it correctly. As Holmes notices, even sometimes pidgins are described as jargons and negatively evaluated as Broken English. People, especially Europeans, "consider pidgins to be a debased form of their own language" because many terms used in pidgin languages come from European languages (Holmes 2013: 88). Therefore, speakers are almost sure that they are able to guess the meaning of the given words, and in that way various misunderstandings occur which may have serious consequences, for instance in Tok Pisin the word 'baksait' means back whereas hearing this term a listener instantly think of a word 'backside' meaning something totally different, in this case 'bottom, butt'. Consequently, people who do not know a certain language should not guess the meaning of terms or pretend to understand the message somebody tries to convey. By simplifying a dominant language they will not start using a pidgin. To speak and understand someone correctly it is necessary to learn a certain language even if it seems easy (Holmes 2013: 88-89).

The very surprising yet interesting thing about pidgins is their life span as they have a short life. As it was said above pidgins are produced in a specific multilingual situation and used for a special goal. Once they develop to help speakers to communicate "they disappear when the function disappears" (Holmes 2013: 89). For instance, a pidgin which is used for communication between two groups of traders disappears by the time trade between these groups dies out. There is also a feasibility that even if trade increases it is more likely for one group to learn the other group's language, and consequently a pidgin or a need to create a common language disappears. Nevertheless, there is still a chance for a pidgin to develop into a highly developed language or a creole (Holmes 2013; 89).

Recently, some linguists point out the importance of a process called pidginization, as opposed to creolization, in which a language is simplified, a word structure together with a grammatical structure is reduced to a minimum, pronunciation is adjusted to speakers. Additionally, there are not many functions for which pidgins can be used (books are not written in pidgins) and there are a great number of borrowings from a dominant language. With so many changes in this process a pidgin still requires some kind of innovativeness and creativity (Wardhaugh 2010: 59).

All in all, to distinguish pidgins from other languages it is enough to have in mind three identifying characteristics. Initially, pidgins are "used in restricted domains and functions" (Holmes 2013: 89). Secondly, their grammatical structure is simplified and based on dominant languages. Lastly, pidgin languages have rather low prestige and thus they attracts negative attitudes, particularly from foreigners. However, although pidgins are perceived as limited and perhaps too simplistic, they still play an essential role in changing and developing languages all over the world (89).

Creoles

A creole can be defined as an extended version of a pidgin which has native speakers. Children learn creole languages as their first language and use it in various domains of life. Creoles are created when a new generation of speakers appear and, as Aitchison argues, "when pidgins become mother tongues" so a creole may be treated as a common and somehow natural language (Wardhaugh 2010: 59). Hence, there seems to be an endless consideration on in what situation a pidgin can be actually a creole. Therefore, a creole may be named like this when it originates from the original pidgin which develops in a fully-fledged language. Many researchers believe that various pidgins are in fact creoles, for example Tok Pisin, which was aforementioned as a pidgin, is acquired as a creole because many speakers learn it as their first language and it is developed to meet their linguistic requirements. Moreover, there is a possibility for some languages such as West African pidgins or Nigerian Pidgin English to exist as both pidgins and creoles. In this case, speakers of those languages may use them only as a second language in an extended version or only as a first language. The first option is more probable in urban areas "in which there is likely to be considerable contact among speakers of different languages" (Wardhaugh 2010: 59).

Although some scholars claim that certain languages may be considered as both pidgins and creoles, they do not share the same characteristics, have different functions, grammatical structures, and even attitudes which are demonstrated towards them. Thus, a creole is based on a developed pidgin with evolved vocabulary and structure aiming at showing various meanings and functions of a first language. It has a complex relationship with a standard language from which it arose and not every creole has its pidgin ancestor. For instance, speakers using local varieties of languages rather than prestigious ones speak nonstandard form of languages which may be mixed randomly. That is why, pidgin English is related to Standard English and Haitian Creole is associated with Standard French (Wardhaugh 2010: 59).

Creoles have different structure from pidgins, and grammar is definitely more complex which is underestimated by foreigners. Words contain affixes and inflections due to which creole languages are able to stress meanings of tenses, for instance in Rover River Creole the past tense is expressed with the word 'bin': 'im bin megim ginu' meaning 'he made a canoe' while the present form of a tense is as follows: 'im megim ginu' (Holmes 2013: 90). Other characteristic focus on phonology in which, similarly to English language, there is a morphophonemic variation. It describes phonological correlation between terms which are in a close relation, for example "the first vowel in words 'type' and 'typical', and the different sounds of the 'plural' ending in 'cats', 'dogs', and 'boxes'" (Wardhaugh 2010: 66).

Additionally, in creoles transitive verbs may be distinguished from intransitive ones and speakers have ability to form embedded clauses such as relative clauses. Particles are frequently used and it is not complicated to stress a negation by using, for instance "a simple negative particle 'no' as in the English-based Krio – 'i no tu had' [meaning] 'It's not too hard'" (Wardhaugh 2010: 67).

Many creolists also point out that creole languages use the exact syntactic methods as slightly different standard languages. When it comes to vocabulary, more terms and expressions are similar to

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a standard language but still they are limited and presented in a condensed form which results in often having different shapes. Sometimes speakers use reduplication or repetition of words to reduce a risk of misunderstanding or confusion, for example Tok Pisin uses a pair like 'talk' meaning 'talk' and 'talktalk' meaning 'chatter' or 'cry' meaning 'cry' and 'crycry' meaning 'cry continually'. But there are many terms rather of complicated encoding like 'gras bilong pisin' meaning 'moustache' and surprisingly, a "creole may draw on the vocabulary resources of more than one language" (Wardhaugh 2010: 67).

In addition, Aitchison argues that people speak creole languages faster than pidgins and notices that they do not speak them word by word. As creoles are constantly changing and developing, new terms are reduced in form, for example 'man bilong pait' (man of fight) is used as 'paitman' (fighter). Also, there are many technical borrowings from English language.

The salient point is addressed to creolization, a process in which a pidgin's structure becomes more regular and as a consequence a pidgin is transformed into a creole. When words have regular structure it is easier to learn and understand these forms and it is clearly visible in the example of Tok Pisin and English – the adjective 'bik' means 'big, large' whereas the verb is formulated by adding 'im', so 'bikim' means 'to enlarge, to make large'. Following this rule, if a speaker knows that the term hot in Tok Pisin is 'hat', there is no doubt that he is able to create a verb 'to heat' or 'to make hot' by adding the aforementioned affix 'im', so 'hatim' is the searched word (Holmes 2013: 91).

The process also includes growth of grammatical and sentence structures, regularities in pronunciation, expansion in the number of functions in which a creole can be used, and evolution of a stable and sensible system for constantly increasing terminology and expressions. Moreover, creoles were formed due to a procedure of second language acquisition in unique conditions and children had an ability to help with the process of regularization of grammatical structures.

Although attitude towards creoles mirrors that negative one to pidgins by foreigners, speakers of creole languages seem to appreciate them. The aforementioned Tok Pisin (a perfect example of a pidgin, an expanded pidgin, and a creole language at once) "has status and prestige". Inhabitants of Papua New Guinea "recognise its usefulness as a means of communication with a wide range of influential people as well as in getting a decent job" (Holmes 2013: 94). Tok Pisin is even used during business meetings of one of companies though all members speak other common language (94).

Worth remembering is that although creoles sometimes seem similar to pidgins, they are more complicated, have more functions and different structures. Still, they both undergo changes yet for creoles certain changes are slower because of complexity of structures. Moreover, there is a feasibility that without pidgins creoles may not exist. Pidgins have a linguistic and social background whereas creoles have only historical one but on the condition that they have arisen from pidgins. However, some creoles may become a common language in certain areas used in town, in church, at work, or at home, and even in that kind of a situation a creole may become a lingua franca (Holmes 2013: 93).

Lingua Francas

Lingua franca, as Samarin believes, is a very intriguing phenomenon as it may be described by a variety of terms such as a trade language (Swahili), a contact language (Greek koine), an international language (English or French), an auxiliary language (Esperanto), or even a mixed one (Michif).

The reason, or more likely the consequence, for so many kinds of lingua francas "is population migration (forced or voluntary)", or trade purposes. A lingua franca, then, might be defined as a language used for communication between speakers who have different mother tongues. The

difference between a lingua franca and pidgins and creoles is that lingua francas usually use existing, standard languages which were earlier established as official languages for certain countries. However, sometimes, especially in multilingual societies where people use many different languages and accents, lingua francas are so helpful as they may eventually replace minor or local languages (Wardhaugh 2010: 55).

Throughout the centuries there were many lingua francas including Vulgar Latin or Sabir. However, this term was first introduced by Italians in 17th century, used for trade, and it means 'Frankish language'. Now, the most widespread and known lingua franca in the world is English language. It is used in many various situations, for instance in business, travel, or trade (Khodorkovsky). Speakers use languages differently and depending on their abilities to use them English serves either as a mother tongue, a second language, or a foreign one. Therefore, for example Italian, Spanish, Polish, and English scientists having a debate on a new vaccine use English to communicate and understand each other. Some researchers claim that this common language for all aforementioned scientists is different from the standard version of English and they call it 'Englishe'. Its form is slightly changed and even if people are able to communicate freely, they often make mistakes while speaking spontaneously, and that is why a lingua franca will never be acknowledged as a 'pure' English. Consequently, Jenkins argues that there is an European variety of English, called 'Euro-English', which may serve as an European Lingua Franca in the distant future. There is not much data about it as the language is in its early stage of development. Yet, English "is likely to be a kind of European-English hybrid which, as it develops, will look increasingly to continental Europe rather than to the UK or the US for its norms of correctness and appropriateness" (Jenkins). This fact is based on a relationship and interaction among non-native speakers of English language who show that, for instance pronunciation may cause intelligibility problems (even if speakers present a high level of language proficiency).

As mentioned above, English as a lingua franca can be used in various everyday situations. The best example of its use, different from universal ones including business, trade, or tourism, may be education, strictly speaking an Erasmus programme in which students have a chance to study abroad. English, then, is the only language due to which students communicate with other students, teachers, and also inhabitants of a chosen country. English as a lingua franca is the only possible way to achieve goals and overcome problems by students. Although there may be attempts to learn a language of a country students live in, using a lingua franca is more practical and should prevent misunderstandings. Moreover, more students admit that they do not mind if other students make mistakes as long as they understand a message. Yet, it has to be highlighted that due to accents of non-native students a problem of intelligibility occur. As a result, they improve their comprehension skills and are aware of other varieties of English language. Duran also notices that non-native speakers do not use prestigious terminology while speaking with other non-native speakers. Interestingly, "English is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers" (Duran 2016: 181). Despite the fact that native speakers are the ones who correct mistakes made by non-natives, in most conversations native speakers are not involved. All in all, lingua francas are helpful in raising awareness about language changes and perceiving languages as useful ones by speakers.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that studies on pidgins, creoles, and lingua franca are underestimated, they are very useful for people who do not share the same language yet and would like to participate actively in various everyday activities. Those languages help speakers to find their own way of communication and understanding of people from all over the world. Moreover, the way in people interact with each other shows changes in languages – how people pronounce words, what grammatical structure they use, and what kind of vocabulary they produce depending on a situation they are in. Languages are

constantly changing, ones are born, and the other ones die out because people do not need to use them anymore, but it happens also that they are reborn in slightly changed form. The relationship between languages and societies (speakers) is that both phenomena including structure, culture and history are extremely complicated hence incredibly fascinating. In simple terms, people are influenced by languages and vice versa. Because of this on-going process languages are in constant development as well as people are (Holmes 2013; Wardhaugh 2010).

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2. Empowered or Exploited? The Dual Narrative of Women in Microfinance and Self-Help Groups

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Abstract

This chapter examines the complex and often contradictory role of microfinance and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in women's empowerment across India, revealing a dual narrative of both empowerment and exploitation. Drawing upon Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Feminist Political Theory, the study analyzes how women's participation in SHGs can simultaneously enhance their agency while perpetuating systemic inequalities. Through a comprehensive review of literature and comparative analysis of regional case studies spanning eight Indian states, the research demonstrates that while SHGs have successfully increased women's financial inclusion, asset ownership, and participation in economic activities, they have also exposed women to new forms of exploitation including political instrumentalization, coercive loan recovery practices, and institutional corruption. The findings reveal significant regional variations in outcomes, with southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu showing stronger empowerment indicators compared to northern and eastern states where patriarchal structures and weak governance systems limit women's genuine agency. The chapter argues that the effectiveness of SHGs in promoting women's empowerment depends critically on broader structural factors including institutional quality, social norms, male family member attitudes, and the presence of supportive policy environments. The research concludes that while microfinance and SHGs possess inherent potential for women's empowerment, realizing this potential requires addressing systemic inequalities, strengthening regulatory frameworks, and ensuring that women's voices and choices remain central to program design and implementation rather than being subordinated to institutional or political interests.

Keywords: Women's empowerment, Self-Help Groups, microfinance, capability approach, feminist theory, financial inclusion, gender inequality, rural development, India

1. Introduction

Women constitute a dominant section of every society playing significant role in social and economic front (Krishnan et al., 2008). In any society women act as wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, Nevertheless, they are frequently disregarded or ignored during the empowering process. Consequently, given their numerous societal roles, women's access to development and involvement in decision-making are highly concerning. When women in South Asia challenge prevailing cultural customs and social norms to improve their personal well-being, they are empowered. Through the use of self-help techniques, attempts to incorporate women into society have gained traction over time. Self-help groups with a microfinance focus have shown themselves to be an effective and creative way to advance financial inclusion and support the larger goal of attaining gender equality as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Shanthi & Ganapati, 2012). In low- and middle-income nations around the world, both governmental and non-governmental groups have launched microfinance initiatives with the goal of giving households—with a focus on women—financial services such small loans and savings alternatives (Pitt et al., 2006). India's policy environment has been quite conducive to the expansion of the microfinance sector. This main form of microfinance includes microfinance institutions (MFIs), the SHG Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP), which was implemented by NABARD in the early 1990s, the growth of SHGs, and more formal SHG Federations (Reddy & Manak, 2005). This was anticipated based on the idea that women in low-income households frequently face credit constraints, which limit their access to activities that generate money and give