“The Concept of Pidgin and Creole”

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Abstract: This work is mainly looking at the origin of both pidgin and creole, because there are lots of arguments on where they are originated from. It can trace back to whether the contact between languages in Africa or the communication between slaves and their masters in Caribbean. To clear such arguments we brought theories that looked at them (pidgin and creole) in different angles, and we have suggested our thought about it.

Keywords: pidgin, creole, definition, and origin

I. General Introduction

Language is just like a chain that has been transmitted from one generation to another without separation. In the normal situation, the present generation should inherit language from their ancestors, sometimes with some minor changes, but in the case of language transfer there will be a major change, and this change will lead to emerge of new language, but it is gradually, it takes centuries or even millennia before its actualization. There are two ways Bickerton (1984) suggested in which language come into existence: one is through catastrophic way and the other is gradually. The latter is the more usual way, but the former is the carrying vital information on the nature of language in general.

What the discussion above is saying, issue of language in general, let’s go further and narrow ourselves to the focus area which is pidgin and creole languages. Let’s look at their definitions separately for more clarification:

II. Pidgin And Creole Languages

Definition of Pidgin

Pidgin is a type of simplified language which came into existence as a result of contact between two or more languages in order to find a means of communication, according to (Wikipedia). This situation mostly occurs in trade, plantation and colonization. Pidgin is said to be language with simplified syntax, word order etc. because it is constructed in an unplanned way, or it is given birth or been developed by unintelligible languages, Bickerton (1984). It’s not all simplified languages are pidgin. It is not a native to anyone but learnt as a second language by many. Other definitions are:

Definition of Creole

A creole is a naturalized stable language that came into existence through mixed parent languages, Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creole_language). It is a language that developed or derived from pidgin. When a language has its origin from an extended between more communities, one of which is European language then it is called a creole. Creole integrates characteristics from the all the parent languages to establish

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the mother tongue of a community. Creole has native speakers, unlike pidgin it is first language to children of the community where it has been spoken, that is to say, it is a mother tongue to children. This language is invented by children Bickerton (1988), and became a primary language to them. It is has a grammatically structured form and many of its vocabularies were derived from the superstrate language. Literally, superstrate means any stratum or layer superimposed on another, and linguistically is the major language in which pidgins are based and has large number of vocabularies i.e. dominant language. Bickerton (1974 pp. 3) also defined creole this way “A creole arises when a pidgin becomes the mother tongue of a speech-community”

It is simpler to define a creole, any pidgin that become stable and learn by children as their mother tongue. There are two essential things here stability and learning by children because these are the bedrock of it. The definitions of the two languages have revealed to us that they have many things in common as well as differences which give room to people to start thinking and arguing of sameness and differences between pidgin and creole. For example Mufwene (2001) argued that, pidgin and creole are different languages. Basing his argument on language evolution saying that if an internalized language can be classified as separate or dialect of the same language then creole is also a separate language. Still to others they look the same, or one cannot do without the other “…a creole was impossible without an antecedent pidgin… Moreover, there was no empirical basis on which to challenge the claim that a uniform, systematic pidgin was the immediate ancestor of a creole…” Bickerton in Linguistics: Cambridge Survey (1989: 272). Pidgin that IS always evolving into Creole, in other word pidgin is an antecedent of creole. The question now is that, what made sameness and differences? To find an answer to this question, we have to look at the similarities and differences of both.

III. The Differences And Similarities Of Pidgin And Creole

Similarities

Both languages are naturally arising in a contact situation due to lack of common language to share among group of people, and serve the purpose of lingua franca (language of wider communication). Though to some extent pidgin and lingua franca are the same, just like the way Wardhaugh defined pidgin as “Pidgin and creole are arise from a basic need that people who speak different languages have to find a common system of communication. Such a common system is often called a lingua franca.” To strengthen this view, Wardhaugh referred to the definition of lingua franca by UNESCO in 1953. ‘a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different in order to facilitate communication between them’ (pp. 56). But the reason for saying serve as a lingua franca is that, it can be spread and use by other communities not necessarily only by the people who were involved in the contact situation, while at the initial stage of pidgin it is restricted to only those who were involved in the contact situation. Onuigbo (1999: 200) claims that “What began originally as a trade language gradually grew into a compromise language for wider communication”. Creole is derived from pidgin but the pidgin is a secondary language which developed by speakers of unintelligible languages in a contact situation for the purpose of communication, Bickerton (1984). But Mufwene (2001) has a different view in which he claims that pidgin and creole arise individualistically under different conditions, and it is not necessary for a creole to be preceded by a pidgin or a creole to develop from a pidgin. Pidgin is fully adequate (adequate in the sense that able to fulfil the need for communication among the people of different languages) language, it is derived from the process of pidginization, and it is evolved from trade, colonization and plantation areas,that involves many languages but no one is predominant, and creole often evolve from pidgin, through the creolization or nativization process. Creole is developed out of pidgin (pidgin is the antecedent of creole). Todd (1974) referred to the two languages as “Popularly, they are thought to be inferior, haphazard, broken, bastardized version of older, longer established language” pp. 1

Differences

Pidgin has no native speakers while creole has native speakers, the former is created by adults, but the latter is invented by children. Linguistically, Pidgin’s form and grammar is simplified and reduced, sometimes can even die out, but creole is a stable and developed into full-fledged complete and adequate natural language. Creole often exists in post-colonial areas and it is used as a daily vernacular, while pidgin mostly exists in colonial period (i.e. the European based pidgins, not that we don’t have pidgins presently, there are lot of pidgins existing today), and some in pre-colonial time and its usage is restricted. Creole has less or elaborated grammatical structures in grammar than older languages do i.e. it can be standardized or not, but definitely more than pidgin. It has much variation but coherent sociolinguistic norms (of evaluation/integration), has wider domains and are used more for expressive, and Pidgin is a product of incomplete second language acquisition, and it has small core vocabularies and borrowed extensively outside. It has a little system but surface grammar with much variation. Pidgins in general having a simplified linguistic structure which include all aspect of grammars when compare them with their lexifiers. These aspects are in terms of semantics, syntax, morphology, lexicon and phonology. Sebba (1997) labels the reduced structural system into four structures in attribution to pidgin grammar. According to his suggestion some of them are also usable for creoles.

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There is additional one that found which is not part of Sebba’s suggested structures i.e. phonological simplicity. Now in totally we have five features of surface structure in pidgin. These designed features can also be used or shared by creoles across the world.

Cambridge Survey Vol. 2. Sociolinguistically, Bickerton has stated that, pidgin has no or incoherent norms of interpretation with limited domains for expressive and communicative functions. Typically, it either dies out or evolves into Creole through the process of creolization or nativization. Rickford (1977) claimed that pidginized modifications which went through difficulties and linguistics expansion process, then the creole may be used for any new stable variety that results from this process, but Bickerton (1984) have argued that there was no evidence which will show the expansion of creole.

If you carefully examine the situation between the two languages, they are more of different languages than the same. For example, linguist like Mufwene (2001) argued that, pidgin and creole are different languages. Basing his argument on language evolution saying that if an internalized language can be classified as separate or dialect of the same language then creole is also a separate language.

I am strongly convinced by the differences than the similarities, because they are more of separate languages than connected, even though they have many things in common as well. There are lot of theories that explained about these languages (pidgin and creole), and will give us clues on what we have discussed, and details on our further studies. But before then, let’s look at these opinions on the origin of pidgin and creole.

IV. Terms And Issues Related To Origin Of Pidgin

Pidgins came into existence through colonization, plantation and/or trade. The languages that played major role during such period were the ones responsible for the emergence of pidgin. Such languages were: Spanish, French, Portuguese, English and Dutch. There are some terms in relation to pidgin and creole. These terms are: ‘superstrate’, ‘substrate’ and ‘adstrate’. The major language in which pidgins are based and has large number of vocabularies (dominant language) is called superstrate. Minority languages that contributed less in terms of vocabularies (subordinate language) are the substrate. Language that is neither dominant nor subordinate, mostly come into pidgin after the initial contact has taken place. For example, English language is the superstrate in case of Nigerian Pidgin English and Papua New Guinea’s Creole, while other minority languages that were in contact during the pidginization are serving as substrate e.g. in the case of Nigeria, Benin language, Igbo, Yoruba among others. The present languages in the area where pidgin is spoken and later their vocabularies were borrowed into the pidgin are the adstrate. I will still give example with Nigerian situation, Hausa language is adstrate because it was later that its vocabularies were borrowed into the pidgin.

The term pidgin has a number of opinions on where it was originated. There are lot of converses on the term, but none is accepted by the community of academicians and linguists:

1) Pidgin (‘Pidian’) means people in Southern American language called YayoKleinecke (1959) according to a source [http://www.uni-de.de/SVE/VARS_PidginsAndCreoles.htm#origin](http://www.uni-de.de/SVE/VARS_PidginsAndCreoles.htm#origin). This kind of source cannot be believed because this kind of form (Pidian) can be a name in the language e.g. ‘Mapidian’, ‘Tarapidian’ etc. and still claimed that it could be misspelling.

2) ‘Ocupacao’ means occupation, trade or job in Portuguese. Portuguese were among the first European traders that travelled to third world countries and encouraged the indigenous with their language, but it is difficult to explain phonetically or morphosyntactically how the original word shift to pidgin form.

3) Chinese corruption of the word business. As the word is used for any action or occupation (cf. joss-pidgin ‘religion’ and chow-chow-pidgin ‘cooking’) It shouldn’t be amazing that the word pidgin is been used for a language variety which arose for trading purposes.

4) ‘Pijdon’ meaning ‘barter’ in Hebrew word. This opinion is stronger and accepted both phonetically and semantically. On the distribution of a Jewish outside of Europe and its acceptance as a general term for a trade language.

5) The term is claimed to be derived from ‘pequenoportugues’, Hancock (1972). It is broken Portuguese spoken by non-educated people in Angola. This opinion is somehow accepted semantically. If you look at the word ‘pequeno’ is used to refer to ‘offspring’, in this case a language derived from another. Phonetically, the changes to /pidgin/ is not hard to explain: /peke:no/ > /pege:n/ > /pigin/ > /pidgin/ (however it is not being proved).

Muhlhausler (1986) has strengthened the history or the origin of the term pidgin, saying that all of the above origins are genuine, basing his reason as, all are in agreement with the nature of pidgin languages.
Because they emerge as vehicles of intercommunication between speakers of many different languages, coincidence of form and similarity of meaning across languages will give a word a high survival rate.

There are no or less controversies on the term Creole than Pidgin. The word is seems to have derived from French 'Creole'. It quite closer to Portuguese ‘crioulo’ than Spanish ‘criollo’ though it goes back to Iberian meaning ‘breed, bring up, to nurse’, but the present meaning is a native to a locality or country. In the seventeenth century, it was originally used to refer to people from European countries born in the colonies. Semantically, the word Creole changed to refer to customs and languages of people in the colonies. Later it changed to language emerged of pidgin based on European languages like Portuguese, English, Spanish, French or Dutch. Now the term refer to any language of such situation, regardless of what input language is. Creole is the pidgins that learn by children as their first or native language then is called Creole. The difference between pidgin and Creole is not so much but it is significant to some extent. To some they are different, to others they are the same. Those that having the idea of difference may be based their reason with the Chomskyan paradigm of 1957. The Chomskyan paradigm of 1957 here, we are referring to syntactic structure which laid the foundation for “transformational generative grammar” (TGG). This model was designed to separate between superficial sentence structure and the deep or logical structure. In TGG the sentence is represented at different levels, the only level representing the surface grammar is the phonetic level, while the semantic, syntactic and phonological levels are representing the deep structure. This type of difference is always enabling TGG to explain any ambiguous sentence. Now in relation to pidgin and creole, the grammar in pidgin is simplified but when it evolved into creole it become more complex. The claim of those who seen the two languages (pidgin and creole) as different basing their argument on the grammar aspect, and relating it to TGG.

Kouwenberg and Singler (2009) explained the emphasis of the paradigm. In the interaction of language and mind, the brain has been structured universally with features that distinguish all languages.

All these ideas will not give us clear picture of pidgin and creole origin; we need more details that will back these opinions. That is why the following theories were looked into consideration.

V. Theories Of Pidgins And Creoles

In the last hundred years there were several theories proposed by different initiators that explained the origin of pidgin. These theories were classified into five groups, and they overlap with one another. Sometimes there will be a possibility of mixture of origin, (pidgin and creole, theories of origin, and developmental stages). There are several theories from different initiators backing issue of pidgin and creole languages which we are going to look at them one by one. Looking at them should include the discussion of their problems. Todd (1974) identified and listed four theories of pidgins and creoles with their developers, and we got additional one which is the recent among the theories from Atlantic group:

1. The nautical jargon theory

John Reinecke came up with the idea of nautical jargon in 1938, suggesting that it could have been the basis of almost all the pidgins and creoles. What this theory is hypothesizing is that, members of crews in ships wanted to develop a ‘dominant’ language i.e. common language among the European sailors of 18th and 19th century. This was brought because the crews’ members were comprised of different men from variety of dialects and languages. This led to the development of core vocabularies of nautical items with simplified grammar. Regardless of where the language varieties are spoken, pidgins display several of these lexical items. The possible influence of nautical jargon has noted in pidgins. “The nautical jargon theory assumes that pidgins are derived from the lingua franca used by the crews of ships, presumably through trading and other contacts.” That is the view of Mª Teresa Galarza Ballester. Therefore, the nautical jargon would have provided basis for the pidgin which would have been expanded according to model of the learners’ mother tongue. Such suggestion would help to justify the similarity and dissimilarity that took place in pidgin and Creole Englishes. ‘Capsize’ goes with the meaning turn-over or spill in both West Atlantic and Pacific pidgins, so, also applied to some other words in the languages of pidgin and creole.

One of the shortcomings of this theory is that it does not help to account for the many structural similarities between pidgins which arose from different European languages, and other problem of this theory is that if this is the case with all pidgin or how pidgin came into being, then there should be no actual languages existing now except pidgins throughout the world because these crew of sailors were travelling throughout the world not only English, Portuguese, Spanish, French people, but including Asians such as the Arabs and other languages. This theory has weak points to stand strong or to convince. It is just an assumption, every setup of people in every situation needs lingua-franca (a common language) to communicate if the setup comprises of many languages. Yes, it is confusing and contradicting with the definition of pidgin itself, if we go by this theory.
2. The monogenetic/relexification theory

The idea of monogenetic theory was first brought by Hugo Schuchardt in the late 19th century, but others argued that it was 15th century. Neither the year it doesn’t matter, but later it has been stressed and propagated by Taylor in 1961, and also by Thompson in the same year. The idea of this theory is that, Portuguese pidgin is the one in which all European language based pidgin were derived from, it happened in either 15th or 19th century. The argument here is that, the Portuguese itself is an artefact of lingua franca (common means of communication or language of wider communication) for the crusaders and traders in the Mediterranean area. This theory is considered as radical fashion language of wider communication (also called Sabir) which was used as auxiliary language. Evidence has shown that language of wider communication differs in lexicon from place to place but its structure remains the same and takes some similarities to modern pidgins and creoles. Some claimed that the lingua franca survived for so long in the coast of North Africa which was confirmed from Tunisia and Algeria in late 19th century.

The theory claimed that the first set of Portuguese who sailed to the coast of West of Africa in 15th century would have used their form of lingua franca i.e. sabir subsequently in the 16th and 17th centuries when Portuguese recognition and influence started wane, the vocabularies of the established pidgins would have been replaced by the new colonial languages such as English and French. Portuguese were among the first traders that went to India and South East Asia a similar situation can be assumed to have found: the other European languages would have replaced the Portuguese vocabularies of the origin Portuguese pidgin. Whereas many creoles around the world have vocabularies based on languages other than Portuguese such as English, French, Spanish and Dutch, for that it was theorized that such creoles were derived from this lingua franca by means of relexification i.e. the process in which a pidgin or creole brought substantial amount of its vocabulary from another language while keeping the grammar intact. (Wikipedia)

Sometimes the theories of monogenesis and relexification have a huge number of problems. The complex characteristics of syntax which used by linguists to find out how the language is related to others have been removed. In learning a second language, relexification accepts that, where people learn lexicon and grammar independently and that will learn the latter and replace the former. Pidgin languages are naturally unstructured, so relexification cannot determined the syntactic structure of a Creole because the language doesn’t have such structure. The relexification in this theory guesses a lot of impossibilities which doubtful or difficult for language to spread around the entire tropical zone, to people of different language background, still retain its grammatical structure from the lexifier, and apart from the changes in its phonology and vocabularies. After all how can you learn lexicon and grammar separately and hoping to develop a structured language.

3. The baby-talk theory

This theory was developed by Charles Leland who considered pidgin as ‘baby talk’ because of its similarities with babies’ effort to acquire first language. They have seen pidgin speakers and babies frequently move toward the standard articulation, that they both use great amount of content words and limitedly few function words, that in speech morphological change is either very rare or totally absent. There is no restriction in word classes’ formation and the pronominal contrast is regularly reduced. Similarities of such are still exist between pidgin and child language and many scholars’ attention have been drawn to this phenomenon in an attempt to explain why and how pidgin came into being. In other word how they are classified, and the following is the classification of the ideas of what they lack in the process of learning pidgin:

a) High percentage of content words with a correspondingly low number of function words
b) Little morphological marking
c) Word classes more flexible than in adult language (free conversion)
d) Contrasts in area of pronouns greatly reduced
e) Number of inflections minimised

All these features of a child’s early acquisition of language are there in adult speakers of pidgin.

In my understanding this idea is not enough to base on, and it doesn’t convinced me because the babies effort situation is the same as in every second language learning be it a child or adult.

4. The independent parallel development theory

Among the first scholars who recognized and spread the resemblance of pidgin and Creole was Robert A. Hall, Jr. and he still believed that they are arose and developed in an analogous lines. He and his supporters of this theory considered that the similarities that exist can be justified for, by acknowledging these languages (pidgins and creoles) are all derived from Indo-European languages regardless of the varieties. Many of the speakers have common West African substratum and had to come to terms with similar physical and social condition. The relevance features of this theory should not be left out and it come in two boundaries. Atlantic and pacific pidgin Englishes have characteristics in common which Standard English doesn’t have i.e. structural
and lexical features. The second one, it is unfair to deny the West African contribution to Atlantic and Pacific pidgins and creoles.

This theory still upholds that it is clear that all pidgins and creoles were developed and arose on the independent and similar because were all derived from Indo-European languages in case of Atlantic varieties because they all have common West African substratum.

The problem with this theory is stuck to only Atlantic pidgin and creole. What about the other African pidgin like Southern and Eastern African Swahili pidgin Kouwenberg and Singler (2008) which was developed as far back as 6th and 7th century and Ethiopian pidgin Arabic? And not talking of Galgaliya pidgin found in Northern Nigerian, Zikin. I am seeing this theory is problematic, because it focuses and based on only Atlantic pidgins and creoles.

5. Universalist theory

This theory is talking about the universal similarities of pidgin and creole in general, is the most recent among all the theories. It claimed that similarities is the basic inclination among all humans to form languages of similar category or systematic language with simple syntactic SVO with little or no reduction or other complexities of sentence, with lexicon that makes maximum use of polysemy operating from limited vocabulary, and devices use of reduplication, and simplified phonology.

This theory shared common features with the other theories. In a practical way, creole is predicted to pristine value for linguistic limitations. For example “With the parameter pro-drop, whereby the personal pronoun is not obligatory with verb forms (cf. Italian capisco ‘I understand’), the unmarked setting is for no pro-drop to be allowed and indeed this is the situation in all pidgins and creoles…” (Atlantic Group). It is direct oppose to independent and parallel theory because this one did not restrict itself to one side or particular section of pidgin and creole. To me is the one that provided convincing points more than the other theories.

In support of the above theory, we brought this hypothesis to back it. It is called “The language Bio-program Hypothesis” which was developed by Bickerton. The bio-program hypothesis is hypothesizing that there is no doubt that the language (creole) is derived from pidgin, and their main idea is that the creole is been invented by children using the biological program for language to transform the unstructured language (pidgin) into a language with highly structured grammar. It is like responding to Chomsky’s view that they theorized language on mental organ. Bickerton and his followers were suggesting that there is a particular part of human cognitive dedicated to language. This is the best hypothesis that supports this theory because the other theories did not account for this fact. The inventor suggested that, this hypothesis provided a view which makes the child freely change into the target language.

Whatever arguments people have about the origin of both pidgin and creole, we assumed that pidgin and creole were originated from the contact situation in Africa (languages contact that took place in Africa in pre-colonial period, colonial period, and post-colonial period among people who tried to find a common language for communication). You can apply any of these theories to this situation that we discussed above and will still give you a positive result, in the sense that pidgin and creole were originated from Africa.

VI. Developmental Stages Of Pidgins And Creoles

The developmental stages are categorized into four. These four categories usually appear in two contexts where each context has a specific term for it. There are: social situation and linguistic correlation.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social situation</th>
<th>Linguistic correlation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Marginal contact</td>
<td>Restricted pidgin</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Nativization</td>
<td>Extended pidgin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mother tongue development</td>
<td>Creole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Movement towards standard language (not necessarily input language)</td>
<td>Decreolization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pidgin and creole usually undergo these stages for their development to take place. Pidgin has a life-cycle and generally agreed that it is characterised into restricted and extended, it is obvious that pidgin start as a restricted variety of language which used in a contact situation for the purpose of trading.

Process of pidginization and creolization

When language is limitedly used only for the purpose of communication among natives of different languages, then pidginization process normally begins. It is restricted and undergone simplification and admixture. If a new language emerged as a stable variety in such procedure, it is called pidgin. Rickfor (1977) claimed that pidginized modifications which went through difficulties and linguistics expansion process, then the creole may be used for any new stable variety that results from this process, but Bickerton (1984) have argued that there was no evidence which will show the expansion of creole. Pidgin emerged involving simple structures often commands and little number of words strained from the language of the superstrate, Todd
(1984). Pidgin and creole are usually believed to be simplified languages, all sort of complexity that language have has been reduced. They are simpler than their lexifier, Jeff (2008). In response to this issue of simplification, Jeff (2008) quoted two authors with different views. McWhorter (2001, 2003), his article titled “The World’s simplest grammars are creole grammars”. In retaliation, DeGraff (2001a, 2001b) has clearly stated that Haitian Creole is not simpler than other languages, citing an example that broad derivational morphology is in existence in that language.

While creolization is the situation in which pidginized languages are extended in context in which it is used and they must serve the functions of communication and expression. In often time this process is going to link with children born into such situation, and then the pidginized languages are assumed to have undergone complication and expansion of linguistic resources in the process. As a result of such process any stable language that emerged is called a creole, Rickford (1977:191-2). Another explanation is from Rickford (1977) “Creolization is the process by which one or more pidginized variants of a language (emerging from an initial multilingual contact situation. . .) are extended in domains of use and in the range of communicative and expressive functions they must serve. Frequently, but not necessarily, this process is associated with native use by children born into the contact situation. The pidginized variants are assumed to undergo complication and expansion of linguistic resources in the process, and the term Creole may be used for any new stable variety that results from this process”

Reasons for the development of pidgin

When people were taken from Africa as slaves to North America to work on the plantation and mixed with people from other parts of the world with different tribes, and there was a need to communicate among themselves and their masters, so, pidgin was developed, because there was no common language to share between them. The reason behind the development of this language, they could come up with the idea to escape back to their land. This issue has been reported by Smelser et al (2002) that, it took place in nineteenth century and they published it in international encyclopaedia of the social and behavioural sciences.

Pidgins came into existence through colonization. The languages that played major role during colonization were the ones led to the emergence of pidgin. Such languages were: Spanish, French, Portuguese, English and Dutch.

Creoles usually come into existence in one of the two following situations. Firstly, when people (speakers of pidgin) were kept separately to deny them from speaking their various native languages, and were forced to maintain the developed pidgin, and pass it to future generation, then the transition from pidgin to creole will take place. This situation normally took place in the Caribbean and South American by the colonial masters, they enforced it on the slaves. The second situation is when pidgin is purposely upgraded to higher variety of language by social group; this situation is one happened in Papua New Guinea, and Cameroun, but that of the Cameroun does not to some extent like the Papua New Guinea. The result for such situation, the children of these speakers of such pidgin may or will end up speaking that pidgin as their first language. Therefore, abandoning the native languages of their parents, and then the growth of linguistic stages for new creole will take place and act as well developed language, because the language (pidgin) has been given or used with full status.

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