

So is there any way to prove that pidgins never existed, or can they only not be proven to exist?

So actually, I think this question hinges on the way you def-- on what you mean by pidgins, what is meant by pidgins, right?

So at least wanted define pidgins, which is to say that there are these systems of communication which are created when people come from different language background and they have to communicate, they have speak to each other.

So like in Africa, in Asia-- in fact, this term pidgin arose in the coast of China, and it referred to this business language that people used to cross linguistic barriers.

So from that perspective, pidgins do exist, right, if you take it as that definition.

Pidgins have been documented over and over again.

They are non-native languages, and typically, they indeed reduce in structure.

But as people use them more and more, they can develop structure.

So-- go ahead.

OK.

AUDIENCE: I guess my question be more like, if-- you were saying that there was no pidgin of Haitian Creole?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Mm-hmm.

AUDIENCE: Like, uh-huh, like-- MICHEL DEGRAFF: Right, so this is where we need to be clear about how we define pidgins, because we looked at the way Bickerton defined it.

So the claim was a very strong one, that in the history of the Creole, you have this earlier speech system that's extremely rich using structure, and he was very precise in terms of what's missing.

And what's missing is affixes-- so no bits of words that can be used to create larger words.

So we don't have things like "-er" in English "singer." So that's a very extremely precise claims that, according to which pidgins are supposed to be at the bottom level of language complexity.

They are really simplest system impossible-- in fact, even un-language-like.

They might remind us, say, of the language of homo erectus.

So that claim is a strong one that we're looking at.

So in the history of Haitian Creole, according to the evidence that we have, we don't see anything of that sort that's documented.

So the earliest archival data source that we have the full-fledged language with all the bells and whistles, including affixes, embedding, very complex language from the very earliest stages.

You see?

But you seem to have some doubts about-- AUDIENCE: Yeah, because-- I didn't write this question, but I was still having-- like we can't know if there was no recording of there being a pidgin, but maybe there was no recording because-- like, if there is a recording, we're like, OK, oh, then a pidgin did exist.

But just because there's no recording, can we not say that, oh, maybe there was a spoken one?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Right, but it was never-- yeah, I can see what you're trying to drive at.

AUDIENCE: Or if somebody were to ask-- also, what was in between-- between the current Creole and the different languages.

If somebody-- how would I-- if somebody were to debate, it's like, oh, Creole's are-- then how should I respond?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Well, you could say that-- OK, so actually, Bickerton has used something of that kind of argument.

Well, the way he put it, he put it very succinctly.

He says that "the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," right, which is exactly what you're trying to claim here.

The fellows would not have that clear kind of data is that evidence that this doesn't exist.

It might have existed, but nobody recorded it, OK?

But in this scenario, right, the claim is stronger that-- you see something like if it could have existed and nobody could pay attention, because it could have existed and be part of a community to the point, where children being born in the community would have used that evidence to create the creole.

Remember that this is what you get.

At some point-- let's see.

Let's call it generation, I don't know-- let's call it zero.

And for that generation, all the hearing is-- I think I'm going to have to use a stronger marker, so Rachel could you help me?

Maybe this one, it might work.

Let's see.

This is from here.

Oh, yeah. That's better.

OK, so there would have been enough of this kind of data for these children then to use that and then, from that, create the creole.

So it's not as if that this would have been a very fleeting type of language, so given that they were observers of the speech patterns of that period, people wrote about the patterns of the Africans, you see.

It would have been surprising if it was indeed a communal lingua franca of sorts, and nobody noticed that, whoa, there was a system where all the French suffixes were gone.

What one could imagine along the line was that there might have been some Africans who will be producing something that could be Pidgin-like, which would be like a second language version of French-- which is what we expect, right?

Because if you're learning Italian, you might go to a stage where you produce Italian verbs without affixes, right?

And from that perspective, yes, one could imagine that there would be some speakers producing Pidgin-like data, but could there be a whole community that would be using that Pidgin-- including, say, people in their own homes to the point where the children would be only getting-- because remember that for Bickerton, the crucial fifth piece is that you have children here, and the children are transforming this Pidgin into a Creole.

And then you get, at a later generation, it's called this, I don't know, plus one.

Then you get the Creole becoming a stable language from the Pidgin.

AUDIENCE: And too, like, [INAUDIBLE] like tunneling the people [INAUDIBLE]?

Would it be done, like, that people were keeping their languages while this was being developed at the same time?

Or that how it would be-- is that how it happened with like, were people keeping their African languages-- MICHEL DEGRAFF: Yeah, in fact, there is reports.

So someone like Toussaint L'Ouverture, for example, the well-known Haitian leader, was claimed to also speak African languages from, say, the Bay family, so this is likely that one could imagine at some point there would be many speakers in the community who would be bilingual or trilingual, even speaking four or five languages.

But the question here is whether there was anything like what Bickerton posits, that was spoken across the community to the point where the children had no choice but to use only the speech and data to create the native creole, and the evidence is not there.

And also, structurally-- and this is what we see.

So maybe we should come back to that question when we look at the data, because we're going to come back to the data that we have and try to make sense of this claim.

AUDIENCE: If you think about the situation with Spanish-- or with Spanglish in the US, it's very-- I mean, I would say that there's several generations that speak it.

I also would say that it's relatively unstable in the way that a Pidgin might be, but I also wouldn't know what the difference would be between an unstable Pidgin and code switching in the sense that, like, if you think about more of a modern day example, I would say that Spanglish is the best candidate, but that also is my concern.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: But again-- so that's a good point that you're bringing up here.

So the idea is that would Spanglish be anything like a Pidgin, right?

And first of all, I would say that the conditions that surrounds Spanglish are very different from those that surrounded, say, the creation of Haitian creole, so in terms of just a mix, you see-- so in Haitian creole, where we have lots of African languages being spoken and plus many varieties of French.

There wasn't just one French.

There were many languages that were now called French, but in fact they were quite different in terms of the structures-- what the French themselves called the Patois, right.

AUDIENCE: I thought when we talked about Pidgins, we talked about Pidgins as non-genetic languages, so then, if we're looking at that definition, then technically the only Pidgins would be the very, very first languages.

So then you can't have creole of Pidgin, because it is influenced or derived from something?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Well, that's what we're going to see exactly-- that in a way, there's a sense in which by using that-- [INAUDIBLE] creoles derive from Pidgin, you're already creating a bias against the area that-- the Africans, actually they were learning French in the same way, say, that the French people themselves in Europe, back when France was being created, were learning Latin.

And in fact, we're going to look at some data like that.

OK, so this is all good, so you guys have been have been asking all the right questions.