

## Re: Related languages (Re: A China–Sumer connection)

**Source:** <http://sci.tech–archive.net/Archive/sci.anthropology/2005–03/1300.html>

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**From:** Comm (*tjsrno\_at\_spampost.com*)

**Date:** 03/18/05

Date: Fri, 18 Mar 2005 10:35:01 GMT

Hey there, see in. It's getting hard to find the section of miles long thread that we are chatting on, heh.

<phippmartin@hotmail.com> wrote in message  
news:1111127875.078231.178130@z14g2000cwz.googlegroups.com...  
> [*sci.archaeology removed (the name in the header, not the entire  
> group). Feel free to make cultural references on topic in  
> sci.anthropology.*]  
>  
> Neeraj Mathur wrote:  
>> "Comm" <tjsrno@spampost.com> wrote in message  
>> news:FG9\_d.10842\$oO4.3945@newsread3.news.pas.earthlink.net...  
>>>  
>>> "Neeraj Mathur" <neemathur@hotmail.com> wrote in message  
>>> news:d1af19\$7ig\$1@news.ox.ac.uk...  
>>>>  
>>>> "Comm" <tjsrno@spampost.com> wrote in message  
>>>> news:9lLZd.9617\$oO4.4756@newsread3.news.pas.earthlink.net...  
>>>>>  
>>>>> "Neeraj Mathur" <neemathur@hotmail.com> wrote in message  
>>>>> news:d164co\$i91\$1@news.ox.ac.uk...  
>>>>> I'm a bit confused here, because the definition of 'creole' that I  
> gave,  
>>>> which you agree with, was based entirely on grammar and structure  
> (note  
>>>> phrases like 'simplified languages', 'grammatical complexity').  
>>>>> Vocabulary has nothing to do with that definition of creole.  
>>>>>  
>>>>> Hmm, not to my ear. I hear what happens when Mexicans, Anglos,  
> Haitians  
>>>>> and Jamaicans have to work together. Not too long before they  
> speak a  
>>>>> language in everyday use that heh, no one ELSE understands. Then  
> the  
>>>>> words I used before "contact and blending" (Martin also said  
> blending, I

>> > *think*) is more appropriate.

>

> *Actually, I said "merging".*

>

>> *Yes, certainly, there is often vocabulary blending. But does that*

> *make it a*

>> *pidgin or a creole? Vocabulary alone can be used to communicate very*

> *basic*

>> *ideas, I'm sure, and so that might work for pidgin. But the*

> *distinction*

>> *between pidgin and creole must be based on grammar.*

>

> *Comm, I think what Neeraj means is that creoles are formed when pidgins*

> *develop their own gramatical rules. The problem is that, since people*

> *here are associating languages based on the development of grammar,*

> *they would place the resultant language in group A if it developed a*

> *grammar based on a language from group A and they would place the*

> *language in group B if it developed grammar from a language in group B.*

I know that, I know how they do – and about language trees. I don't accept it! Let someone do my experiment. What kind of grammar is on that skit (I emailed it to Neeraj and gave you the link to it)? I wish I had the reference, but one person noticed that pigeons, no matter where they are, tend to have the SAME grammatical rules, independently of each other. He cited African countries and Polynesian countries. He then brought up little children and the grammar they tend to use (before they are corrected). It was very astonishing. But you see "Comm/reference" is a BIG problem!! The one person who has it, could get it, won't due to too much time expended on what he regards as 1. people can get off their butts and research it all themselves and 2. they don't want a reference, they'll just spit on it. He's too busy.

> *Since it is highly unlikely that people who have their own language(s)*

> *are going to create an entirely new grammar for a pidgin without it*

> *being based on the grammar of the language(s) they already speak, then*

> *perhaps you agreed too quickly to accept the definition of "creole"*

> *given. Or perhaps "creole" isn't the right word. Maybe we need to*

> *create a new term to describe what we are talking about.*

I already did: contact language, merging language. The response was not dialogue – but I got flamed.

We could call

> *a language a "blend" whenever it contains grammar from one language and*

> *vocabulary from another.*

I'd go for that.

>

>> > *I think I know what you mean. Ever hear hillbillies talk? They*

> *say*

>> > *things like "uglysome," "lonesome" (means lonely, but "lonsome" is*

> *still*  
>> > *used by everyone), they'd use "some" instead of "ly" all the time,*  
> *or a lot*  
>> > *of the time – even "friendlysome!" And they make words like*  
> *"yorn."*  
>>  
>> *What does 'yorn' mean? Something to do with yesterday..?*  
>  
> *I would guess it would be used in the sentence "This is mine and that*  
> *is yorn."*

No, they'd say yours. But "kids of yorn." Seems to be after "of." OF mine, OF youn. And no, no "hisn." Also, never "yonder tree." "That tree out yonder." They say that. Over yonder. Out yonder.

>  
>> > *The speech is also highly metaphorical. It takes a while, but it's*  
>>> > *understandable. The grammar is mutilated – unless you regard it as*  
> *another*  
>> > *language (I do, but if I had to edit somethnig they wrote, I became*  
> *a*  
>> > *grammar/spelling nazi). The thing with written language is that it*  
> *tends*  
>> > *to be held in stasis by "those who ahem, Properly Speak it" –*  
> *unlike*  
>> > *non–written language.*  
>>  
>> *You're absolutely right here. No linguist worth his salt would*  
> *disagree with*  
>> *you. Within the speech–community of any given language, there is*  
> *likely to*  
>> *be one or two 'prestige' dialects – to the linguist, this does not*  
> *make the*  
>> *other dialects unworthy of study. But, as you said, all the varieties*  
> *do*  
>> *have grammar. These grammars can be understood from a historical*  
>> *perspective.*  
>  
> *This is an area where I do have personal experience. In Asia, or*  
> *anywhere I imagine, when people are learning English, then tend to make*  
> *similar mistakes. Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, they will omit the past*  
> *tense, plurals, confuse countable and uncountable nouns, confuse the*  
> *meanings of words for which they don't make distinctions in their own*  
> *languaes (bring/take, let/make, look for/ find, can/will, borrow/lend,*  
> *etc.)*

HMMM! "Can you find that?" I say that all the time. I mean "look for" it. Take that to the party. Means "bring it." "Did you take the extra shoes?" means "Did you bring the extra shoes." I don't get what you mean by let/make – and to borrow is opposite of to lend. OR: can you lend me = can I borrow. Also those completely backward sentences I do a lot, when I'm tired. "Raining. It is all day." "Supper. I ate before."

and speak with thick accents based on the way they pronounce

- > *words in their own languages. They make similar mistakes even if they*
- > *have plurals and tenses in their own respective languages. But you*
- > *know what? They still understand each other when they are speaking*
- > *"English" amongst themselves, even though I might not understand them*
- > *and they might not understand my "correctly" spoken English. This is*
- > *how the different varieties of English come about: in the Philippines,*
- > *for example, where all the English in school is taught by local*
- > *teachers, the students are blissfully unaware of the fact that their*
- > *variety of English is in fact different from standard American English.*
- >
- > *The book Teaching English as an International Language (McKay, Sandra*
- > *Lee, Oxford University Press, 2002 – yes, I'm posting this from work*
- > *today) gives the example of Standard Singapore English vs. Singlish on*
- > *page 56 (quoting Shaw, W.D. 1983. 'Asian Student attitudes towards*
- > *English' from Smith, L.(ed): Readings in English as an International*
- > *Language*. Oxford: Pergamon: 21–34). *Even Standard Singapore English*
- > *differs from Standard American English, but Singlish would be a blend*

I once saw samples of that and was able to read it with no problem. And there are heaps of samples on those "directions" printed when things are made in China and directions written up on there. Some of it is funny.

- > *(possibly even a creole) because it has its own grammatical rules.*
- > *McKay also gave the example of a study (Parasher, S.V. 1994. 'Indian*
- > *English: certain grammatical, lexical and stylistic features. in*
- > *Angihotri, R.K. and A.L. Khanna (eds): Second Language Acquisition:*
- > *Socio–Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of English in India. New Delhi:*
- > *Sage Publications: 145–164.) which showed that Indian speakers of*
- > *English are more likely than British and American speakers of English*
- > *to consider "mistakes" made by other Indian speakers of English as*
- > *"acceptable". What local speakers consider "acceptable" is, in fact, a*
- > *different variety of English. You might have some first hand*
- > *experience with this too, Neeraj, if you ever find people from India*
- > *speaking a variety of English that you find a bit odd.*

You can hear that on comedy shows where an Indian guy is really doing it up. It's hilarious. They use all wrong metaphors.

- >
- > *This is where all the arguments break down. What is English? Indeed,*
- > *what do we even mean by "language"?*

There ya go. Same page. Way outside the box. I wish my experiment could be done.

If a child points to objects in

- > *the street and says "car... truck... bike" and then points to animals*
- > *and says "cat... dog... bird", is the child speaking English or just*
- > *reciting vocabulary? What is the child doing if he refers to objects*
- > *in the street using one language and animals with a different language?*
- > *We do that all the time in English, refering to food with French words*

- > *(beef, poultry, pork, mutton), referring to farm animals using Germanic*
- > *words (cow, chicken, pig, lamb) and then taking words directly from*
- > *Latin to form technical terms (insert names of species here).*

YES! My favorite critter is anomalocaris. He be BAD. (= it's awesome).

Hmm, where they gendered at all? Wrong subject.

- >
- > *When a student of English uses his own grammar to write English is he*
- > *writing English or just using English vocabulary to write his own*
- > *language? I swear I've had students, when asked to write something in*
- > *English, write something using English words and Chinese grammar, and*
- > *despite what Comm says about word order in English being "unimportant"*
- > *and despite what Peter Daniels said about Chinese being "a lot like*
- > *English", the result is \_extremely\_ difficult to understand.*

No, I said word order IS important in English. If I typed otherwise, I goofed. I think Chinese is a bit like English too due to word order being important – but no cases. Word order is not important if you have a heap of cases. Chinese is parsimonious – and that's how I see English. But Chinese is spoken in tones. Sheesh! I tried an experiment a few times. Chinese people unable to say Philip. It came out Phirip. I wondered if it was a hearing thing. So I said to say "Phirip" and they repeated it and it came out "Philip." So then, this is a hearing thing! I knew they could SAY the L and R right, Bruce Lee? They must hear ME saying Bluce Ree. Hearing. Now, heh, to dredge up the subject that's long gone – I heard that one of the Egyptian dynasties also switched the L and R sounds. But others did not. That leads me to believe that..... guess! :)

When I

- > *take up their writing in class I'll say "This grammatical structure is*
- > *used in Chinese, but not in English". If I hadn't studied Chinese, I*
- > *probably would have no idea what they were trying to say. But it must*
- > *have made perfect sense to them, assuming they read it over before they*
- > *handed it in. So were they writing English, Chinese or some perverted*
- > *blend of the two? (The problem, of course, is how English has*
- > *traditionally been taught, namely the grammar–translation method, which*
- > *becomes simply the translation method in the case of lazy students.)*
- >
- > *Getting back to your point, Neeraj, the "prestige" dialects of English*
- > *in Singapore would be Standard American English and Standard Singapore*
- > *English. Is Singlish even English at all? If Singlish is like the*
- > *stuff my students here in Taiwan write then I'd say, no, not based on*
- > *the standards that people here give regarding English and French. If*
- > *Singlish grammar is Chinese grammar then Singlish would be "related" to*
- > *Chinese and wouldn't even be considered to be "related" to English,*
- > *even though much of the vocabulary is borrowed from English. One might*
- > *imagine Normans, centuries ago, coming to England to teach people*
- > *French (and loot their towns and rape their women) only to find,*
- > *centuries later that the resultant English language bears no relation*
- > *whatsoever to French and is still classified as being purely Germanic.*
- > *How discouraging a thought is that for language teachers!*

>  
>> > *It's everyday speech and no, it's not regional at all! I just*  
> *said to*  
>> > *the handyman before, when he asked me "Where you were?" I*  
> *answered, "I*  
>> > *left out to th'store, missed ya." He's a bilingual Puerto Rican*  
> *from NYC*  
>> > *and he had no problem understanding what I said – and I talk very*  
> *fast.*  
>> > *He said what he was going to do to a room (which I can't quote*  
> *verbatim).*  
>> > *I said, "ged." Normal English!*  
>>  
>> *Normal? I'm not certain. I speak English as a first language, I grew*  
> *up in*  
>> *Toronto, and I'm sure I wouldn't have understood the exact nuances of*  
> *what*  
>> *you meant. Heard on its own, 'I left out' would leave puzzled; in the*  
> >> *sentence you gave, I would wonder what the particular meaning of your*  
> >> *sentence is. It seems that it is not equivalent to 'I went to the*  
> *store' or*  
>> *'I was at the store'; perhaps the closest is 'I'd gone out to the*  
> *store'?*  
>  
> *Or "I went out to the store". Here "left"="went out" so "left out" is*  
> *redundant ("I went out out?") here. Sometimes redundancy is useful but*  
> *here it is just confusing. "Left out" could also mean "omitted", for*  
> *example.*

It means leave, left – but it's used. I'm not even sure it originated in BVE. I heard that long before BVE was a "thing." From foreigners.

>  
>> *Certainly, in the moment and with context, I would have understood*  
> *enough to*  
>> *go ahead with the conversation. But that doesn't mean that the*  
> *sentence is*  
>> *grammatical in any of the versions of English that I know. The fact*  
> *that it*  
>> *is grammatical in the English you speak is quite interesting; the*  
> *fact that*  
>> *it seems to have a very specific semantic niche means that your*  
> *grammar and*  
>> *lexicon are certainly complex. I'd be interested in knowing how this*  
>> *construction developed. I wouldn't think that it has much to do with*  
>> *creolization!*  
>  
> *I think Comm needs to admit he made a mistake that was, nevertheless,*  
> *understood. In the "China–Sumer" thread, Comm made the mistake of*  
> *saying "here (South America)" and people got the impression she was*  
> *posting from South America when "here" meant "America"... or "planet*  
> *Earth"... or "the Milky Way Galaxy" or wherever she is posting from*

> *that isn't specifically South America.*

Type 120 wpm, don't proof read. My mistake. Ray speaks Spanish – I do remember him screwing up English a little bit after he got done speaking Spanish, then he sort of shook his head and talked normal again. Just a guess. Galactic Weather update – our massive black hole is active again..... :)

Even native speakers of English

> *make mistkaes. See? I just made a typo. No big deal. :)*

When I'm typing very fast, I often consistently make specific typos – spelling errors too. And the letter is nowhere near the letter I want. I'll type "not" instead of "now" or vice versa (can cause BIG confusions). Or ridiculous instead of ridiculous. When I go back and read it (not type it) after it's posted – ACH, I see the mistake.

>

>> > *Now, is "where you were?" a Spanish grammer thing? I don't know.*

> *He*

>> > *speaks English with a NY accent, not a Spanish accent. He was born*

> *here.*

>> > *I'm also phonetically spelling out the conversation here, verbatim.*

> *This*

>> > *is normal interactive conversation, everyday mundane stuff.*

>>

>> *'Where you were' might work as a word–by–word translation from*

> *Spanish*

>> *'donde estabas', if the person thinks 'donde = where' and 'estabas =*

> *you*

>> *were'.*

>

> *So was the man speaking English, Spanish, Spanish with English*

> *vocabulary, English with Spanish grammar, a blend of the two or a*

> *creole? This is getting confusing!*

>

>> *Of course in English, 'where you were' is most naturally interpreted*

>> *as a relative clause; most English speakers find that in questions,*

>> *wh–movement forces the verb to go in second place, and if this makes*

> *the*

>> *verb appear before its subject, it must be replaced by one of the*

> *invertible*

>> *auxiliaries. What I just said is not something that teachers or*

> *parents beat*

>> *into their children, and wasn't always the case; but you said*

> *yourself that*

>> *you found 'what light through yonder windows breaks?' ungrammatical.*

> *(You*

>> *would probably not have felt as strongly about 'What light breaks*

> *through*

>> *yonder window?' or, better in keeping with the aspect rules of modern*

>

>> *English, 'What light is breaking through yonder window?'. Now it's*  
> *just the*  
>> *vocabulary that seems a bit odd.)*  
>  
> *"What light is coming the window over there?"?*  
>  
>> > *This means that: 1) English*  
>> >> *speakers have an intuitive knowledge of a grammar that is*  
> *psychologically*  
>> >> *real to them;*  
>> >  
>> > *I doubt it. They are corrected as kids when they often say things,*  
> *and*  
>> > *they say things as if they are using that creole grammar (I read*  
> *one paper*  
>> > *on that, which was astonishing). Some kids, not all, are*  
> *constantly being*  
>> > *corrected by their parents due to wrong grammar.*  
>>  
>> *Of course, conscious correction is possible. But that's not the*  
> *primary way*  
>> *that children learn grammar rules. I was never corrected for using*  
> *'wrong'*  
>> *grammar in Hindi, nor was I ever taught what 'right' grammar should*  
> *be.*  
>> *Nevertheless, I know what is grammatical and what is not in Hindi.*  
>  
> *I'm always correcting my wife's grammar but she continues to make the*  
> *same mistakes. I end up talking back to her the same way (a blend of*  
> *Cebuano and English) because otherwise she doesn't understand me. And*  
> *we've been married eight years.*  
>  
>> > *There is nothing innate about how we speak a language.*  
>  
> *We don't know that. Children are born capable of learning any language*  
> *on Earth.*

You misunderstood what I said. Refer to my suggested experiment. I mean that there is nothing innate about the way we speak the language ugh...hmm – hard to convey what I mean here. OK, if I consciously have to and try to speak proper E, or write it properly, I can do it. But I normally do NOT do it. When you speak from the heart – unrestrained, spontaneously, it's too fast to monitor like that. OK, we are born with the genetic ability to speak – and we communicate that way. Just like eyesight is the main sense for us – not smell. Facial recognition is human. It's not dog. But WHAT we speak is determined by exposure – and so is HOW we speak it. That part is NOT innate. Did I once innately speak perfect English – and I mean perfect – and then suddenly innately speak lingo slang? HEY, I'm bilingual – I speak street and I speak proper – LOL.

That could mean either that we are all blank slates and that

> *we learn languages from scratch or it could mean that we all are born*

> *with an instinctive idea of what a noun or a verb is. The latter idea*

> *would explain how we learn languages so quickly.*

Yes, but not how we put the words together or what words we use. An experiment would show that. Then again, that girl that grew up with dogs and many others documented can NOT speak, even tho they can vocalize, name objects – they can't put nouns and verbs together to make sentences!

Neurologists learned something from that. You learn to speak, but there is a cut off point. That is what they found out.

>

>> > *And I think that is the big problem. The Romanian was using mostly*

> *Slavic*

>> > *words. I even recognized a few of them (tho I no longer speak a*

> *word of*

>> > *Russian – well, curse words I remember HA!!), enough to know the*

> *brunt of*

>> > *the convo – which "races" would end up on which side! The*

> *Hispanic with*

>> > *me – and she understands all kinds of Hispanic (Spanish, Portuguese*

> *and*

>> > *even that other language spoken in Spain – the name of the language*

>>> > *startes with a 'c' – I don't remember what it's called – but she*

>> > *translated stuff for me that was spoken in it. – and she also*

> *speaks*

>> > *Italian fluently her husband is Italian) – she did not understand*

> *a*

>> > *single word of it. Not one SINGLE word. The Pole understood it.*

> *Now*

>> > *here is the thing: apparently, it was easier for the both of them*

> *to*

>> > *speak like that, than to resort to what English they both knew –*

> *and I*

>> > *know they knew enough English to ask me a kind of complex question*

> *about*

>> > *ethnicity and religion.*

>>

>> *Ah, there's my answer. Okay, now I understand your point a bit more:*

> *you are*

>> *suggesting that a linguist should recognise a close link between*

> *Slavic and*

>> *Romanian because a Romanian speaker can choose from amongst the words*

> *in his*

>> *lexicon to make himself understood to a Slav, although this means*

> *that he*

>> *can no longer be understood by other Romance speakers.*

>>

>> *Yes, you have a point there. I would just mention that such Romanian*

> *would*

>> *sound very forced and contrived to most Romanian speakers. A better*

> *test*

>> *would be to see how much a Pole can understand when overhearing a*

>> *conversation of two native speakers, or a folk song.*

>

> *The point would be even better made if we knew why the Spaniard didn't*

> *understand the Romanian. Perhaps the Spaniard didn't understand any of*

> *the words. On the other hand, the fact that Romanian and Polish are*

> *both Indo–European languages may be enough for the Polish person to*

> *understand a Romanian sentence because the grammar would not,*

> *obviously, have been too different.*

Spanish is also an IE language. She didn't understand a single word. I picked up some Slavic words, a few.

The same, however, cannot

> *obviously be said of English and Chinese: even if English and Chinese*

> *people used the same vocabulary we probably wouldn't understand each*

> *other, even though both languages are described as SVO*

> *(subject–verb–object) languages. The fundamental question is, of*

> *course, how similar does the grammar of two languages have to be for*

> *people to be able to understand each other?*

Grammar? If the words are understandable, I'd say grammar means nothing. Well, it means a LITTLE. I've seen samples from Russians that were impossible (and funny as hell). Real life experience. Let Neeraj read what I emailed him and see if he can understand it. It's perfectly understandable to me and the many others that read it. Keep in mind it's phonetic – or most of it is. The proper English is NOT being typed out phonetically on there. You check it out. See if you can read it. "Marsh Debate." That one.

Another example then: German is SOV I think. Yeah, it is. It's not SVO. Sometimes I understand what some Germans are saying at club I go to – sometimes. It's usually the ones that say Ich more like IKH and not like ISH. And they are talking FAST. It's the vocabulary! Absolutely. I can't spell this, but here goes: Kannst du Deutsch (No one says "sprechen sie Deutch" except foreigners, but that is like English, the words are like our words :) Was heisst du? (No one says "was ist deine name" either, except foreigners, and that's also like English :) Ich bin in Unigte Staten geboren. It's backwards. SOV. Ich bin geboren in Unigte Staten is like our grammar! A German can understand either one. I asked. I took 2 years of Spanish on the hunch that I'd have to know how to speak that someday. Damn was I right or what? It was nothing but memorizing words, a real strain for me, too – and then forgetting them after the test – plus I absolutely loathed it to the point of wanting to cut class. Hate is not a strong enough word. I can read cyrillic – and we used to write English in cyrillic and pass notes around in class. If teachers found them, they couldn't read them :–D And it was writing, not printing. I can still do that. USE. Use and disuse. If there were enough Spanish speakers (heh, like now?) back then, I'd probably be able to speak Spanish now. Now, if a Spanish speaking person (my girlfriend who didn't understand Romanian did

this) says something to me really slow, every word distinct, I can sometimes understand a little of what they are saying – how that is, I do not know – but it's definitely NOT from studying it back in the 1960s. Maybe – yo (like ya?) tengo (??) calor (like calories?) HEH. Frio, like freezing? Neeraj will understand this one . I tend to use the word "dharma" as if it's English (cultural thing with us – I think he might have that too). It means wisdom/truth. But then comes "dharmic" – ? Dharmas (plural – 5 of them). I have used that too. Someone told me that is a Sanskrit word. But I doubt "ic" and "s" is Sanskrit.

>

> *Martin*

>