

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

**Source:** <http://sci.tech–archive.net/Archive/sci.archaeology/2005–03/2291.html>

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**From:** Neeraj Mathur ([neemathur\\_at\\_hotmail.com](mailto:neemathur_at_hotmail.com))

**Date:** 03/16/05

Date: Wed, 16 Mar 2005 23:31:53 -0000

"Comm" <tjsrno@spampost.com> wrote in message  
news:9ILZd.9617\$oO4.4756@newsread3.news.pas.earthlink.net...

>

> "Neeraj Mathur" <[neemathur@hotmail.com](mailto:neemathur@hotmail.com)> wrote in message  
> news:d164co\$91\$1@news.ox.ac.uk...

[snip for brevity]

> *This is usenet, I chimed in because it looked like fun. Then I got  
> flamed; and so did others, PKM got flames, PM got flamed. So I flamed  
> back. Typical usenet.*

It does get a bit tiresome. Thank you for taking my post in the tone it was intended, and responding in kind.

> *Your central claim*

>> *seems to be that 'English has been a creolized language since after  
>> 1066'. You also stated above 'arm chair or usenet linguists tend to think  
>> creoles are some kind of pidgen.' At this point it seems that we are  
>> losing each other – rather than debate terminology with you, I'll just  
>> ask you to define what you are using 'creole' and 'creolized' to mean.  
>> (To most linguists, creoles and pidgins are intimately related: pidgins  
>> are vastly simplified languages meant to allow contact between cultures  
>> speaking different languages, and creoles develop from pidgins when their  
>> use exceeds that original contact purpose and they gain in grammatical  
>> complexity to express a wider range of communicative needs.)*

>

> *I agree with your definitions. I say English is a creole (that has become  
> a defacto language) – especially now with all the Latin/Greek words for  
> anything technical we have to say (including the word technical).*

Aside – I should state that this topic is currently also being debated in the thread 'Questions Words and Word Order' with Manuel M. Campagna (in sci.lang), who is currently advancing the same position as yourself. Perhaps we should proceed in only one place to save bandwidth, and we can all look at each others' points together.

Okay, to your point.

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.

I don't dispute with you at all that English gained vastly in vocabulary from Norman French, from Latin directly (with some words borrowed even in the Old English period, particularly church-associated terms), and later from Greek. English has also borrowed words from the languages of the former empire – such common words as 'jungle', 'pyjama' and 'bungalow', for example, were all borrowed from Hindi. It is therefore quite true and quite important to point out the strong vocabulary links that English has with French, and the somewhat weaker links it has with so many other languages. But it is difficult to argue from this that English is a creole. A successful tradition of integrating foreign vocabulary does not tell us anything of the language's structure.

> *Imo word order doesn't matter that much in spoken English. You can wreck the language and still communicate fine. "I'm a leave out." "He left out." (it means, "I'm going to go" and "He is gone.") Do you understand that?*

To be perfectly honest, I didn't understand either! Are there regions where that is normal or acceptable?

> *"I cold." "To the store I went." "Went to the store, I did." "I went to the store." Or even just, "Went to the store!" In spoken English, that is communication – no problem. How does anyone know WHO went to the store in that last example? The thing is, in spoken English, people do know.*

I agree with you completely. However, not all of those examples are felt to be grammatical by most speakers of English. This means that: 1) English speakers have an intuitive knowledge of a grammar that is psychologically real to them; 2) this grammar involves various rules and processes; 3) there are more rules and processes in the grammar than are strictly necessary for basic communication.

The existence of number 3 above, and the examples that you have provided, furnish evidence that English is in fact not a pidgin; the historical record will show that it never has been. If it has never been a pidgin, then by definition it is not a creole.

> *"Compliments, courtesy of the chef – poultry fillets." How much of that last one is Anglo Saxon/Germanic? It means you are going to be given some free chicken to eat.*

Mmm, I wish! I don't think I've ever gotten such sumptuous treats! But I agree with you that the vocabulary (except 'of' and 'the') is not Germanic in origin. It is also true that communication is achieved. Nevertheless, the

example is probably not a grammatical sentence in English. I'm sure you will also agree that, statistically, the two words in that phrase that are most common, that is, most likely to appear in any given text of any particular length, are precisely the two non–borrowed ones. Is this not an important fact when describing English?

>> *Upon consideration, then, it seems that the only thing that the Normans contributed to English was vocabulary.*  
>  
> *Yes. Everyday vocabulary. Also such merging like that would affect the way people pronounce the words – so much so that English speaking people can't understand Danish or German.*

Ah, it seems this is the first time that we are disagreeing on fact, not just interpretation. I do not believe that French is responsible for pronunciation changes. Phonological changes happen all the time, and the two languages that you mentioned – Danish and German – have managed to differentiate from each other so much so that they cannot understand each other. This was done without the political imposition of other languages as happened in England. Therefore I don't accept that Norman influence is behind the phonological developments of English.

> *By the time a few hundred years past in England with Normans and AS speaking to each other easily – would Normans that never went to England and had no contact with them or other Normans be able to understand each other? I doubt it.*

This is hard to say – especially considering that the Normans in England abandoned French after a few centuries anyway. Still, while the language would have changed, I doubt that they would have major barriers in understanding Parisians a few centuries after coming to England. (Actually, rereading what you wrote, have I misunderstood your question? You were talking about changes in Norman French within England, right?)

>> *Perhaps, having read my post, you will be closer to seeing why linguists like myself don't consider that to be such a major change: structural changes are much more significant than vocabulary differences when considering the language as a whole.*  
>  
> *I know you use that criteria. That is what I don't really accept or pay a mind to. Romanian is classed as a Romance language. Tell that to Slavs that understand them. Tell that to other Romance language speakers who don't understand a word Romanians are saying.*

I won't say much about Romanian, but I'm certain that I understand very little of it, while I understand much Italian and some Portuguese (I have studied Latin, French, and Spanish). Part of the problem is that Romanian treats articles and such as suffixes rather than as separate words that precede what they qualify, as well as its retention of more cases, at least for its articles. The only reason for grouping Romanian as a Romance language is its history and its descent from Latin. Still, it is not

particularly helpful to group it with the Slavic languages either, since Slavs who 'understand' it are probably only able to pick out a few key words in any given utterance, without any idea of the grammar or what is being said about those words. The situation is analogous to my friend studying Persian who occasionally recognises a word in a Bollywood song or when I'm chatting to somebody in Hindi, but still cannot come close to understanding the points of any given sentence or paragraph, much less provide a translation.

> *Already did. Vocabulary. Everyday words. Basic words, too. I know that  
> is is NOT the criteria you use. I agree with your definition of creole.*

I agree with you that English has strong vocabulary links with French. I disagree that this has any bearing on the question of whether or not Middle English was a creole, based on the definition that we have settled upon.

Neeraj Mathur