

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

Source: <http://sci.tech–archive.net/Archive/sci.archaeology/2005–03/2315.html>

From: Comm (tjsrno_at_spampost.com)

Date: 03/17/05

Date: Thu, 17 Mar 2005 06:43:49 GMT

"Neeraj Mathur" <neemathur@hotmail.com> wrote in message
news:d1afl9\$7ig\$1@news.ox.ac.uk...

An aside – you have a beautiful name! Ok, see inside :)

>

> "Comm" <tjsrno@spampost.com> wrote in message

> news:9ILZd.9617\$oO4.4756@newsread3.news.pas.earthlink.net...

>>

>> "Neeraj Mathur" <neemathur@hotmail.com> wrote in message

>> news:d164co\$i91\$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.

Well, I'm friendly to friendly people – very much so, too.

>

>> 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'd have to subscribe to it.

>

> *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.

>

> *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.*

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 us "some" instead of "ly" all the time, or a lot of the time – even "friendlysome!" And they make words like "yorn." 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. But what about backward grammar in German? Or takes "hark, what light by yonder window breaks." Hey, what's that light shining in the window? I have listened to plays of Shakespear on TV and I didn't understand a damned word they said. Not a word. I gave up. (heh, they need to dub it :)

>

>> *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?*

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! 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.

>
>> *"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.*

I'd have to say that all English speakers would understand it. It would only be "ungrammatical" if editing was required! The point to language is not proper grammar that's held in stasis – – the purpose is being understood – communication.

See above what I said about normal mundane conversation. I have said in a crowded room "eeh, cold." everyone understood me. Some said "me too."

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 grammer. And if they are not – ?? Many are not. But in comes school to do it. What if, as in the old days, there was NO school? Public school, or teaching what the esoteric and/or elite schools (two separate things) knew to the public was unheard of in every society at one time. Public school is a very new idea. I know a lot about esoteric schools of thought – I'm from one culturally, shadow language and all that. There is nothing innate about how we speak a language. It's learned – from home, school and then from peers, TV and etc.

The only valid experiments in language to determine the way the brain works would be illegal to do. Take a group of newborn babies from various ethnic groups – separate them from ANY heard/spoken language. Caretakers would

have to be mute, never speak (they'd have to be cared for up to a point).
Do the same thing again – only this time with identical twins. See what happens by the time they are 7 and talking, and then age 18 and talking. That would teach you about language, I really think. What language does the human ANIMAL speak in the wild – and what grammar? You'd find out that way. You'd also find out how capable 7 year old kids can be if they have to be! But they would have a language. What would it be? What kind of grammar would they have?

2) this grammar involves various rules and processes;

See above – kids often speak like creole speakers speak and have to be corrected – and they are corrected early on – IF they get corrected at all. Then school, TV, and etc. normalize the way they speak, sort of (a BIG sort of). Do the experiment.

3) there

> *are more rules and processes in the grammar than are strictly necessary for basic communication.*

No, there are more rules and such imposed on people at an early age, either at home, school, or from TV. Take English – somewhere along the line English speakers dropped all that imo silly gendered word crap – they dropped the cases too – and there is hardly any verb declension compared to other languages. In a funny kind of way, English IS like Chinese that way. It's simple, direct.

>
> *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.*

It's not? Someone said that to me! And yes, mmmm. They were really little fillets, tho :)

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?*

I'm not sure. I gave you real life examples above – now and before.

>

>>> *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.*

Hmm, every Dane I know understands German a bit, they can read it too – but not the other way around! I know that vowel sounds change – they just seem to do that – regionally – but I'm not able to say why. Could be coincidence, but maybe it's not. The southern accent is from people that were Scots Irish types moving down south. The NJ NY accent is from other people. It's all English, but the accents are very different.

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.*

Maybe not – or maybe it is a little, or more than a little. I can't prove it one way or the other.

>

>> *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.*

Heh, they abandoned it in Norway too!

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?)*

Yes. I think I botched up the question, my fault.

>

>>> *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.*

OK – about the grammar. I hear ungrammatical, horribly ungrammatical English every day in 99% of my daily dealings. I also speak it. And I speak it very very fast – as do others speaking to me. The words slur together to such a degree that they become one word. We have no problem communicating ideas like this, said in proper English to you: Elminate the 3 windows in the 3rd room. Cover them up with the same paneling that's in the room, try to match the color and also fix the outside to match. If the rug is glued, then put thick waterproof boards on it after it's cleaned. If there is a leak, caulk it.

Now, that's a lot being said (and a lot of work) – and the person better clearly understand what needs to be done! The thing is, we both do. I have seen Romanians have a convo with a Polish friend – and they were going at it fine. I have no problem understanding broken English, or twisted grammar. But when it's as twisted as Shakespeare? Forget it – I don't understand a word of it. But that's me. My husband understands it without a problem. It could be just that I'm bored out of my head by what I'm hearing. Not sure.

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.*

That was not what happened between the Romanian and the Pole. They were talking – then both switched to broken English and dragged me into it asking me about my related ethnic groups in – which ones were they in the former USSR.

>
>> *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.*

I think spoken Middle English was. You can't know what that was like – you can only know what intellectuals of the time (the educated!) wrote down. 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 starts 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.

Written language, even right now – and definitely in the past before public school – is probably NOT what the ordinary people were speaking. I really don't think I need a thesis to support that idea, either. I speak lingo every day, very fast too – the words are completely slurred, there is no way to make a distinction between one word and the next word. When I spoke to the Romanian and Pole, every word was distinct, proper, perfect. And it was a chore. Nobody speaks like that when they communicate casually! If I spoke to you, you might not understand a word I'm saying – but this is not spoken here; this is written language. People from India I've known, most of them were doctors I worked with at a job (highly educated, you see?) spoke Perfect Proper English. They often had a hard time understanding casual chat – even from me. And I heard complaints from black students that they did not understand what some professor was saying (professor was from India)! I couldn't fathom why, either. It was very understandable to me. Like extremely understandable!

>

> *Neeraj Mathur*

>