THE CONCEPT OF A 'CREOLOID'
EXEMPLIFICATION: BASILECTAL SINGAPORE ENGLISH[1]

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It would seem that a new concept needs to be established for certain speech varieties which are, strictly speaking, neither creoles nor part of a post-creole continuum but which share many features with them. Unlike creoles, these varieties did not develop from a pidgin but by some other process. However, they often show similar structural variables to creoles (or lects along a post-creole continuum) based on the same standard language. I have suggested the term **creoloid** for this type of phenomenon (Platt 1975a and b).

Some tentative defining features of a creoloid are:

(a) **A creoloid develops from the transference of features into the standard language from the speech varieties of several (sometimes unrelated) ethnic groups.** This is not to say that feature transference has occurred at an equal rate from **all** of the speech varieties involved nor that the area of transference is identical for every variety. Variety A may have caused interference in a certain part of the standard language whereas variety B may have had that effect on another part. Another possibility is that for certain reasons variety A is the dominant interference factor with B, C and D, because of their own structures, causing reinforcement of the transferred features. This would be the case in Singapore English where the strongest sources of transference are the Southern Chinese dialects of Hokkien and Cantonese (let us call them varieties A_1 and A_2) with Mandarin, Malay and Tamil (varieties A_3, B and C) playing a more minor part.

Typical transference in a creoloid situation takes place through the education system in its wider sense. The standard language is taught officially in its standard form in the classroom, but unlike a

53

true learner's language this type of interlanguage is used in regular
communicative situations outside the classroom at an early stage, caus-
ing partial petrification of certain structures. In addition to this,
it is usually the case that if instruction in all or most subjects is
given in the standard language, the teachers themselves would use a
local variety of this standard language. We therefore find a speech
continuum usually ranging from a localised form of the standard lan-
guage as the acrolect through mesolectal varieties to a basilect, a
pure creoloid.

   If one considers the whole phenomenon of variable use of certain
features (Labov 1972a, 1972b, Trudgill 1974), then one may consider
that in such a continuum a few creoloidal features are present to a
minor degree in the acrolect itself and that the percentage of their
use increases as one moves down the continuum (Platt 1976b, 1977c).

**(b) The standard or superordinate language is one of the official
      languages.** It may in certain cases, of course, be the official
language. Under British rule, English was the sole official language in
Singapore but in the present independent Republic of Singapore, English
is one of four official languages, the others being Mandarin, Malay
and Tamil.

**(c) The creoloid itself is used as one of several native languages by
      the speech community.** In this respect, the creoloid resembles a
creole, which serves as a native language for a sector of the speech
community.

   I would include as native language either the speaker's first lan-
guage (learned as first language in infancy) or learned at an early
stage of childhood. Singapore English is the native language, for
example, of most Singapore Eurasians, a number of Singapore Indians of
Christian faith, and certain English-medium educated Singapore Chinese.
Some of the latter may have first learned, for example, Hokkien,
Teochew or Cantonese from servants or older relatives but have picked
up Singapore English well before they were of school age from parents,
friends or elder siblings and it has become one of their native lan-
guages.

**(d) The creoloid is used in inter-ethnic group communication within
      the speech community where it is one of the sub-varieties.** This
aspect of being a lingua-franca between ethnic groups is usually con-
sidered more the function of a pidgin. But the typical creoloid dif-
fers from the typical pidgin in that it is not drastically reduced in

lexicon or syntax. The scope of communicative potential is limited
with most pidgins whereas the semantax of a creoloid would be flexible
enough for it to be used for detailed discussions on many topics (Platt
1975b).

In Singapore, Singapore English (SE) with its basilect, Singapore
Colloquial English (SCE) is just one of many speech varieties, the
others being Mandarin, Southern Chinese dialects (Hokkien, Cantonese,
Teochew, with some Hakka and Hainanese (Platt 1976a), a local form of
Malay, Tamil and other Dravidian languages, Hindi and other Indo-
European languages of India. In inter-ethnic group communications, SE
would be used between Chinese and Indians, Chinese and Malays, Malays
and Indians, and between all these ethnic groups and Eurasians and
Europeans (Platt 1975b).

One could conceive of similar situations, where a creole (or a
creoloid) apart from being a means of intra-group communication could
become a lingua-franca for inter-ethnic group communication.

As an example of a pure creoloid I wish to discuss the basilectal
form of Singapore English: Singapore Colloquial English (SCE), which
is at times barely comprehensible to speakers of other varieties of
English.

From these defining features, a tentative definition of a creoloid
might be:

> A speech variety which has developed through the educational
> system such that a non-native or introduced prestige speech
> variety is taught to speakers of another speech variety (or
> other speech varieties) in a situation where the introduced
> variety comes to be used in everyday situations, to be
> acquired by some children before they commence school and to
> become virtual 'native' speech variety for some or all speakers.[2]

It would be more accurate to speak of a **creoloidal continuum**, and a
characteristic of such a continuum would be that speakers of higher
lects are able to distinguish different functions for different lects
along the continuum and to use appropriate lects for different func-
tions. Some speakers would, of course, be restricted to the production
of lower lects although they might be able to decode higher lects and
be aware of their status and function.

In order to understand the development of SCE in Singapore, it has
to be seen against the background of the extremely complex language
situation in Singapore arising from a mixture of ethnic, socio-economic
and educational factors past and present.

The inhabitants of the island before the establishment of the
British colony were predominantly Malays, and they still form about
15% of the population of over two million. They are outnumbered five
to one by the Chinese, who arrived from Southern China during the 19th

and earlier part of this century. The third group (about 7% of the
population) are 'Indians', of whom the majority are Dravidians, with
Tamils predominating. The rest of the population, less than 2%, con-
sists of Eurasians, Europeans and other small groups.

Up to the early part of this century, the use of English (British
English) was restricted mainly to administrators, military personnel
and British businessmen and their families. The main speech varieties
used were Southern Chinese dialects, Indian languages and Malay.

In the pre-Japanese occupation era (until 1942) education was neither
free nor compulsory. English-medium schools had been established by
various church missions and there was also one English-medium government
school, Raffles Institute. It was at these schools that Singapore
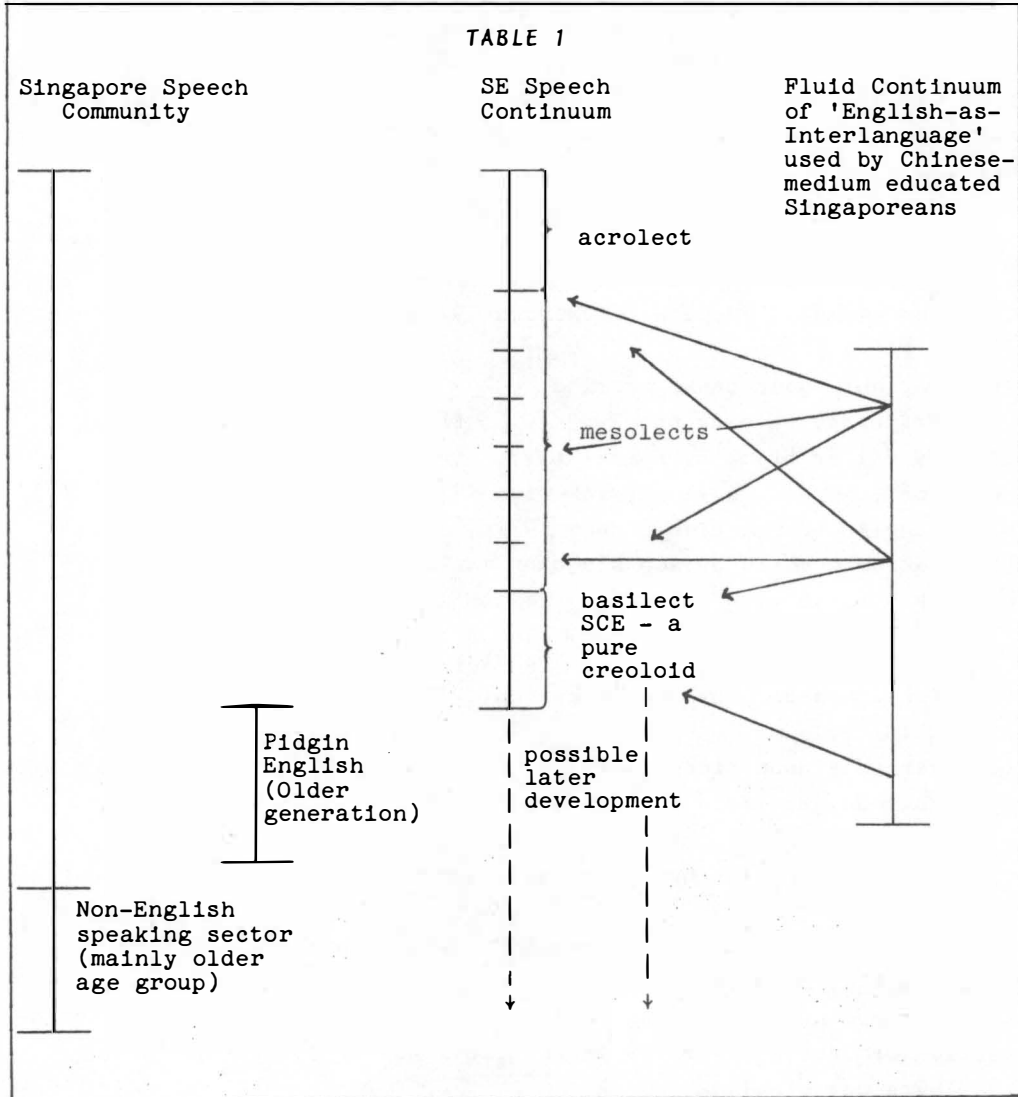English came into being (Platt 1975b).

The existence of the whole Singapore English speech continuum can
be traced to the transference of certain features from the speech var-
ieties of local ethnic groups (e.g. Hokkien, Cantonese, Malay and Tamil)
to the English acquired by school children in English-medium primary
and secondary schools. These transferred features were then reinforced
by the use of this variety (particularly its basilect SCE) in informal
situations at school, at home among siblings, and later on in the
Friendship and Employment Domains (Platt 1977a, 1977b).

With the tremendous expansion of education since the war and since
independence, the growth in the number of speakers of SE has been rapid,
and now most of the younger part of the population of Singapore in
general could be considered as speakers of Singapore English. In 1956,
an all-party committee recommended bilingual primary and secondary
education. Each child was to be taught in English, Chinese (Mandarin),
Malay or Tamil. If English was the first language, then one of the
other three had to be taken as a second language. If one of the others
was taken as first language, English had to be taken as second language.
Since 1947, there has been a constant increase in the choice of English
as first language (from 31.6% in 1947 to 64.8% in 1972). Recent changes
in educational policy have increased pupil exposure to the second lan-
guage which is to be used as a medium of instruction for some subjects.

Because of the ever increasing number of English-medium educated
Singaporeans, a strange phenomenon has developed, namely the existence
at the present stage of a speech continuum of Singapore English which
does not reach the lower end of the social spectrum and which is con-
ditioned by the age of its speakers. There was a type of primitive
English pidgin in use since early times of colonisation but it did not
develop as the main lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication was
Bazaar Malay (Bahasa Pasar), a pidginised form of Malay.

In addition to the more firmly structured SE continuum of the English-medium educated Singaporeans, there exists a type of more fluid 'English-as-Interlanguage' continuum of the mainly Chinese-medium educated Singaporeans who, as soon as they are more constantly exposed in Friendship and later on in Employment Domains to SE speakers, gradually become absorbed into the SE continuum (Platt 1977d).

Table 1 gives a diagrammatic representation of the situation described above.

TABLE 1

Singapore Speech Community

SE Speech Continuum

Fluid Continuum of 'English-as-Interlanguage' used by Chinese-medium educated Singaporeans

acrolect

mesolects

basilect SCE - a pure creoloid

Pidgin English (Older generation)

possible later development

Non-English speaking sector (mainly older age group)

If the scope of English-medium education extends further, it is likely that the continuum will eventually extend to cover the full range of the social spectrum.

As mentioned earlier, a creoloid often exhibits similar structural variables to creoles (or lects along a post-creole continuum) based on the same standard language (as in Hawaii, Jamaica and Guyana, e.g. Bickerton 1973, 1975, Day 1973) and Black English Vernacular (e.g. Fasold 1972, Labov 1972a, Wolfram 1969). The status of the latter has been debated but it appears, on the whole, to be accepted as a post-creole type of phenomenon (e.g. Labov 1972a, Todd 1974).

It is not possible here to discuss all structural similarities but some examples are: variable copula realisation, variable past tense marking, variable 3rd person singular marking, and variable noun plural marking.

(a)   **variable copula realisation**

    You t'ing I stupi' la?   (Platt 1975b)

    My paren' also Cantonese. (Platt 1975b)

(cf. for example: Guyana (Bickerton 1975), Black English Vernacular (Labov 1969).)

(b)   **variable past tense marking**

    Yesterday we play hockey.   (Platt 1975b)

    My fat'er bring my mot'er over. (Platt 1977c)

(cf. for example: Guyana (Bickerton 1975), Jamaica (B. Bailey 1971), Black English Vernacular (Labov 1972a, Fasold 1972).)

(c)   **variable third person singular marking**

    Tha' radio soun' goo'.   (Platt 1975b)

    My sister sleep in t'ere. (The reference was clearly to one
                        sister.) (Platt 1977c)

(cf. for example: Guyana (Bickerton 1975), Jamaica (B. Bailey 1971), Lawton 1976).)

(d)   **variable noun plural marking**

    How many bottel?

    I like orchi'.   (Platt 1975b)

    T'is here coffee house is qui' goo' - also go' customer come in.
                (Platt 1977c)

(cf. for example: Guyana (Bickerton 1975), Black English Vernacular (Labov 1972a, Kessler 1972).)

There are numerous other features, e.g. the use of got as an existention or locative verb as in the previous example or in:

    Here go' pipel.

    'There are people here.' (Platt 1975b)

(cf. Bickerton and Odo (1976) and Day (1973) on the use of get/got in Hawaii.)

and what Bickerton (1976) refers to as 'pronoun copying'. In Singapore
English, 'pronoun copying' agrees in number and gender with the referent,
unlike the invariant i of New Guinea Tok Pisin:

My cousin(s) t'ey working t'ere.

Even my neighbour(s) I hear t'em spea' Hakka.

But t'e gran'son(s) t'ey know to spea' Malay.

SCE is not an interlanguage in the **restricted** sense of the term. It
is not just a learner's language, a series of lects approaching more
and more to the grammar of the target language and showing considerable
and **unsystematic** variation from speaker to speaker. It is rather a
'petrified' system, petrified by constant use, and therefore reinforced
among speakers of the variety itself. I do not, of course, mean petri-
fied in any absolute sense. SCE is changing all the time as any speech
variety does, but unlike the typical second or 'other' language situ-
ation, there is reinforcement of SCE characteristics in all domains:
school, home, employment, friendship, transactions (Platt and Platt
1975).

That there is considerable structuring in SCE can be seen from the
following examples of variable use and their implicational relationships.

Copula realisation: The realisation of the copula in four syntactic
environments (pre-Adjective, pre-Nominal, pre-V-ing and pre-Locative)
appears to be highly implicational through the SE speech continuum.
For a random sample of 40 speakers,[3] a scalability of 93% was obtained
(Platt 1976b) with the implication being:

Invariant Copula Realisation

pre-Adj. ⟶ pre-Nom. ⟶ pre-V-ing ⟶ pre-Loc.

For a group with lower educational levels and lower prestige occu-
pations, i.e. the typical speakers of SCE, the following group scores
of copula realisation were obtained:

Environment	Percentage
Pre-Adj.	69.8
Pre-Nom.	80.0
Pre-V-ing	81.3
Pre-Loc.	84.1

(Platt forthcoming)

In an investigation of past tense marking by a random sample of 32
English-medium educated Singaporeans with education not above G.C.E.
level (Platt 1977e), a scalability of 88.9% was obtained for eight verb
types if each cell in the scalogram showed categorical past tense mark-
ing or non-categorical past tense marking. The eight verb types are:
consonant final + d/t, consonant final + ed, vowel final + d, vowel

change, be, have, get, go. The implicational ordering is: C + d/t →
Vw change → Vw + d → have → go → C + ed → be → get.

The overall percentages of marked as against unmarked forms ranged
from a low of 26.6% for C + d/t to 92.9% for get.

A recent investigation (Platt 1977d) has shown that there even
exists a strong implicational relationship between linguistic features
such as the degree of definite and indefinite article insertion, noun
plural marking, past tense marking, and 3rd person singular marking,
as can be seen by the group averages of a random sample of 29 English-
medium educated Singaporeans:

the	a(n)	N.plural	past tense	3 pers. sing.
84.8	71.7	61.9	47.9	29.1

It has been mentioned earlier that there exists in Singapore a type
of 'English-as-Interlanguage' used mainly by Chinese-medium educated
Singaporeans. As there is a continuous movement from this group to-
wards the SE continuum because of contact with speakers of SE, it is
not easy to find and record casual speech of the 'pure' Interlanguage
users. Many of our speakers had already had contact with SE speakers
in friendship or employment domains or in tertiary education situations.
Most of these Chinese-medium educated speakers, however, still spoke
English to some extent like a learner's language, carefully and slowly,
with considerable hesitation.

This can be shown by a comparison of two groups of speakers: Group
E (English-medium educated) and Group C (Chinese-medium educated who
all took English as their compulsory second language at primary and
high school) (Platt 1977d). The average use of the five variables
mentioned earlier is noticeably higher for the E group. By this I mean
that not only is the **actual** use of a variable higher but so is the
potential use, where 'actual use' (AU) refers to the number of times
that the variable actually was realised, whereas 'potential use' (PU)
means the number of places in which the variable was or could have been
realised.

Mean of Variable Occurrence

GROUP	the		a(n)		N.pl.		Past T.		3 pers.	
	AU	PU	AU	PU	AU	PU	AU	PU	AU	PU
E	30.4	35.9	16.2	22.6	30.7	50.0	10.0	20.3	2.2	7.4
C	19.4	23.9	11.4	18.4	17.7	31.8	5.6	15.1	1.0	4.5

The figures suggest that E group speakers, on the average, spoke
more in the half hour recorded interview sessions, backing up my claim
that the English-medium educated are the **typical** speakers of Colloquial
Singapore English, using it with a native-like fluency, whereas the

Chinese-medium educated use English more as a 'foreign' or 'other' language.

We can see from some of the above investigations that there is a great deal of system in the interrelationships of variables in SCE and that we are dealing with a group of speakers in an ordered dynamic system developing towards an acrolectal form which is, however, itself a local variety of the 'standard' language.

N O T E S

1.   This paper was presented at the Workshop on Pidgins and Creoles, at the XIIth International Congress of Linguists in Vienna, August-September 1977.

2.   Todd (1975) independently suggested the term 'creoloid' when referring to Tyrone English (TE), the English used by the uneducated Catholic community in Tyrone, Northern Ireland. Todd's definition of a creoloid differs in two essential points from the one suggested by me: (1) She suggests that only one native language comes into contact with English whereas I propose that a creoloid could arise in a contact situation with one or more native languages; (2) TE appears to have been acquired more or less informally over a considerable stretch of time in a contact situation between two languages, one being the dominant one, whereas Singapore English and similar speech varieties arose specifically through the educational system in a particular community and developed within a relatively short span of time.

3.   These and other speakers were recorded in Singapore. The research was supported by Australian Research Grants Committee grant A68/16801.

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