

Gastarbeiterdeutsch, "Foreign Workers' German": An Industrial Pidgin

GLENN G. GILBERT AND PAVLOS PAVLOU

The linguistic make-up of pidgin languages reflects the social forces which brought such languages into being and the discourse functions in which they were used. As far as we know, it was the Australian sociolinguist Michael Clyne who first proposed that *Gastarbeiterdeutsch* (GAD) could be considered a pidgin language (Clyne, 1968). In order to understand how what we call "industrial pidgins," like GAD, are related to other languages that are more traditionally thought of as pidgins, we offer the following typology of social relationships that distinguish at least six categories of pidgins:

1. **slave pidgins**, as, for example, Guinea Coast and New World African Pidgin English (NWAPE), the precursor of the "Atlantic Creoles";
2. **indentured labor plantation and mining pidgins**, such as Hawaiian Pidgin English, Town Bemba (Zambia), Fanagalo (South Africa);
3. **industrial labor pidgins**, for instance, *Gastarbeiterdeutsch* (GAD), Foreign Workers' Dutch, Foreign Workers' French;
4. **military pidgins**, such as Juba Arabic Pidgin (Sudan), Bamboo English (Japan; Korea);
5. **trading pidgins**, such as Chinese Pidgin English (South China Sea), Russenorsk (artic Norway and adjacent parts of Russia), Chinese Pidgin Russian (Kjachta, Manchuria);
6. **full pidgins**, for example, Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea), Weskos (Cameroon Pidgin English), Chinook Jargon (Pacific Northwest: United States and Canada).

The first three—slave, indentured, and industrial—are distinguished by the nature of the power relationship between overseers and laborers. The master-slave condition involves the smallest degree of voluntarism and the most

coercion of those with the least power. Industrial laborers enter into the work relationship for almost exclusively economic reasons, which entails a much greater degree of voluntarism. Indenture or contractual labor lies somewhere in between.

Military pidgins, which may be used within the armed forces itself and with the surrounding civilian community, likewise involve interlocutors who are locked into a hierarchical "imbalance of power," as a result of an armed intrusion into a speech community. Only trading pidgins seem to arise on a basis of more equal power sharing of interlocutors. In their case, where one would often expect a nonpidginized bilingualism to develop, pidginization nevertheless occurs, largely because of the unwillingness of power equals to learn each other's language and the trade disadvantage they feel would set in if they tried to carry out business through the medium of the other language.

Fundamentally different from the preceding five types are the full or "extended" or "expanded" pidgins (Mühlhäusler, 1986: 176 ff). Although they begin as one of the pidgins just described, full pidgins are characterized by their longevity and functional expansion. They prove so useful to a speech community that they come to serve as important second languages and lingua francas. They provide good evidence for our contention that the linguistic form of a pidgin is highly dependent on the range and type of social functions in which it is used. Expansion of a pidgin takes place only to the extent that its speakers find such a process communicatively and socially necessary. Full pidgins are much more akin to creoles, which are first languages, than they are to the other types of pidgins.

The initial formation of pidgins and their subsequent developmental stages are subject to the communicative and social constraints of what could be called a Socioprogram for Language. Our claim is that pidgins are derivatives of "real" human languages, different from them in quantity but not in quality. We remain unconvinced by Derek Bickerton's recent proposal (1990) that a primitive "protolanguage" manifests itself in pidgins, along with chimp sign language, *Homo erectus* language, the language of children under twenty-four months, and the language of Genie in Los Angeles.

In the late 1970s, in a review of Wolfgang Klein's *Sprache ausländischer Arbeiter*, (Gilbert, 1978: 986) made a tabular comparison of a number of linguistic and social factors in the pidginization of German by foreign industrial workers, in contrast with the pidginization of English by the slaves brought to the New World beginning in the seventeenth century. In the intervening thirteen years we have of course learned much more about the linguistic and social characteristics of GAD, so that many of the question marks and uncertainties in this figure are now subject to clarification. Similar comparisons could be drawn up for the other pidgins.

We see no reason to separate industrial pidgins qualitatively from other pidgins. We maintain that the factors in their genesis and development are different in degree, not in kind. Labor which produces goods and provides

services in an industrial society simply represents a contemporary counterpart to the plantations and mines of previous centuries. Contrary to the expectations of many observers, who see the demand for workers drawn from Third World countries lessening, the presence of *Gastarbeiter* looms large in the future of the highly industrialized countries in Europe, Germany in particular. The source of the immigration will most probably come from a different quarter, though newcomers, speaking Slavic, Baltic, and other mother tongues, may arrive by the millions from Eastern Europe. Since their communicative needs will presumably remain the same as those of their southern predecessors, we would expect the same, or similar, principles of pidginization of German to apply.

As to the issue of simplification and of mutual intelligibility, consider some of the uses of the word *nix*, "not," which is illustrated in examples 1-3:

1. nix gut Wetter
nichts gutes Wetter
"schlechtes Wetter—bad weather"
2. nix Zigeuner
nichts Zigeuner
"kein Zigeuner—no gypsy"
3. zwei Monaten nix Arbeit
zwei Monate nichts Arbeit
"zwei Monate arbeitslos—two months unemployed"

Clearly, in context, such phrases remain meaningful to native speakers of German. Nevertheless, the retention by the pidgin of mutual intelligibility with the lexifier language cannot serve to disqualify GAD as a pidgin, as is claimed for instance by Meisel (1975), since the maintenance of a high degree of mutual intelligibility is characteristic of pidgins generally (as opposed to creoles), as can be seen in examples 4 and 5:

4. *Tây Bôi*, a military pidgin used in Vietnam between the French and the various ethnic groups of Vietnam for about 100 years, from the 1860s to the 1960s. Source: Reinecke (1971: 54-55). The *Tây Bôi* text, in boldface, is followed by a literal word-for-word English translation and by an idiomatic English translation, adapted from Reinecke's.

La quanh Sa-đec vener la quanh Tân-an, trois jour déjà, pas
 province Sa-đec come province Tân-an, three day already, no
 "[He] came from Sa-đec province to Tân-an province, [he has been here]
 three days already, [he has] no

travail; moi demander sa carte; lui dire n'a
 work; me ask his [identity] card; him say not have
 job; I asked [for] his [identity] card; he said [he] did not have

pas; moi signaler M. le Commissaire.
 not; me report Mr. the Commissaire
 [one]; [so] I [am] report[ing to] the commissar."

Although a few Vietnamese place names and other words are used, a speaker of standard French would probably view this as "telegraphese," and it remains largely intelligible to French speakers from Europe.

5. *Tok Pisin*, or *Beach-la-Mar*, as it was called, is an example of an indentured labor plantation pidgin. Although the pronunciation is not indicated in Churchill's highly Anglicized spelling, a high degree of mutual intelligibility with English is apparent.

Altogether you boy belong Solomon you no savvy white man.
 Altogether you boy belong Solomons you no savvy white man
 "You men of the Solomons don't know the white man at all.

Me fella me savvy him. Me fella me savvy talk along
 Me fellow me savvy him Me fellow me savvy talk along
 Me, I know him. I know how to talk to

white man.
 white man
 the white man."

Meisel, along with many others, has also pointed out that the contact between foreign workers and Germans is characterized by a frequency and intensity whose importance cannot be neglected. Thus, in his opinion, "von einem 'Pidgin-deutsch' im üblichen Sinn, kann nicht die Rede sein" ["in general terms, this is not the case of a pidgin-German"] (Meisel, 1975: 48-49), although he later observes that "man [hat] . . . nicht . . . mit einem fehlerhaften Deutsch zu tun..., wie es gewöhnlich von Ausländern gesprochen wird, die die deutsche Sprache als Fremdsprache erlernen" ["one is not dealing with a German with considerable errors, as it is generally the case when German is spoken by foreigners who learn German as a second language"], which eventually leads him to locate GAD "irgendwo zwischen gebrochenem Standarddeutsch und Pidgindeutsch" ["somewhere between broken standard German and pidgin German"].

Sociolinguistic network analysis, as it was developed by Leslie Milroy in her study of English in Belfast, if applied to GAD, might well show that contacts with Germans are not as intense as one would think. The social organization of GAD communities in many German cities acts to restrict contacts with speakers of nonpidginized varieties of German. Access to what Bickerton calls the "correction cycle" remains surprisingly limited, both physically and attitudinally.

A social network study would have to start with the fact that the great majority of the "guest workers" live in urban centers, many with a marked tendency to ghettoization. Over 19% of the population of Frankfurt am Main consists of foreign workers. Other cities have large percentages as well, for example, Stuttgart 16.3%, Cologne 12.6%, and Berlin 10%. According to Arzberger (1985) 13% of the foreign workers reside in areas which are exclusively inhabited by foreigners and 60 percent in mixed neighborhoods.

The large absolute numbers of these people and the fact that they are concentrated in urban centers make it possible for many of them to survive in Germany by actually living in their own culture, which has been transplanted into the host country. Many neighborhoods in German cities are reminiscent of the corresponding homelands of the people who live there. This situation enables a sizable number of them to function minimally in German society with very little or no knowledge of German as it is spoken by native speakers. Unemployed spouses, especially, may live for many years in Germany, totally isolated from the Germans and the German language. Since they perceive little pressure from the society to acquire communicative skills in German, they do so only to the extent necessary. For them, the pidgin suffices for interethnic communication. Germans and non-Germans alike understand them, at least in context, so that they have very little incentive to "depidginize" their language.

SOCIAL FUNCTION OF FOREIGN WORKERS' GERMAN

Here we present some other factors that should be taken into consideration when discussing the social function of foreign workers' German. Foreign workers in Germany and other European countries are considered to be a "temporary work force." As you may remember, many guest workers initially intend to return to their countries after some years and therefore they do not consider the command of German essential to their "provisional" time in Germany. However, the truth is that many of them prolong their stay in Germany and some of them wish to stay forever. Studies show that there are two factors that lead to linguistic adaptation: first, the period they have lived in Germany and, second, the intention to stay longer or forever.

A survey by Kuhn in 1979 reports that only 16% of the foreign adults have concrete plans to return. Another 42% (approximately) would like to return, but do not have concrete plans. The lack of concrete plans means that most probably these workers and their families will stay in the host society. The remaining population of the workers express their wish to remain even though they realize that they are at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale and are discriminated against in some ways.

The worker's determination whether to stay in Germany or not has an impact on their motivation to learn German. This motivation also correlates

to the prestige they attach to the German language. The group of workers who want to stay longer, realize that in order to be more or less accepted in that society they need to speak German to a certain degree of acceptability. For that reason they invest more money and live in neighborhoods with a predominantly German population and choose apartments in which to live with their families. On the other hand, those who decide to return, prefer to live in ghetto areas where the rent is very cheap. For the same reason they live with many people in those houses or they stay in dormitories.

A difference between FWG and other "true" pidgins is that foreign workers in Germany maintain tight links with their culture and mother tongue. They use their L1 among themselves, get newspapers and video tapes from their homelands, and so on. In addition, they have the right (and often can afford) to visit their countries any time and thus reestablish contact with their mother tongue and culture.

Another factor that should be taken into account is that, according to the Bundesanstalt für Arbeit (in Meisel, 1975) 70 to 80% of these workers learn German at their place of employment and only 12% of the total foreign population learn German through formal instruction in school or elsewhere. The above numbers refer to those workers who speak German fairly well (about 55%).

The classification of the workers into two groups, namely those who intend to stay and those who plan to return, leads to the conclusion that the foreign workers are not a homogeneous group. The development of pidgin can only take place in the ghettos inhabited by those who do not want to be integrated into the German society and pose clear demarcation lines between themselves and the Germans. One of the requirements for pidginization is that the contact to the norm must be cut off.

That means that the foreign workers must be isolated from the superstrate population and their language. However, this may not be the case. Meisel (1975) argues that exposure to German (through radio, TV, and newspapers) occurs much more often (often with German friends and colleagues) than occasions to communicate with foreigners from other nationalities.

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN GERMAN

It is a fact that it is possible for foreign workers to learn German, if they wish to do so, either by tutored or untutored acquisition. German governments initially planned to have "rotating" temporary workers, but as it turned out a lot of these workers wanted to stay in Germany longer or forever. After becoming aware of this fact, the German governments decided that in order to prevent acute social problems, they should try to integrate these foreign populations.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The influx of foreign workers and their families has made unprecedented demands on the German educational system, which has never had to deal with teaching German as a second or foreign language on a large scale. However, steps were taken to provide language instruction to foreigners of all ages (children, adolescents, and adults).

Johannes Meyer-Ingwersen (1975) echoes Meisel's "anti-pidgin" position. For both of these authors the acquisition of German by foreign workers is a continuous, straight-line process characterized by (a) considerable motivation for learning, (b) constant exposure to the correction cycle, and (c) a clearly fixed target.

Taking a somewhat less rigid position, the Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt (1975) finds evidence in GAD of both a pidgin and various stages of second-language acquisition. The project determined that a pidgin could only arise in a ghetto situation under conditions of extreme isolation. Even in that case, the researchers find it difficult to refer to GAD as a pidgin.

Clyne (1968), Adler (1977), and a number of other authors go further by suggesting that GAD, in its various ethnic variations, is a type of pidgin, on the basis of both its communicative and linguistic characteristics.

Bodeman and Ostow (1975) also find GAD to be pidgin, with a grammatically reduced structure functioning as a communicative lingua franca, that can be traced back to semantic universals. Romaine, in her recent introductory pidgin and creole language text (1988: 212), reverts to the earlier arguments of Meisel, in effect arguing that what we have called "industrial pidgins" cannot exist by their very nature:

There are of course a number of differences in the position of foreigner workers in Germany and that of pidgin speakers. It has been argued that preconditions for the formation of a true pidgin are lacking in the German case. The ratio of learners to native speakers is too small, and the segregation of these workers is not strong enough to encourage the persistence of this kind of pidginized German once the economic conditions that produced it have disappeared.

Romaine is entirely correct in pointing to the large ratio of native speakers to learners, but she does not mention the restricted networks of interlocutors which so heavily promote the use of the pidgin.

In summary, we see GAD as a textbook example of an industrial pidgin:

1. it maintains good mutual intelligibility—in context—with nonpidginized varieties of German;
2. despite the variety of substrate languages involved, certain regularities of simplification appear everywhere the pidgin is spoken—the simplification is a

- function of linguistic universals and of communicative needs;
3. interlocutor networks are highly restricted for many *Gastarbeiter*, "guest workers";
 4. the ratio of native speakers to *Gastarbeiter* nevertheless remains high;
 5. there are no indications that the basic economic conditions that have produced the pidgin will disappear.

REFERENCES

- Arzberger, Claudia Koch (1985). *Die schwierige Integration*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Bickerton, Derek (1990). *Language and species*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blackshire-Belay, Carol (1991). *Language Contact: Verb Morphology in German of Foreign Workers*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Bodemann, Y. Michael, and Robin Ostow (1975). "Lingua Franca und Pseudo-Pidgin in der Bundesrepublik." In *LiLi* 5: 122-146.
- Clyne, Michael (1968). "Zum Pidgindeutsch der Gastarbeiter." *Zeitschrift für Mundartforschung* 35: 130-139.
- Gilbert, Glenn G. (1979). "Linguistic and social aspects of Industrial Pidgins." Paper presented at the Conference on Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies. St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.
- (1978). *Review of Sprache ausländischer Arbeiter*, ed. by Wolfgang Klein. *Language* 54: 983-987.
- Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch" (1975). Kronberg/TS: Scriptor.
- Meisel, Jürgen (1975). "Ausländerdeutsch und Deutsch ausländischer Arbeiter. Zur möglichen Entstehung eines Pidgin." In *Lili* 5: 9-53.
- Kühn, K. (1979). "Memorandum zur Intergation des Arbeitimmigranten in der B.R.D." In *Deutsch Lernen* 3: 82-99.
- Meyer-Ingwersen, Johannes (1975). "Einige typische Deutschfehler bei türkischen Schülern." In *LiLi* 5. 68-77.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter (1986). *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Reinecke, J. E. (1975). *A Bibliography of Pidgin and Creole Languages*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.
- Romaine, Suzanne (1988). *Pidgin and Creole Languages*. New York: Longman.