

55 • PIDGINS AND CREOLES

PIDGIN LANGUAGES

A pidgin is a system of communication which has grown up among people who do not share a common language, but who want to talk to each other, for trading or other reasons. Pidgins have been variously called 'makeshift', 'marginal', or 'mixed' languages. They have a limited vocabulary, a reduced grammatical structure, and a much narrower range of functions, compared to the languages which gave rise to them. They are the native language of no-one, but they are nonetheless a main means of communication for millions of people, and a major focus of interest to those who study the way languages change.

It is essential to avoid the stereotype of a pidgin language, as perpetrated over the years in generations of children's comics and films. The 'Me Tarzan, you Jane' image is far from the reality. A pidgin is not a language which has broken down; nor is it the result of baby talk, laziness, corruption, primitive thought processes, or mental deficiency. On the contrary: pidgins are demonstrably creative adaptations of natural languages, with a structure and rules of their own. Along with creoles (p. 338), they are evidence of a fundamental process of linguistic change, as languages come into contact with each other, producing new varieties whose structures and uses contract and expand. They provide the clearest evidence of language being created and shaped by society for its own ends, as people adapt to new social circumstances. This emphasis on processes of change is reflected in the terms *pidginization* and *creolization*.

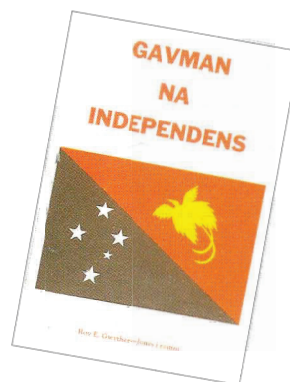
Most pidgins are based on European languages – English, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese – reflecting the history of colonialism. However, this observation may be the result only of our ignorance of the languages used in parts of Africa, South America, or South-east Asia, where situations of language contact are frequent. One of the best-known non-European pidgins is Chinook Jargon, once used for trading by American Indians in north-west USA. Another is Sango, a pidginized variety of Ngbandi, spoken widely in west-central Africa.

Because of their limited function, pidgin languages usually do not last for very long – sometimes for only a few years, and rarely for more than a century. They die when the original reason for communication diminishes or disappears, as communities move apart, or one community learns the language of the other. (Alternatively, the pidgin may develop into a creole.) The pid-

gin French which was used in Vietnam all but disappeared when the French left; similarly, the pidgin English which appeared during the American Vietnam campaign virtually disappeared as soon as the war was over. But there are exceptions. The pidgin known as Mediterranean Lingua Franca, or Sabir, began in the middle ages and lasted until the 20th century.

Some pidgins have become so useful as a means of communication between languages that they have developed a more formal role, as regular auxiliary languages. They may even be given official status by a community, as lingua francas. These cases are known as 'expanded pidgins', because of the way in which they have added extra forms to cope with the needs of their users, and have come to be used in a much wider range of situations than previously. In time, these languages may come to be used on the radio, in the press, and may even develop a literature of their own. Some of the most widely used expanded pidgins are Krio (in Sierra Leone), Nigerian Pidgin English, and Bislama (in Vanuatu). In Papua New Guinea, the local pidgin (Tok Pisin) is the most widely used language in the country.

An extract from a glossary of political terms listed in a Tok Pisin booklet on government and independence. It was produced by the Political Education Committee in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, in August 1972.



GAVMAN	Em i dispela lain pwa i save lukautim laetri. Ol pipel get i makim dispela lain long teken dispela wok.
GROUP	Em i olman campela pipel ol i gat wampela kain sindan na wampela laik.
HAUS OV' ASSEMBLY	Em i wampela lain romba ol pipel i putim long foupela yia, na ol i save long long Port Maki long wokim ol lo, na paipinaus ol gupela wa long lukautim Papua Nu Gini.
INKAM TAKIS	Em i wampela laikis Gavman i save tekewe long pa bilong olgeta man, sapos ge bilong ol hap. Dispela take ol i kelim inkam laikis na dispela ol takis man i go long lawman.
INDEPENDENS	Em i kain long ol pipel bilong Papua Nu Gini ol i lukautim kantri bilong ol.
KING	Em i wampela man i bocha karek.
OL LO	Em i wampela laikis Gavman i save lukautim olgeta pipel. Dispela ol lo i save lawman i save na makim. Long Bisi Pias ov Asenbli i kump na senias Legi-activi Gavman.
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL	Em i wampela laikis Gavman i save tekewe long pa bilong olgeta man, sapos ge bilong ol hap. Dispela take ol i kelim inkam laikis na dispela ol takis man i go long lawman.
LABEL	Em i wampela laikis Gavman i save tekewe long pa bilong olgeta man, sapos ge bilong ol hap. Dispela take ol i kelim inkam laikis na dispela ol takis man i go long lawman.
LOKAL GOVERNMENT	Em i wampela laikis Gavman i save tekewe long pa bilong olgeta man, sapos ge bilong ol hap. Dispela take ol i kelim inkam laikis na dispela ol takis man i go long lawman.
MINIST	Em i wampela laikis Gavman i save tekewe long pa bilong olgeta man, sapos ge bilong ol hap. Dispela take ol i kelim inkam laikis na dispela ol takis man i go long lawman.

GOVERNMENT This is a group [line] of people who look after [look out for] a country. All the people elect this group in order to do this work. **GROUP** It is a number of people who share the same activities [one kind sit down] and the same interests.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY It is a group of members that the people put in every four years, and they regularly meet [know how to meet] in Port Moresby to make [work] the laws and to find out the best ways [the good roads] of looking after Papua New Guinea.

INKAM TAKIS It is a tax that the government takes from the pay of every person whose pay is of a certain level. This tax is called income tax and the money goes to the government.

INDEPENDENS It is the time when the people of Papua New Guinea will look after their own country.

KING He is a man who rules a country.

POSSIBLE ORIGINS OF THE WORD PIDGIN

All of the following have been suggested as sources for the word *pidgin*, which is first attested in print in 1850:

- A Chinese mispronunciation of the English word *business*.
- The Portuguese word *ocupação* (business).
- The Hebrew word *pidjom* (barter).
- A Yayo word *pidians* meaning *people*.
- Portuguese *pequeno* (little, child) – cf. 'baby-talk'.
- English *pigeon* – suitable for carrying simple messages.

Right: The front page of *Wantok* ('Friend'), a Papua New Guinea weekly newspaper written entirely in pidgin (Tok Pisin) (with an English sports section).

Right, below: A street poster from Freetown, Sierra Leone, written in Krio: 'Electricity has no legs: it's Kabel-metal cable that carries it.'

WANTOK

NIUSPEPA BILONG YUMI OL PAPUA NIUGINI STRET - 26 YIA NAU

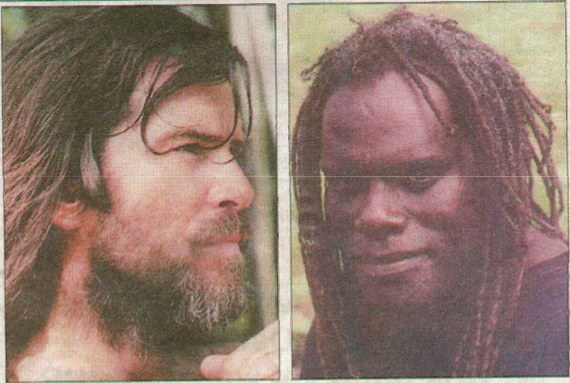
Namba 1,138

Wik i stat long Fonde, April 18, 1996

50 toea

Robinson
rusoe muvi
nai kamaut
long Ogas

William Takaku
(han) wantaim
re Brosnan long
pela muvi nem
ong em 'Robinson
jace'. Brosnan em
ngela okta husat i
ve aktim dispela
mas Bond muvi
idenaye Takaku na
osnan i wokim dis-
la muvi long
isang long 1984.
ivi ya i solim wel
ong ol waltman na
i bilong ol blek
in na long wanem
il tupela i ken
map long wampela
igting long traim
ng save put long
il na palin bilong
pela yet. Dispela
ivi nau bai kam aut
ng 23 Ogas long
apela yia. LUKIM
TORI LONG PES 18.
Foto: William Takaku



Belo na Kanage wantaim
sampa wanwok bilong em i
go baim buai long tupela meri
Manus long a Mall insait long
Moabi sili na wok long kaika
bui na palin tohlong wan-
taim tupela meri ya i stap.
Ol i tokplein i stap na
tupela wandapa meri i wok-
about i kam na abrusim ol na
go. Em nau wanpela bilong
dispela tupela meri Manus
ya i kirap na tokim Kanage
wantaim ol wanwok bilong
em: Ol oisem yet, oiget
belo ol i save panim kam i
go oisem.

Wanpela wanwok bilong
Kanage kirap na askim dis-
pela meri Manus. Ol i save
panim wanem samting?
Arapela meri Manus ya
kirap na tokim dispela wan-
wok bilong Kanage: Oisem
nau tasol mama kirim yu na
yu no save na askim.
Wanwok bilong Kanage
kirap na tokim meri wandapa
wanwok bilong em: nogot wan-
pela samting ol i save kelim
samting—digita, samting i
gat neri ya.
Meri Kamal ya kukuk
long wanwok bilong Kanage
na tokim em: Ol i panim
sosis na hot dok.
Kanage sanap tul tru na
kaikai dua bilong em pinis
na latim wanpela smok na
putim long maku. Ie em i
putim atongpela win pinis
na dok. Kaik pinis bilong
dabolim dabolim na popu-
len bilong Papua Niugini i
wok long dispela narap.

Jaka Boss
MOSSI

INSAIT

4-PES
RAGBI
LIG
NIUS

Pablik Solisita laik Ombusu i mas fri

ERONICA HATUTASI i raitim.

Kot bin givim 'death penalty' long em

RA bilong Charles Ombusu,
ajo Koeget bilong Pablik
laila i laikim kot long larim
busu i go oisem tri man. Dispela
bikos i nogot winem long em i
n man na bagarapim meri.
Ombusu wantaim 21 krimas
ng Cro provins em i namba
s man long Papua Niugini
ai Suprim kot bin laikim em
g sas bilong kilim dai man na tu
jarapim pikinini meri bilong
nyei long las yia.
Oja Koeget i laikim Ombusu
g go fri bikos suprim kot i no
winem long kotim Ombusu

long mekim ol dispela pasin.
Narapela samting tu em Mista
Koeget i tok planti riopot na nusi i
bin kamap pinis long radio,
televizen na ol niusepepa long dis-
pela samting. Na ol pabik i ting
Ombusu tasol i bin wokim dispela
rong. Oisem na dispela i no gut-
pela long putim kot long dispela
samting i go yet. Insait long riopot
bilong em, em i askim kot long
etapim kot long dispela mak nau
bikos api bilong em i orait pinis.
Ombusu i bin api agenaint
dispela disisen bilong Nesenel Kot
long kilim em bikos em (Ombusu)

i kilim man na tu klaim 5-pela kris-
mas long bagarapim meri.
Suprim Kot i bin oraitim dispela
api bilong Ombusu bikos Nesenel
Kot i bin sasim Ombusu long
tupela sas wantaim insait long
wanpela kot. Suprim Kot i ting kot
bilong kilim man i mas kamap long
narapela taim na kot bilong
bagarapim meri i mas kamap long
narapela taim.
Pablik Prosekjuta, Paruol
Mogaji, long wankait taim tu i
strong oisem kot bilong Ombusu i
mas kamap gan long Nesenel Kot
gen.

Na dispela i ken mekim ol i
harim wan wan sas na i no tupela
sas wantaim oisem pastaim.

Em i tokim Suprim kot jai long
taim bilong harim trail kot bilong
Ombusu oisem kot i bin asua long
wanem em i no bin bishim rot
bilong bukum tupela sas na tu
palim aut as tru long Ombusu i
rong o nogot. Oisem na kot i mas
kamap gen long harim dispela
samting insait long nesenel kot.
Ol narapela poim long abansian
bilong pabik, prosekjuta long Ja-
pela kot em.
• Prosekjuta i tokaut long
wanem tupela sas em bai i go hot
wantaim i ge moa long pes 2.

SHAKESPEARE IN PIDGIN

The range of pidgin English is well illustrated by the translations which have been made of such works as the Bible and Shakespeare. Here is an extract from *Julius Caesar* (Act III, Scene 2), translated into Krio pidgin and Tok Pisin.

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious.
If it were so, it was a grievous fault;
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest—
For Brutus is an honourable man;
So are they all, all honourable men—
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.

Krio

Padi dem, kohntri, una ohi wey dey na Rom. Meyk una ohi
kak una yeys. A kam ber Siza, a noh kam preyz am. Dem
kin memba bad wey pohsin kin du lohng tem afta di
pohsin kin dohn dai. Boht plenti tem di gud wey pohsin du
kin ber wit im bon dem. Meyk i bi so wit Siza. Bra Brutohs
dohn tel una sey Siza na bin man wey want pas mak. It i
tohk tru, na badbad ting dis ya. En Siza dohn get im bad
pey foh dat. A tayk pamishohn frohm Bra Brutohs dem foh
kam tohk na Bra Siza im berin. En Bra Brutohs na ohnarey-
bul O! Dem ohda wan sef na ohnareybul.
(From T. Decker, 1965, p. 74.)

Tok Pisin

Pren, man bolong Rom, Wantok, harim nau. Mi kam tasol
long plantim Kaesar. Mi noken beiten longen. Sapos sam-
pela wok bolong wampela man i stret; sampela i no stret;
na man i dai; ol i wallis long wok i no stret tasol. Gutpela
wok bolongen i slip; i lus nating long giraun wantaim long
Kalopa. Fesin bolong yumi man. Maski Kaesar tu, gutpela
wok i slip.

Brutus ia tokim yu long Kaesar i mangal. Sapos olosem,
bikpela pekato tru. Tasol Kaesar Kalopa bekim pinis long
virua belongen. Tru Brutus, na ol pren bolongen, gutpela
man. I orait. Ol i gigim mi orait long mi toktok sore hia
long Kaesar.
(From J. J. Murphy, 1966, pp. 19–20.)

A page from a New Guinea road safety handbook *Rot Sefti Long Niugini* (1972), with instructions in English (top), Tok Pisin (middle), and Hiri Motu (bottom).

If you have an accident, get
the other driver's number, if
possible his name and address
and report it to the police. Do
not fight him or abuse him.

Sapos yu kisim bagarap kisim
namba bilong narapela
draiva, sapos yu ken, kisim
naim bilong em na adres tu,
na tokim polis longen.
Noken paitem em o tok
nogut long em.

Bema kerere davaria
neganai, taraka o motuka
taria tauna ena ladana oi abia
bona ena noho o gaukara
gabuna danu abia. Taraka o
motuka ena naba danu abia
vadaeni Police hamaoroa. Oi
heai bona hereva dika lasi.



CREOLE LANGUAGES

A creole is a pidgin language which has become the mother tongue of a community – a definition which emphasizes that pidgins and creoles are two stages in a single process of linguistic development. First, within a community, increasing numbers of people begin to use pidgin as their principal means of communication. As a consequence, their children hear it more than any other language, and gradually it takes on the status of a mother tongue for them. Within a generation or two, native language use becomes consolidated and widespread. The result is a creole, or ‘creolized’ language.

The switch from pidgin to creole involves a major expansion in the structural linguistic resources available – especially in vocabulary, grammar, and style, which now have to cope with the everyday demands made upon a mother tongue by its speakers. There is also a highly significant shift in the overall patterns of language use found in the community. Pidgins are by their nature auxiliary languages (§58), learned alongside vernacular languages which are much more developed in structure and use. Creoles, by contrast, are vernaculars in their own right. When a creole language develops, it is usually at the expense of other languages spoken in the area. But then it too can come under attack.

The main source of conflict is likely to be with the standard form of the language from which it derives, and with which it usually co-exists. The standard language has the status which comes with social prestige, education, and wealth; the creole has no such status, its roots lying in a history of subservience and slavery. Inevitably, creole speakers find themselves under great pressure to change their speech in the direction of the standard – a process known as *decreolization*.

One consequence of this is the emergence of a continuum of several varieties of creole speech, at varying degrees of linguistic ‘distance’ from the standard – what has been called the ‘post-creole continuum’. Another consequence is an aggressive reaction against the standard language on the part of creole speakers, who assert the superior status of their creole, and the need to recognize the ethnic identity of their community. Such a reaction can lead to a marked change in speech habits, as the speakers focus on what they see to be the ‘pure’ form of creole – a process known as *hypercreolization*. This whole movement, from creolization to decreolization to hypercreolization, can be seen at work in the recent history of African-American English in the USA.

The term *creole* comes from Portuguese *crioulo*, and originally meant a person of European descent who had been born and brought up in a colonial territory. Later, it came to be applied to other people who were native to these areas, and then to the kind of language

they spoke. Creoles are now usually classified as ‘English based’, ‘French based’, and so on – though the genetic relationship of a creole to its dominant linguistic ancestor is never straightforward, as the creole may display the influences of several contact languages in its sounds, vocabulary, and structure.

Today, the study of creole languages, and of the pidgins which gave rise to them, attracts considerable interest among linguists and social historians. To the former, the cycle of linguistic reduction and expansion which they demonstrate, within such a short time-scale, provides fascinating evidence of the nature of language change. To the latter, their development is seen to reflect the process of exploration, trade, and conquest which has played such a major part in European history over the past 400 years.

French	Guianese Créole	Krio	English
Mangez	Māʒe	Chɔp	Eat
J’ai mangé	Mo māʒe	A chɔp	I ate
Il/Elle a mangé	Li māʒe	I chɔp	He/She ate
Je mange/Je suis en train de manger	Mo ka māʒe	A de chɔp	I am eating
J’avais mangé	Mo te māʒe	A bin chɔp	I ate/had eaten
Je mangeais	Mo te ka māʒe	A bin de chɔp	I was eating
Je mangerai	Mo ke māʒe	A go chɔp	I shall eat
Il/Elle est plus grand que vous	Li gros pas u	I big pas yu	He/She/It is bigger than you

WHERE DO PIDGINS AND CREOLES COME FROM?

The world’s pidgins and creoles display many obvious differences in sounds, grammar, and vocabulary, but they have a remarkable amount in common. Two opposed theories have attempted to explain these differences.

MANY SOURCES?

A long-standing view is that every creole is a unique, independent development, the product of a fortuitous contact between two languages. On the surface, this ‘polygenetic’ view is quite plausible. It seems unlikely that the pidgins which developed in South-east Asia should have anything in common with those which developed in the Caribbean. And it is a general experience that these varieties come into use in an apparently spontaneous way – as any tourist knows who has faced a souvenir seller. Would not the restricted features of the contact situations (such as the basic sentence patterns and vocabulary needed in order to trade) be enough to explain the linguistic similarities around the world?

The view is tempting, but there are several grounds for criticism. In particular, it does not explain the *extent* of the similarities between these varieties. Common features such as the reduction of noun and pronoun inflec-

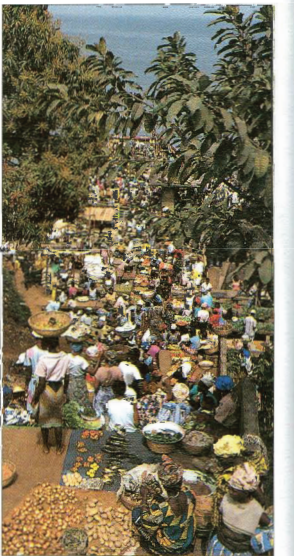


Members of Radio Nous Mêmes (‘Ourselves Radio’), a local radio station in the Maroni River area of French Guiana.

CREOLES COMPARED

The similarities between European-based creoles are striking, as can be seen from this comparison of the verb phrase in the French-based creole of Guiana and the English-based Krio of Sierra Leone (after L. Todd, 1984, p. 24).

Saturday Market, Freetown, Sierra Leone.



tions, the use of particles to replace tenses, and the use of repeated forms to intensify adjectives and adverbs are too great to be the result of coincidence. Why, then, should the pidginized forms of French, Dutch, German, Italian, and other languages all display the same kind of modifications? Why, for example, should the English-based creoles of the Caribbean have so much in common with the Spanish-based creoles of the Philippines? How could uniformity come from such diversity?

ONE SOURCE?

The opposite view argues that the similarities between the world's pidgins and creoles can be explained only by postulating that they had a common origin (i.e. are 'monogenetic'), notwithstanding the distance which exists between them. Moreover, a clear candidate for a 'proto'-language has been found – a 15th-century Portuguese pidgin, which may in turn have descended from the Mediterranean lingua franca known as Sabir (p. 340). The Portuguese are thought to have used this pidgin during their explorations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Later, it is argued, as other nations came to these areas, the simple grammar of this pidgin came to be retained, but the original Portuguese vocabulary was replaced by words taken from their own languages. This view is known as the *relexification* hypothesis.

There is a great deal of evidence to support the theory, deriving from historical accounts of the Portuguese explorations, and from modern analyses of the languages. For instance, every English-based pidgin and creole has a few Portuguese words, such as *savi* 'know', *pikin* 'child', and *palava* 'trouble'. In Saramaccan, an English-based creole of Suriname, 38% of the core vocabulary is from Portuguese. Early accounts of Chinese pidgin refer to a mixed dialect of English and Portuguese. And on general grounds, relexification of a single 'proto'-pidgin seems a more plausible hypothesis than one which insists on a radical parallel restructuring of several languages.

The shift in approach, implicit in the relexification theory, is fundamental: it is not the case that English, and the other languages, were 'creolized', but that an original (Portuguese) creole was 'Anglicized'. However, not all the facts can be explained in this way. Pitcairnese creole has no Portuguese influence, and yet has much in common with other varieties. What accounts for those similarities? Then there are several pidgins and creoles which have developed with little or no historical contact with European languages – Sango and Chinook, for instance. And there seem to be many structural differences between European and non-European pidgins and creoles, which the common origin hypothesis finds difficult to explain.

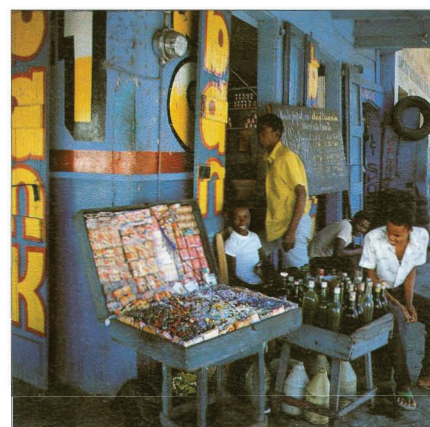
The evidence is mixed. Disentangling the structural similarities and differences between these varieties is a difficult task, and the evidence could be taken to support either a monogenetic or a polygenetic theory. Far more descriptive studies are needed before we rule out one view or the other.

Meanwhile, other theories have been proposed, in an attempt to explain these similarities and differences. Other forms of simplified speech have been noted, such as that used by children (§41), in telegrams and headlines, and in talking to foreigners (p. 377). It is possible that the processes underlying pidgins and creoles reflect certain basic preferences in human language (such as fixed word order, or the avoidance of inflections). In this connection, these languages provide fresh and intriguing evidence in the search for linguistic universals (§14).

PIDGINS COMPARED

Lexical similarities and differences between pidgins are clearly illustrated in this list of items collected by F. G. Cassidy in the 1960s, taken from the set of 'basic words' used in glottochronology (p. 333). The English element predominates in Tok Pisin and Chinese Pidgin; in Sango, the vast majority of the words are African; in Chinook, most words are from Chinook or other Amerindian languages (but note the influence of both French and English). French names for parts of the body have emerged in Sango and Chinook. Though there is no historical connection between the languages, note also the coincidences of thought which have produced the figurative phrases for *feather* (grass-of-bird (Tok Pisin), hair-of-bird (Sango), and leaf-of-bird (Chinook)), and the words for *heart* in Tok Pisin and Chinook, both of which stress the notion of heartbeat.

English	Tok Pisin	Chinese Pidgin	Sango	Chinook Jargon
bell	bəl	bell	ngbéréná	tíntin
big	bigfələ	big	kótá	hyás
bird	pígm	bird(ee)	ndeke	kalákala
bite	kajkajm	bitee	tə	múckamuck
black	blækfələ	black	(zo)vəkó	klale
blood	blət	blood	méné	pilpil
cold	kilfələ	colo	dé	cole, tshis
come	kəm	li	ga	chahko
die	daj	dielo	kúi	mémaloost
dog	dəg	doggee	mbo	kámooks
drink	drɪŋk	dlinkee, haw	yç	muckamuck
ear	ir	ear	mé	kwolánn
earth	grawn	glound	sése	illahie
eat	kajkaj	chowchow	kóbe, te	múckamuck
fat	gris	fat, glease	mafuta	glease
feather	gras bílɔŋ pígm	fedder	kóá tí ndeke	kalákala yaka túpso
fish	fis	fishie	susu	pish
give	grɪvm	pay	fú	pótlatch
green	grɪnfələ	gleen, lu	vəkó kété	pechúgh
hair	gras bílɔŋ héd	hair	kóá	yákso
hand	hæn	hand, sho	mabókə	le mah
head	héd	headee	li	la tet
heart	klak	heart	coeur	túmtum
know	save	savvy	hínga	kumtuks
man	mæn	man	kólí	man
no	no	na	non	wake
nose	nos	peedza	hō	nose
one	wənfələ	one piecee	ókó	ikt
small	líklík	likki	kété	ténas
sun	sən	sun	lá	sun, ótelagh
talk	tək	talkee	tene	wáuwau
two	tufələ	two	óse	mokst
warm	hətfələ	warm	wá	waum



Street scene in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.