

# Contact Languages

(REVISED SYLLABUS)

Instructor: Natalie Operstein  
Course requirements: None

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Office Hours: by appointment

## Seminar Description

This seminar is an introduction to the linguistic, historical, and cultural aspects of contact languages - pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages. Pidgins and creoles arise in specific historical and socio-economic conditions out of a particularly close contact between groups of people who do not speak each other's languages, and represent a non-trivial combination of two languages with many distinctive features not inherited from either of them. Mixed languages, on the other hand, typically arise in bilingual communities and afford a unique opportunity to observe the workings of a bilingual brain. Study of contact languages sheds light on such important issues as the universal properties of language, language origins, and the connection between the linguistic and cultural history.

Topics discussed in the course will include general elements of linguistic and cultural exchange such as borrowing of culture-related vocabulary and the creation of linguistic areas, in which shared external history and prolonged cultural contact has profound consequences for the structures of the participating languages. Among the contact languages to be examined are pidgins and creoles based on English, Spanish and French, and occasionally such other languages as Zulu, Russian, and Italian. We will discuss common characteristics of European-derived creoles, theories of creole origins, and the relevance of the historical and socio-economic conditions for the structures of the resulting contact languages. The students will supplement class discussions with assigned readings, make several class presentations, and write a research paper (8-12 double-spaced pages, 12pt). The course grade will be calculated as follows:

Class Presentations	40%
Final Exam	20%
Term Paper	40%

## Textbook

Arends, Jacques, Pieter Muysken, and Norval Smith, eds. 1994. *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

## Approximate Course Outline (timing to be adjusted as needed)

Weekend	Topics	Readings	Other
09/10	Forms of language contact. Definition of pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages. Survey of the world's contact languages.	Chapters 1-3	
09/24	Structure of pidgins, creoles and mixed languages, with some case studies.	Chapters 4, 18	Presentations on book chapters and journal articles.
10/15	Cultural and historical aspects of creole studies.	Chapter 13, 17	Presentations on book chapters and journal articles.
10/29	Genesis and development of creoles; theories of creole origins.	Chapters 8-11	First progress report on paper topic.
11/19	Some common grammatical features of creoles.	Chapters 20-23	Second progress report on paper topic.
12/10	Classification of creoles. Decreolization.		Presentation of term paper & final exam.