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## 250. The development of creolistics and the study of pidgin languages: An overview

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### 1. The field of creolistics

*Creolistics* (*Kreolistik*, *créolistique*) refers to all types of theoretical, descriptive, sociolinguistic, and historical scholarship involving two kinds of contact languages. *Pidgin languages* have doubtless existed on every continent and whenever there has been a need for people speaking mutually unintelligible languages – and with no common language between them – to effect communication with one another. Pidgins have limited grammatical structure and lexicon; their use is restricted to specific domains (such as trade); and they are the native language of none of their users. *Creole languages* are commonly regarded as erstwhile pidgins that have become the primary language of subsequent generations of speakers. Known creoles tend to cluster in regions that were venues of European colonial expansion between roughly

1500 and 1900, principally the Caribbean, coastal West Africa, the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and various parts of the Pacific. For purposes of general theory, it is hardly useful to study pidgins and creoles independently of one another.

### 2. The explicandum of creolistics

Common to all scholarship on pidgins and creoles, explicitly or implicitly, is the premise that in some crucial sense they trace their origins to catastrophic language contact. The fundamental aim of creolistics is to provide systematic and responsibly supported explanations of the social forces that bring languages into intensive contact and the cognitive processes that mediate the development of grammar.

Creoles at considerable geographic remove and with quite diverse linguistic affiliations do seem to evince a number of structural similarities: the marking of tense, mood, and aspect by means of preverbal particles (Guyanese Creole English *Mieri bin go iit* 'Mary would have eaten', Winford 1993, 108), although not all creoles share exactly the same system; the use of free rather than bound morphemes to encode grammatical information; basic word order (predominately SVO);