

# Emergent systematicity in Tây Bồi (Vietnamese Pidgin French)

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## (i) Are pidgins ‘structureless’?

- Pidgins traditionally characterized as ‘**fluid, structureless, and probably macaronic.**’[1]. The pidgin-to-creole model assumes **grammatical systematicity** only emerges **post-creolization**, i.e. after pidgin acquired as L1.
- However**, data from Tây Bồi (Vietnamese Pidgin French; VPF) suggest an **emergent system without creolization**, i.e. in adult L2 acquirers. The analysis here is a work-in-progress and feedback is very much appreciated.

## (ii) Vietnamese Pidgin French

- Vietnam endured six decades of French colonization, which saw the acquisition of French (*tây*) by adolescent male indentured workers (*bồi*).[2]
- Resultant pidgin, VPF, never creolized. No longer spoken. Records of VPF consist of descriptions by a handful of authors.[3-7]
- VPF exhibited widespread variation between speakers and within the same speaker. But such variation was likely not completely unstructured at a community level, with both diastatic and diatopic variation indicated in the data.

## (iii) Morphological reanalysis

- Reinecke: “Since many common indicative and imperative forms as well as the vast majority of infinitives end in /e/, [VPF] speakers ‘hear’ /e/ as the appropriate ending for some verbs not derived from the first conjugation infinitives.” [5]
- Largest class of French verbs ends /e/ in infinitive (1); unlike other classes (2-4).
- (1) Fr. /parle/ ‘speak.INF’
- (2) Fr. /vādr/ ‘sell.INF’
- (3) Fr. /vənr/ ‘come.INF’
- (4) Fr. /avwar/ ‘have.INF’
- /e/ also encodes IPFV and IMPF for all verb classes.
- (5) Fr. /parle/ ‘speak.IPFV; speak.IMPF’
- (6) Fr. /vāde/ ‘sell.IPFV; sell.IMPF’
- (7) Fr. /vəne/ ‘sell.IPFV; sell.IMPF’
- (8) Fr. /ave/ ‘have.IPFV; have.IMPF’

- Forms ending /e/ are selected from French intake as the VPF verb regardless of TMA/finiteness. VPF verbs have a single form in all contexts.[5]

- (9) VPF /pale/ ‘speak’
- (10) VPF /vaŋde/ ‘sell’
- (11) VPF /ave/ ‘have’
- (12) VPF /vəne/ ‘come’

- N.B. Not all VPF speakers had this system![5]

- For VPF speakers with this system, the high-frequency French verb ending /e/ in the intake was overgeneralized as a marker of verb status; possibly categorical feature [V].

## (iv) Morphological extension

- VPF speakers extended /e/ to Vietnamese VPs to derive novel verbs.[6]

(13) VPF /de.bi.e/ ‘take off; take away’

< Vn. /ʔdi-ɿ ve-ɿ/ *đi về* ‘return’ + /e/

(14) VPF /kwat.e/ ‘fan oneself’

< Vn. /kwət-ɿ ʔ/ *quạt* ‘fan’ + /e/

(15) VPF /ka.ɗuj.e/ ‘hit with bamboo’

< ? Vn. /kwət-ɿ zɔj-ɿ/ *quất roi* ‘flog’ + /e/

## (v) Systematicity in pidgins

- Can a pidgin be ‘**structureless**’ from a generative perspective?
- Pidgin speakers **systematize intake**, even without creolization. VPF speakers assign categorical feature [V] by overgeneralizing across French morphology.
- Feature assignment is emergent in part through the application of domain-general cognitive factors (Chomsky’s Factor 3[8]), viz. acquirers’ inherent tendency to **Maximise Minimal Means** by overgeneralizing across the intake, even in adult acquirers.[9]
- The latest **generative theory of creolization** by Aboh & DeGraff [10] has so far concentrated on Factors 1 & 2, i.e. Universal Grammar, and Primary Linguistic Data. Combining these insights with the Maximise Minimal Means model may lead to deeper understanding of Factor 3 in the formation of new languages.
- **Further work:** Detailed syntactic analysis of VPF data; application to creole data; theoretical and empirical distinction between L1 & L2 acquirers as applied to pidginization/creolization.

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