

Question. Pidgin not pigeon

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When speakers of distinct languages which come into contact but share no common linguistic background need to communicate, they often create **pidgin** languages. Pidgin languages typically consist of linguistic features of the contact languages, and their vocabulary is typically derived from the socially or economically dominant language. A pidgin language for which English has supplied much of the vocabulary is Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE) which is used in Cameroon, West Africa. The CPE examples here are represented phonetically. Note that *o* and *ó* (pronounced like the 'o' in *cot* and the 'aw' in *awful*, respectively) are different sounds.

For example, here are some CP words with their English translations:

<i>go</i>	'go'	<i>kol</i>	'cold'	<i>nes</i>	'nurse'
<i>man</i>	'man'	<i>siton</i>	'stone'	<i>sinek</i>	'snake'
<i>basiket</i>	'basket'	<i>shet</i>	'shirt'	<i>buk</i>	'book'
<i>haus</i>	'haus'	<i>do</i>	'door'	<i>sipun</i>	'spoon'
<i>bet</i>	'bed'	<i>dai</i>	'die'/'dead'	<i>kain</i>	'kind'
<i>du</i>	'do'	<i>fashon</i>	'behaviour'	<i>simen</i>	'cement'

It is typical for speakers in a complex multilingual situation, as is the one which creates pidgin languages, to find creative ways to extend the usefulness of a small borrowed vocabulary. One way to accomplish this goal is by metaphorically extending borrowed words, as in the examples below, which are CPE compounds derived metaphorically from the English word *eye*.

<i>ai kón</i>	'ear of corn'	<i>bat ai</i>	'evil eye'
<i>benben ai</i>	'cross-eyed'	<i>bik ai</i>	'greedy'
<i>lóng ai</i>	'covetous'	<i>tróng ai</i>	'courageous'

In this task, you are presented with CPE vocabulary items derived in a similar fashion from the English words as shown. Your task is to match the CPE compounds given for each word to their likely English translations, listed on the right. (6 points)

C1 *han* 'hand'

open han

wan han

tai han

A one of a pair

B generous

C mean

C2 *het* 'head'

bik het

klín het

tróng het

A stubborn

B innocent

C intelligent

C3 *hat* 'hat'

bat hat

blak hat

gut hat

A kind/generous

B calm

C wicked

<i>kul hat</i>	D clever/crafty
<i>kóni hat</i>	E hated/hateful
C4 <i>maut</i> ‘ mouth ’	
<i>bik maut</i>	A ability to persuade/flattery
<i>kóni maut</i>	B haughtiness/bragging
<i>swit maut</i>	C dishonesty
C5 <i>blak</i> ‘ black ’	
<i>blak ai</i>	A wickedness
<i>blak bush</i>	B heart of a forest
<i>blak hat</i>	C dizziness
C6 <i>drai</i> ‘ dry ’	
<i>drai ai</i>	A unsubstantiated statements
<i>drai han</i>	B thirst
<i>drai nek</i>	C poverty
<i>drai tók</i>	D insomnia

C7. What else have you noticed about CP? (9 points)

(a) There are two different ways to say ‘generous’ in CPE. What are they?

(b) What do you think the following CPE words are in English?

tróng klin tók swit

(c) Groups of consonants (called ‘consonant clusters’) in words borrowed from English are preserved in some contexts but simplified in others. Based on the words you have seen so far, predict what the CPE versions of the following English words will be.

stick old green ground

Question Pidgin not Pidgeon Solution

Write the appropriate letter A-E in the squares

C1 *han* 'hand'

open han

wan han

tai han

B
C
A

C2 *het* 'head'

bik het

klin het

tróng het

C
B
A

C3 *hat* 'hat'

bat hat

blak hat

gut hat

kul hat

kóni hat

E
C
A
B
D

C4 *maut* 'mouth'

bik maut

kóni maut

swit maut

B
C
A

C5 *blak* 'black'

blak ai

blak bush

blak hat

C
B
A

C6 *drai* 'dry'

drai ai

drai han

drai nek

drai tók

D
C
B
A

C7. (a) Two different ways to say 'generous' in CPE.

open han

gut hat

(b) What are the following CPE words in English?

tróng strong

klin clean

tók talk

swit sweet

(c) What are the CPE versions of the following English words?

stick *sitik*

old *ol*

green *grin*

ground *graun*

Comment

This problem had two elements: one was to relate the phonetic system of CPE to English in order to identify the English 'translations' of the phrases, e.g. in C2 'big head', 'clean head', 'strong head', and to get the correspondences in C7b/c. Then it was a matter of common sense or intuition to match up the phrases with their meanings.