

Since 1880s Tok Pisin, ("Talk Pidgin") in Papua New Guinea, the Creole language widely used throughout the country

Tok Pisin is one of the official languages of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and serves as the country's primary lingua franca, uniting a nation with over 800 distinct indigenous languages. Despite its name translating literally to "Talk Pidgin," it has evolved structurally from a basic contact jargon into an **expanded Creole language** because it is now spoken as a native first language by generations of Papua New Guineans.

Historical Origins

- **1880s Crystallization:** The language solidified in the New Guinea islands around the 1880s. It was brought back by local male labourers who worked on copra and sugarcane plantations in Samoa, Queensland, and Fiji.
- **Colonial Influence:** Under German colonial administration in northeastern New Guinea, the language became isolated from regular English contact. This allowed it to develop its own unique grammatical mechanisms.

Vocabulary and Structure

- **Lexicon:** Approximately 80% to 85% of Tok Pisin's vocabulary is derived from English.
- **Other Influences:** The remaining vocabulary is significantly influenced by German (e.g., *raus* for "get out"), Malay, and indigenous Melanesian languages like Tolai.
- **Creolisation:** It transitioned from a pidgin (a temporary bridge language between different groups) to a creole as children grew up learning it as their primary tongue.

Current Status

- **Official Recognition:** Tok Pisin is co-official alongside English, Hiri Motu, and Papua New Guinean Sign Language.
- **National Unity:** It acts as the ultimate cultural bridge, spoken by millions of people across hundreds of diverse tribal lines.

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