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**Plains Indian Sign language:  
the Nature of the World's Only Signed Interethnic Pidgincreole**

A pidgin is a language that is nobody's mother tongue, which is used between groups of people who have no language in common. Pidgins have been documented in all parts of the world, e.g. Chinook Jargon, Delaware Jargon and Eskimo Jargon in North America, Pidgin Carib in the Caribbean and the Guyanas, Fanakalo in South Africa, Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, etc. Such a pidgin can develop into a pidgincreole, when it becomes a default means of communication in interethnic contacts, or when it becomes a mother tongue for some of its speakers (Bakker 2008). Pidgincreoles typically have structural properties of creoles rather than pidgins, e.g. tense-mood-aspects particles rather than adverbs like "later" or "before".

From a social and demographic perspective, Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL) has all the characteristics of a pidgincreole, being a second language for all users, and a default language in interethnic communication.

But what about the linguistic structures of PISL? Does PISL grammar resemble the grammar of creole languages (Bakker ms.)? In our paper we will show that PISL also shares many of the linguistic characteristics of spoken pidgincreoles, and some with pidgins. PISL is, in contrast with claims in Davis (2010), not a sign language with an elaborate grammatical system, but one with a rather minimal system, reflecting its pidgin past. The language may be exceptionally rich in the number of signs, but it has a crude structure, when compared with sign languages of the Deaf such as American Sign Language, or Sign Language of the Netherlands.

Building on parallels with spoken creoles, we propose to include PISL among the world's non-European lexifier creoles, adding to the observation that creoles, including signed ones, show many parallel structures, independent from their lexifiers.

**References**

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