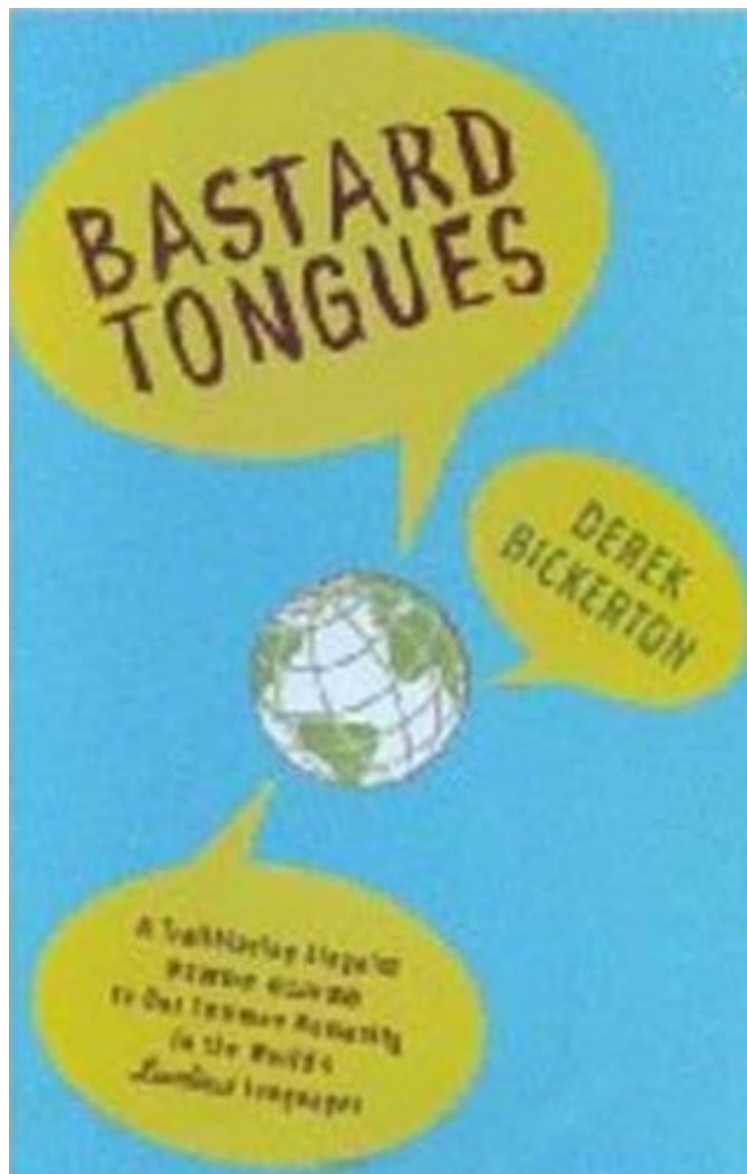


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Bastard Tongues: A Trailblazing Linguist Finds Clues to Our Common Humanity in the World's Lowliest Languages

Von Derek Bickerton

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Languages:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Another offspring of imperialismVon Stephen A. HainesThe word "creole" carries many connotations. Along the US Gulf Coast, it's a language, a people and a music form - not to mention a cuisine. To Derek Bickerton, the first category is the important one, even if this is the one place he failed to investigate in his research. A fascinating account of personal history and intense research, this book examines the roots and meaning of Creole languages. The Oxford Dictionary offers four definitions, but language is the last one: a mother tongue formed from the contact of a European language with another language, especially an African language. In this account it is this "mother tongue" that Bickerton wishes to trace and define. He does so in a manner that would leave most academic linguists shuddering, visiting bars, poverty-stricken communities and remote villages in the bush. The places are where the forces of empire have trod, bringing in imported labour to work plantations, mostly sugar. The names evoke exotic locales - Guyana, Suriname, Caribbean Islands and Hawaii. The imported workforces were from many points of origin - many of them African where separation of a few kilometres meant "neighbours" were unintelligible to each other. All the newcomers had to communicate with each other and with the masters. This is a key point in Bickerton's account. "Pidgin" is the first language arising from two people of a single language each attempting to communicate. It has no particular form nor vocabulary. "Creole", on the other hand evolves from pidgin to emerge as a fully-fledged operating language. Form and structure are essential aspects carrying the language through time, and sometimes space. The "space" element has led to some confusion, according to the author, who examines closely the theory of "diffusion" of Creole, chiefly from the Atlantic into the Pacific regions. His analysis explains why diffusion could not be the basis for the continuity of Creoles. Instead, his research in Hawaii demonstrates why he thinks Creoles are a children's invention. It's common knowledge now that adults have a far more difficult time learning a new language than do children. Canada's schools' "immersion" programmes are a prime example of this situation. In the societies Bickerton examined, "immersion" means sending "Creole" speakers to English-language schools. Where they spoke Creole among themselves - even in class. The Creole spoken had grammar and vocabulary that proved common in many places. The author, who must be the world's best-travelled linguist, visited places as distant as the Seychelles to learn just how this situation unfolded. His conclusion, which still confounds many desk-bound academics, is that the human brain contains a "bioprogramme" [read "genetically-based"] capacity. This is, of course, means an evolutionary heritage, which will prompt a moue of displeasure to those still denying our roots. It also dismisses the idea of children being born as "blank slates" - which has been dealt with elsewhere. It also gives greater substance to Noam Chomsky's "language module" in the brain. Bickerton notes that the recent studies in cognitive neuroscience have not identified such a region in the brain. However, something in the child's neuronal network gives children a highly flexible and creative capacity to cope with the challenges of learning language - at least in the earlier years. It is that ability in the very young that Bickerton wishes to investigate. His conclusion is a proposal to test his theories on young orphan children. In a sense, this has already taken place in Nicaragua where long-ignored and isolated deaf children were finally given schooling and communication opportunities with the overthrow of the Somoza regime. Bickerton understands the limitations in such a situation. He wishes to experiment on children who have speaking capacity, but have yet to possess skills in a particular language. The idea is bound to raise a storm of controversy - indeed, it already has in some reviewers. But Bickerton has anticipated most objections in his presentation. Not only will the staff be monitored - and they will have to be very well trained - but his proposal will offer provision for the subjects for many years. He doesn't mention long-term follow-up studies which would necessarily become part of the programme. That would enlarge his estimated costs, but would certainly enlarge the accumulated data substantially. Given the normal course of orphans' lives, there's more than a little merit in the idea. More importantly, it would help resolve many of the questions about human language capacity and how it develops. [stephen a. haines - Ottawa, Canada]

KurzbeschreibungWhy Do Isolated Creole Languages Tend to Have Similar Grammatical Structures?Bastard Tongues is an exciting, firsthand story of scientific discovery in an area of research close to the heart of what it means to be human what language is, how it works, and how it passes from generation to generation, even where historical accidents have made normal transmission almost impossible. The story focuses on languages so low in the pecking order that many people don't regard them as languages at all. Creole languages spoken by descendants of slaves and indentured laborers in plantation colonies all over the world. The story is told by Derek Bickerton, who has spent more than thirty years researching these languages on four continents and developing a controversial theory that explains why they are so similar to one another. A published novelist, Bickerton (once described as "part scholar, part swashbuckling man of action") does not present his findings in the usual dry academic manner. Instead, you become a companion on his journey of discovery. You learn things as he learned them, share his disappointments and triumphs, explore the exotic locales where he worked, and meet the colorful characters he encountered along the way. The result

is a unique blend of memoir, travelogue, history, and linguistics primer, appealing to anyone who has ever wondered how languages grow or what it's like to search the world for new knowledge. Pressestimmen One of the field's old lions, he has spent the last four decades studying pidgins and Creoles and writing a few novels on the side. A self-described macho street linguist for whom fieldwork is part pub crawl, Bickerton has a penchant for big ideas and a total lack of respect for the respectable that, judging from his new memoir, has put him at odds with bureaucrats and colleagues. Bastard Tongues is gossipy, vain and pugilistic—in other words, all the juicy things an academic memoir should be but too rarely is. "The New York Times Book " Bickerton has made transformative discoveries about the way we acquire language The book is part memoir, part intellectual detective story and part linguistics primer. 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