

Eskimo Pidgin: Sociolinguistic and structural aspects of a pidgin 'continuum'

Pidginised versions of the Eskimo languages were in use during different periods in different regions of the Arctic, from Eastern Siberia, through Alaska and Canada, to Greenland. In spite of the enormous distances and the different traditions of interethnic contact, the Eskimo-based pidgins share specific structural and lexical traits. The similarities can be explained in part by similar sociolinguistic circumstances, in part by universal tendencies involved in pidginisation, and perhaps also by particular properties of the main lexifier languages, which belong to the Eskimo-Aleut family. Apart from a 1909 article by the arctic explorer Vilhjálmur Stefánsson, Eskimo-based pidgins have not been documented and studied as such by scientists during the time of their existence. Due to increased bilingualism in the Arctic, the (known) Eskimo pidgins have gone out of use today, and for additional information we have to rely on relevant fragments in early wordlists, travel reports, diaries and the like. Nevertheless, the diverse sources appear to contribute to a coherent picture of Eskimo Pidgin.