I. INTRODUCTION

Language variation, both synchronic and diachronic, constitutes a major thrust of linguistic research. In particular, distinct language systems influence each other in various ways when they are brought into contact. Since many different ethnic groups have co-existed and moved about in Southeast Asia for millennia, it is often difficult to solve such problems as the proof of genetic affiliations and the identification of areal features which have diffused across linguistic boundaries.

Recent events in Southeast Asia have forced intimate, but historically brief, contact between large segments of European and Vietnamese speech communities. In 1970-71, I had the opportunity of observing directly Viet-American social and linguistic interaction, the latter of which I interpreted as an on-going process of pidginization. The language changes which occurred may be temporary, yet the processes which they exemplify may be applicable to situations for which direct evidence is lacking. Certainly, any theoretical formulation of linguistic or sociolinguistic interaction must account for data such as that described below.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS OF PIDGINIZATION

When distinct cultural systems come into contact, various interactions can occur. If the members of the different communities are to have any communication beyond the most rudimentary and transitory acknowledgement of each other's existence, one or more of the linguistic systems must be modified. Following Nida's and Reinecke's arguments, there are several possibilities when two groups interact linguistically. Both groups can use a third language accessible to each, and this language is called a lingua franca. One group can accept a greatly modified version of the other's language. If the modified version and its parent language are mutually intelligible, the modified language is called a koine. If the two are mutually unintelligible, the modified language is called a pidgin. A pidgin which becomes the primary or native language of its speakers is called a creole. The above arguments can be generalized to the case of more than two groups in contact.

The processes by which pidgins arise are largely unknown, or at least
not agreed upon. Bloomfield\(^1\) suggests that pidgins arise in master-servant situations where the two parties have different languages. The masters use "baby-talk" to make themselves understood, the servants approximate this simplified language, and then the masters imitate the servants. Nida and Fehderau\(^2\) postulate a similar "feedback" system, wherein the speakers of the "source" language use simple terms and syntax, which are then modified by the speakers of the other language, and the modified version is then imitated by the original speakers. Hockett\(^3\) offers a "baby-talk" hypothesis similar to that of Bloomfield. Hockett insists that a pidgin is not a mixed language but is merely an extreme modification of one of the source languages. Cole\(^5\) (p. 552), on the other hand, describes the pidgin Fanagalo as "a disintegrated mixture of mutilated elements from two entirely different language families." De Camp\(^7\) refutes the "baby-talk" theory by citing accounts from 18th Century Jamaica, where white settlers learned creole from their slaves, and argues in favor of a monogenetic theory of origin. That is, creoles are all modifications of one language, Portuguese being a prime candidate, with relexification occurring. Relexification is the process whereby semantic slots in a language are filled by lexemes from a different language. De Camp admits, however, that Far Eastern pidgins do not share many features with Caribbean creoles. Samarin\(^9\) (p. 126) defines pidginization as "any consistent reduction of the functions of language both in its grammar and its use." Samarin claims that this process is a common phenomenon and that pidgins are just special cases.

Regardless of the particular process which is advocated, certain characteristics of pidgins are agreed upon. Pidgins have small vocabularies in comparison to other languages. Hall\(^2\) estimates 700-1500 words for the typical pidgin, and Cole\(^5\) estimates the vocabulary of Fanagalo at 1500 words. Consequently, extensive use of circumlocution and paraphrase is necessary to enlarge the semantic domain of a pidgin. Nida\(^4\) asserts that the structure of a pidgin is simplified, also. Single forms of lexical units are used; morphophonemic alternations are dropped. Hockett\(^3\) says that the grammar is not necessarily simplified, but it is more regular than that of the source language. Since inflections and grammatical categories are reduced, word order carries a greater functional load in showing the relationships between words.\(^2\)

Historically, pidgins seem to have developed in contact situations
between European and non-European communities. Communication was necessary for trade or because the non-Europeans were slaves or servants. Since communication was only in a limited domain, such as trade, the full power of one of the native languages was not needed. Sometimes, social pressures prevented one group from adopting the other's language intact. Thus, the colonialists might assume that learning the native tongue was beneath their dignity. Reinecke states that the presence of many languages enhances the spread and survival of pidgins.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN VIETNAM

Vietnam was under French domination from the middle 1800's to 1954. Tây Bội, or Vietnamese Pidgin French, is reported to have begun in French garrisons in the 1860's and continued until 1960, leaving few marks on the spoken language after this period. Tây Bội exhibited the standard characteristics of a pidgin. In the Swadesh 200 word list, 94% of the Tây Bội equivalents were from Standard French. The French and Vietnamese speakers of Tây Bội used their respective native phonological systems. The Saigon dialect of Vietnamese has five tones, which are an integral part of the phonemic system. These appear in Tây Bội, but without any phonemic function. Structurally, Standard French inflection was mostly dropped, nouns appeared without articles, gender was ignored, and number was indicated by context. The verbs were invariant, and followed the French infinitive. Word order was often a word-by-word translation from Vietnamese.

In the 1960's, United States foreign policy led to a massive influx of American armed forces personnel into Vietnam. In 1969-70, I was trained intensively as a Vietnamese linguist in the Defense Language Institute, and I then endured further training as an interrogator. The U.S. Army sent me to South Vietnam in 1970-71. For four months I was stationed in Can Tho, a large city located in the Mekong Delta. At that time, Can Tho was one of the few large Vietnamese communities which was "on limits" to G.I.'s. The city was safe enough that only a 9:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. curfew was imposed on American servicemen, and this was largely circumvented by G.I.'s merely staying off the streets, but still not returning to their designated quarters. Since several other cities had recently been put "off limits" to G.I.'s, many merchants, bar girls, and prostitutes flocked to Can Tho in order to separate
G.I.'s from their money. To perform this operation efficiently, communication was necessary, and the burden of communicating rested upon the Vietnamese. Also, many Vietnamese were employed by the U.S. military as PX salespeople, kitchen workers, maids, etc. The ability to communicate made such employment easier to obtain.

IV. CONDITIONS OF DATA GATHERING

Into this milieu I was dropped, equipped with a native speaker's knowledge of English, two years of high school French, and a recent period of saturation in Vietnamese. I had enough free time that I was able to wander about the city conversing with everyone I encountered. The Vietnamese reactions to my spoken Vietnamese were invariably positive. Surprise, smiling approval, and eagerness to talk with me encouraged me to increase my Vietnamese fluency.

Conversations with different individuals over several months all indicated that certain opinions toward language were held by most Vietnamese who had any sustained contact with Americans. Those that did not speak English expressed the desire to acquire English in order to get better jobs. Since very few Americans spoke Vietnamese, my consideration in using their language was appreciated and resulted in more friendliness being shown toward me than to other G.I.'s around me.

American attitudes toward language were also consistent. Because most G.I.'s expected to be in Vietnam for only a year, learning Vietnamese offered no long-range benefits. Even the Defense Language Institute managed to kill the linguistic motivation of most of its students. Prejudice against all Vietnamese and a sense of superiority supported the common attitude that it was the responsibility of the Vietnamese people to learn English if they wished to talk with Americans. Vietnamese who attained skill in using American slang, especially profane terms, were particularly admired by Americans for their linguistic virtuosity. When my G.I. companions observed the special attention and favored treatment I received, they often said that they would like to know Vietnamese. Yet, even though the U.S. military offered brief language courses, almost no one bothered to make the effort.