Linguistics 432

Hawai'i Creole English: The Path to Understanding

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I. Introduction

For many people who live in the Hawaiian Islands, Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) is a native or, at the very least, a second language learned early on. Known more commonly as Pidgin, HCE reflects Hawai'i's rich heritage and culture as it is a "mixed-plate" of linguistic and social structures.

In the late 19th century, Hawai'i's sugar plantations employed laborers from around the world and as it was necessary for the laborers to communicate on the plantations, a "makeshift" language began to form (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003, p. 2; Crystal, 2008, p. 451). Hawaiian, Cantonese, and Portuguese influenced the development of this pidgin, known as Hawai'i Pidgin English (HPE) (Sakoda & Tamura, 2008, p. 41). HPE was even used for communications outside the plantation (Furukawa, 2007, p. 374). Speakers, using it at home, introduced HPE to their children, who would teach it to the next generation (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003, p. 2). By the early 1900s, HPE had become "the primary language of many" living in Hawai'i (Furukawa, 2007, p. 374).

Eventually, HPE began to replace other languages as the native tongue of plantation children (Yokota, 2008, p. 22). This occurrence marked the change from HPE to HCE, or, what we in Hawai'i call, Pidgin (Yokota, 2008, p. 22). When HPE underwent creolization, like many pidgins, it developed an expanded and more complex language structure (Sankoff & Laberge, 1984, p. 306).

Today, the linguistic situation surrounding HCE is one marked by controversy, misinformation, and outdated attitudes. Although HCE is spoken by more than 600,000 people, including 100,000 or more who do not speak standard English, it is largely seen as inferior to English; many believe it is a form of incorrect, or, even, "broken English" (Campbell, 2006, p. 2063; Siegel, 2008, p. 56). It is no wonder then, that standard English, in some form or another, is the instructional language used in Hawai'i's schools (Lewis, 2009, para. 7). The use of standard English, and only standard English, in the classroom, may not be the optimal educational strategy for Hawai'i. Research suggests that HCE could be effectively utilized in educational settings. Currently, however, misinformation and a lack of awareness about HCE among Hawai'i's schoolteachers, administrators, parents, and even students, is preventing such integration, and may be hurting, rather than helping, our Islands' keiki. This paper will address this problem and its possible resolutions, including programs which call for the integration of HCE in the classroom.

II. Survey

In November 2010, I attended and presented a "rough draft" of this paper at a conference held by the North Hawai'i Community Children's Council. Among the attendees were teachers, English Language Learner Program teachers, speech language pathologists, educational assistants, and state workers. As part of my presentation, I administered a brief and optional questionnaire about HCE; seventeen[1] were returned. This survey was comprised of five statements which participants were to rate, on a scale from one to five, to what extent they agreed with each statement (see Appendix A for the complete survey).

An analysis of survey responses showed several interesting outcomes. For instance, the nine participants indicated that they disagreed with Statement 1 (Pidgin is not a language) while seven[2] agreed with Statement 2 (Pidgin is a dialect of English). The fact that

a majority believe HCE is both a language and a dialect suggests that there is confusion among participants about what constitutes a language and a dialect. If the nature of HCE is not understood by or known to the community, how can we expect this linguistic situation to be addressed properly?

Statements 4 and 5 also elicited interesting, and to some extent, surprising responses. Before tallying up participant answers, I fully expected that a majority would agree with Statement 4 (Students who speak Pidgin should have no trouble learning in a classroom where standard English is the only language used). However, this was not the case: the majority of participants actually disagreed with Statement 4. Similarly, while I expected participants to agree with Statement 5 (Pidgin has no place in the classroom), the majority disagreed here. These results suggest that there is hope for successful classroom integration of HCE.

Although this survey was done purely for illustrative purposes, and is in no way definitive, it is worth considering. If nothing else, the results of this survey indicate that there does appear to be a lack of awareness about HCE present in the community.

III. Discrediting Myths and Misrepresentations in HCE

Perhaps one of the most common misconceptions about HCE is that it is simply a decrepit variety of English (Siegel, 2008, p. 56). This, of course, is not true. For almost half a century now, "sociolinguists have been showing that creoles such as [HCE] are legitimate, rule-governed languages that differ in systematic ways from the language from which most of their vocabulary is derived" (Siegel, 2008, p.56). For instance, HCE has a unique set of grammatical rules which sets it apart from its lexifier language, English (Siegel, 2008, p. 56; Burridge & Kortmann, 2004, p. 573). One such set of rules may be observed in the formation of negatives in HCE (Siegel, 2008, p. 56). According to Siegel (2008), HCE has at least four markers for negation, any one of which may occur before a verb, auxiliary, or modal (p. 56). Each marker has a specific function and rules which dictate how it may be used (Siegel, 2008, p. 56). For example, the marker nat may be used in three situations: (1) preceding the predicate in sentences which lack a verb, (2) preceding an –ing form of a verb (unless verb is preceded by ste), and (3) preceding sapostu (Siegel, 2008, p. 56). For a more complete list of negative markers in HCE, see Appendix B.

Another misconception about HCE is that it is somehow inferior to standard English (Da Pidgin Coup, 2008, p. 33). This assumption is false. No one language variety has ever been shown to be intrinsically superior to any other, and no one variety has been shown to be significantly more complex than any other in grammatical terms (Da Pidgin Coup, 2008, p. 33; Baugh, 1999, p. 9-10).

A statement made by State Board of Education Chairman Mitsugi Nakashima demonstrates that even those in the education sector are not immune to misconceptions bred of bias. To Nakashima, "if you speak pidgin, you think pidgin, you write pidgin" (Da Pidgin Coup, 2008, p. 35). Nakashima's statement intended to imply that the use of HCE was to blame for poor student scores on national standardized writing tests (Eades, 1999, p. 6). Such a claim is, of course, unfounded for a number of reasons. For example, there are substantial differences between writing and speech, including the neurological processes involved in the facilitation of each act (Da Pidgin Coup, 2008, p. 35-36; Baugh, 1999, p. 12).

According to Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams (2008), because "children learn to speak instinctively without being taught," learning to read and write may not be equated with learning to speak (p. 791). In other words, the acquisition of human language is innate; the mastering of reading and writing, however, is not (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, p. 791). If the only way a child acquires the necessary skills for reading and writing is through study, then it is not the students who

have failed the educational system, but rather, the other way around.

A fourth misconception is one which directly addresses HCE in the classroom. It has been shown that the concern that the use of non-standard language varieties, such as HCE, in schools will hinder students' acquisition of the standard has kept such languages from being used in educational settings (Siegel, 2008, p. 59). The fear is that features of the non-standard variety will be inappropriately transferred when speaking or writing in the standard language, effectively interfering with a student's acquisition of the standard (Siegel, 2008, p. 59). There is, however, no evidence that using HCE in the classroom would increase the likelihood of such interference, and, subsequently, would not affect a student's ability to acquire standard English (Siegel, 2008, p. 59-60). In fact, studies of programs which incorporate non-standard varieties into the classroom actually show the opposite (Siegel, 2008, p. 60). Successful programs have been carried out in the US Virgin Islands, Belize, the United States, and even Hawai'i (Siegel, 2008, p. 60).

There is further trepidation within the community based on the concept of ghettoization, or the idea that the use of HCE in Hawai'i's schools will further disadvantage students who are already at a disadvantage (Siegel, 2008, p. 59, 61). As one community member put it, "Pidgin is passed from generation to generation and ensures that those limited to this form of expression are restricted to the lower rungs of the corporate ladder" (Childs, 2002, para. 5). Perhaps the best argument against this line of thinking is the fact that there are thousands of individuals who grew up speaking HCE and have gone on to become successful in life (Siegel, 2008, p. 61). Many of these individuals demonstrate a mastery of standard English and are able to "switch" between it and HCE, depending on the situation (Siegel, 2008, p. 61). It is not the mere act of speaking HCE which leads to socioeconomic inconsistencies, but, rather, archaic attitudes fueled by misinformation and shortcomings within the institution of education and the community (Siegel, 2008, p. 61).

Educational programs advocated for Hawai'i which would integrate HCE into the classroom have been shown to aid in acquisition of the standard, therefore giving students a chance to get ahead (Siegel, 2008, p. 61). HCE-speaking students would not be isolated in these programs as all students would participate in the same classroom activities and be encouraged to use the variety of language they are most comfortable with (Siegel, 2008, p. 61), which will be discussed further in section IV.

IV. Discussion: HCE and Education

IV.i. How can HCE be used in education?

There are several types of educational programs which integrate and utilize creoles and other non-standard varieties into the classroom. Siegel (2008) discusses three specific types of programs: instrumental programs, accommodation programs, and awareness programs (p. 57-59).

Instrumental programs use the local non-standard language variety as a medium of instruction (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Students initially learn to read and write in this language, and sometimes are even taught content subjects (i.e. mathematics) in the language as well (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). These programs are most effective when the local non-standard language variety is so dissimilar from the standard variety that the two may even be mutually unintelligible (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Because the languages used are so different, these programs are similar to bilingual programs: the non-standard language variety is used as a means of acquiring a second language (in this case, the standard) (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Instrumental programs have been observed in use around the world in such locations as Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Netherlands Antilles, and even the United States of America (Siegel, 2008, p, 58). They are, however, not advocated for use in Hawai'i (Siegel, 2008, p. 58).

Accommodation programs make use of, but do not include as a medium of instruction, the local non-standard variety; the standard variety remains "the only subject of study" (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). In classrooms which participate in accommodation programs, students are permitted to use the non-standard variety for speaking and, occasionally, writing (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Teachers may use the interactional patterns of students in order to encourage and augment acquisition of the standard variety (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Au (2008) cites the use of such "talk-story-like participation structures" as an effective way of encouraging students to develop a desire to learn to read (p. 71). In more advanced classes, teachers may even incorporate literature which has been written in the non-standard variety in order to facilitate learning (Siegel, 2008, p. 58).

Accommodation programs have been implemented in Hawai'i in the past and are composed of several parts: the accommodation component, the sociolinguistic component, and the contrastive component (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). As with accommodation programs, awareness programs utilize and welcome the use of the non-standard language variety as an educational tool for the acquisition of the standard variety (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Students are also encouraged to examine different types of language, exposing them to the concepts of dialect, creole, pidgin, and other misunderstood varieties (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Also examined are the sociohistorical processes that facilitated the use of one variety over another as the standard (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). The contrastive component comes into play when students compare the linguistic characteristics of the non-standard variety with those of the standard (Siegel, 2008, p. 58). Siegel (2008) cites three awareness programs which existed in Hawai'i: the Hawai'i English Program (1968-1983), Project Holopono (1984-1988), and Project Akamai (1989-1993) (p. 58).

The integration of accommodation and awareness programs into Hawai'i's schools would encourage the use of HCE in educational settings, as well as allow students to express themselves in their own language (Siegel, 2008, p. 59). As will be discussed in section IV.ii, this type of self-expression plays a significant role in a student's overall academic experience, any hindrance of which may have detrimental and long-lasting effects on Hawai'i's schoolchildren.

IV.ii. Benefits of the use of HCE in education

Studies done of accommodation and awareness programs suggest that there are many benefits to the use of HCE in the classroom (Siegel, 2008, p. 61). It has been observed that students who participate in such programs score higher on standardized tests and experience an increase in academic achievement (Siegel, 2008, p. 61). What is behind these positive changes? According to Siegel (2008), three factors are at work: "greater cognitive development, increased motivation and self-esteem, and the ability to separate codes and notice differences" (p. 61).

Children express themselves best in a familiar language and "when there is no fear of correction" (Siegel, 2008, p. 61-62). Thus, children are at a disadvantage when this need is denied them, when they are forbidden to use their own language variety (Siegel, 2008, 62). Because self-expression is required for cognitive development to take place, it is likely that students who do poorly in high school have not properly developed "transfer ability," or "the…recognition by a learner that abstract reasoning processes learned with regard to materials in one context can be applied to different materials in a new context" (Siegel, 2008, p. 62). The only way that a student may develop transfer ability is through the discussion, description, and encoding of new materials (Siegel, 2008, p. 62). Because HCE is not used in education, HCE-speaking students are not able to express themselves using their own language, and may not be comfortable doing so in standard English (Siegel, 2008, p. 62). Accommodation and awareness programs facilitate cognitive

development because students are encouraged to express themselves however they feel the most comfortable (Siegel, 2008, p. 62).

It is widely accepted that motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and anxiety play a part in second language acquisition (Siegel, 2008, p. 62). Speakers of creoles often have a negative self-image (a result of frequent correction of their language, and the denigration of their speech and culture) (Siegel, 2008, p. 62). When value is placed on the students' language(s) they are more motivated, have more self-confidence, and are less anxious (Siegel, 2008, p. 62). Students may also be concerned that learning the standard will result in the abandonment of their language and, thus, exclusion from their social group (Siegel, 2008, p. 62). A student who is encouraged to use his or her own variety in the classroom would have less of an adverse reaction towards assimilation; motivation to learn the standard should, therefore, increase (Siegel, 2008, p. 62).

By using a non-standard variety such as HCE in the classroom, students become aware of the differences between it and the standard (Sigel, 2008, p. 63). The "noticing hypothesis" suggests acquisition of a language is facilitated by attention to the target language forms, and "these forms cannot be acquired if they are not noticed" (Siegel, 2008, p. 63). Because awareness programs include contrastive components, students are encouraged to notice features which differ between their own language and the standard; this is the first step of language acquisition (Siegel, 2008, p. 63).

V. C**onclusion**

The motivation and reasoning behind the exclusion of HCE in Hawai'i's schools are reminders of a linguistic history marked by intolerance and misunderstanding. At best, such justifications are misinformed; at worst, they are completely unwarranted. Students are being denied important educational opportunities because of the ignorance and bias plaguing Hawai'i's educational institutions and communities. In order to cultivate a nourishing learning environment for all of Hawai'i's children, we must put aside dated and inaccurate information and openly embrace HCE as a language of Hawai'i and of the classroom.

Footnotes

[1] Although there were seventeen participants in total, one participant did not mark an answer for Statement 1; one participant circled both "Somewhat Agree" and "Somewhat Disagree" for Statement 2, forcing omission from the end count for Statement 2; one participant answered both "Somewhat Agree" and "Disagree" for Statement 4, also forcing omission from end count.

[2] Othe results: 2 "Somewhat Agree," 1 "Not Sure," 4 "Somewhat Disagree," 2 "Disagree," making the seven participants who "Agree" the majority.

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Appendix A:
Survey of Conference Participants and Results

The following is a brief survey about Pidgin. For each statement, please indicate whether you Agree (5), Somewhat Agree (4), are Not Sure (3), Somewhat Disagree (2), or Disagree (1). Please circle your choice.

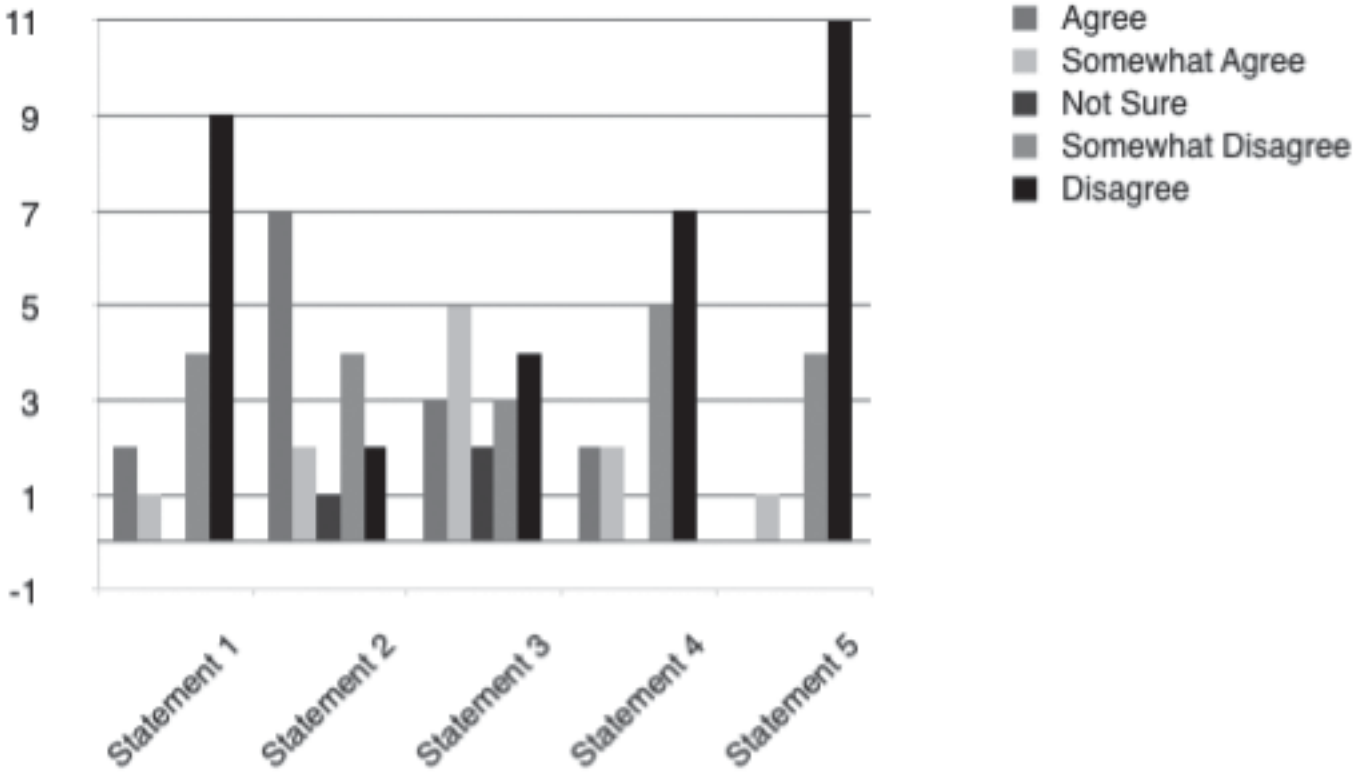
1. Pidgin is not a language.
Agree (5) Somewhat Agree (4) Not Sure (3) Somewhat Disagree (2) Disagree (1)

2. Pidgin is a dialect of English.
Agree (5) Somewhat Agree (4) Not Sure (3) Somewhat Disagree (2) Disagree (1)

3. Students who speak Pidgin must learn standard English if they wish to be successful in life.
Agree (5) Somewhat Agree (4) Not Sure (3) Somewhat Disagree (2) Disagree (1)

4. Students who speak Pidgin should have no trouble learning in a classroom where standard English is the only language used.
Agree (5) Somewhat Agree (4) Not Sure (3) Somewhat Disagree (2) Disagree (1)

5. Pidgin has no place in the classroom.
Agree (5) Somewhat Agree (4) Not Sure (3) Somewhat Disagree (2) Disagree (1)



Appendix B:
Negative Formation in HCE

Table 1, reproduced here from Siegel (2008, p. 57), shows the usage of negative makers, nat no, neva, and nomo in HCE.

Da kæt it fish. 'The cat eats fish.'	*Da kæt* ***no*** *it fish.* 'The cat doesn't eat fish.'
Da gaiz wrking. 'The guys are working.'	**Da gaiz* ***no*** *wrking.* *Da gaiz* ***nat*** *wrking.* 'The guys aren't working.'
Dei ste lisining. 'They're listening.'	**Dei* ***nat*** *ste lisining.* *Dei* ***no*** *ste lisining.* 'They aren't listening.'
Ai gon tel om. 'I'll tell him.'	*Ai* ***no*** *gon tel om.* *Ai* ***nat*** *gon tel om.* 'I won't tell him.'
Mai sista wan bas jraiva. 'My sister is a bus driver.'	*Mai sista* ***nat*** *wan bas jraiva.* 'My sister isn't a bus driver.'
I kæn du twenti pushap. 'I can do twenty pushups.'	*I* ***no*** *kæn du twenti pushap.* 'I can't do twenty pushups.'
Da buga braun. 'The guy is brown.'	*Da buga* ***nat*** *braun.* 'The guy isn't brown.'
Kærol hæftu wok. 'Carol has to work.'	*Kærol* ***no*** *hæftu wok.* 'Carol doesn't have to work.'
Yu sapostu du dæt. 'You're supposed to do that.'	*Yu* ***nat*** *sapostu du dæt.* 'You're not supposed to do that.'
Ai wen du om. 'I did it.'	**Ai* ***no*** *wen du om.* *Ai* ***neva*** *du om.* 'I didn't do it.'
Gat kaukau in da haus. 'There's food in the house.'	*** ***No*** *gat kaukau in da haus.* ***Nomo*** *kaukau in da haus.* 'There isn't food in the house.'
Nau wi gat ka. 'Now we have a car.'	**Nau wi* ***no*** *gat ka.* *Nau wi* ***nomo*** *ka.* 'Now we don't have a car.'