

LANGUAGE CONTACT IN HAWAII 1780-1930

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*ABSTRACT: O contacto lingüístico no Havai é extremamente bem-documentado. Inicialmente, emergiram duas versões-'jargão', tanto do inglês quanto do havaiano, mas a variedade havaiana prevaleceu e tornou-se um 'pidgin' estável, por volta de 1820. Essa situação continuou até que o ciclo do açúcar dos anos 70 trouxe uma imigração maciça da China, de Portugal e de outros lugares. Surgiu, então, um 'pidgin' macarrônico, contendo palavras tanto do inglês quanto do havaiano, mas também das línguas de outros imigrantes. Embora esse 'pidgin' macarrônico tivesse se anglicizado cada vez mais, através dos anos, nunca existiu o 'pidgin' estável postulado por Holm, Goodman e outros, como a língua das plantações havaianas. Nos anos 90 do mesmo século, as crianças abandonaram o havaiano como sua meta primária e, do 'pidgin' ainda pouco estruturado, produziram, de forma abrupta e não gradual, a língua crioula do Havai. Todas as características próprias do crioulo contemporâneo são atestadas nas primeiras duas ou três décadas.*

Within a decade or so after the visit of Captain Cook in 1778 initiated contacts between Hawaii and the outside world, a long and highly complex history of language contact had begun—a history perhaps unique among histories of European-non European contact in the extent to which it was documented by contemporary observers. It is clear, for instance, that a stereotyped form of communication, an incipient pidgin, had begun to form by the end of that decade. The evidence for this consists in the wordlists, purportedly of Hawaiian, that were collected by such early visitors as the Spaniard Manuel Quimper, starting at least as early as 1789 and continuing into the early nineteenth century. These contain, among a number of genuine Hawaiian words, cases of reduplication (*nuimui* 'a lot of, from Hawaiian *nui* 'much, many') and semantic shift (*pi-mai* 'come', from Hawaiian *pi'i mai* 'ascend hither', rather than *hele mai* 'come'), together with borrowings from other pidgins, e.g. *kaukau* 'eat' (Chinese pidgin English) or *pequenino* 'small' (Portuguese 'very small'). With regard to the latter, Carr (1972) mistakenly suggests that words like *kaukau* and *pequenino*

formed part of an early local pidgin English. They may indeed have been borrowed from some form of non-Hawaiian maritime pidgin, but their appearance in Hawaiian wordlists clearly shows that they were used by Hawaiians in predominantly Hawaiian contexts, otherwise naive observers would never have taken them for Hawaiian words.

... Who used such words? It was the belief of Reinecke (1969) that while long term residents in Hawaii acquired more or less fluent Hawaiian, more fleeting contacts between Hawaiians and visitors were carried out mainly in some form of Pacific Pidgin English. With regard to the first suggestion, there can be little doubt that some immigrants did master vernacular Hawaiian. A man like John Young, a country boy from Gloucestershire, England, who became Governor of the island of Hawaii under King Kamehameha, could hardly have discharged the functions of that office with anything less than a near-native command of the language. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence from several sources suggests that the drifting beachcomber types who in the early years of contact formed a sizeable proportion of the small European populations in Pacific islands generally, frequently had only a limited command of the vernacular, and often confused or misled the Europeans who recruited them as interpreters. We can therefore assume that from the earliest date of European settlement in Hawaii there existed a continuum of fluency in Hawaiian extending from near-native competence at one end to a primitive jargon at the other.

As for the briefer contacts between short-term visitors and Hawaiians, we should not be too hasty in assuming that all or even a majority of these took place through the medium of some kind of pidginized English. One fact which renders such a development unlikely is the large number of Spanish, French, Portuguese and even Russian ships that visited Hawaii in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Few crew members of such vessels would have commanded any kind of English, even a pidginized variety. Rather than acquire new words for each visiting vessel that appeared, it would appear to have been a more productive strategy for Hawaiians to have simplified their own language and encouraged newcomers to acquire and use this simplified form.

Considerable evidence suggests that by the arrival of the missionaries in 1820 or thereabouts, there had developed a fairly standardised form of pidgin Hawaiian (see Roberts, to appear, for

detailed description and examples) which had fairly rigid SVO order ( as compared to vernacular Hawaiian VSO) and which had largely if not completely dispensed with the complex Hawaiian systems of tense- and case-marking. Other features included the replacement of articles by a single demonstrative (*kela* 'that'), the selection of a single pronominal form for each person/number, regardless of case or function, and the creation of a distinctive vocabulary of lexical items that were phonologically simplified, often semantically shifted, and sometimes reduplicated ( typical is the formation of *moemoe* 'sleep' from Hawaiian *hiamoe*; see Bickerton and Wilson (1987) and Roberts ( to appear) for further examples).

There can be little doubt that, from time to time, Hawaiians did acquire English words and use these in contacts with visitors. Indeed, a few of them, such as *pīhi* 'fish', had begun to appear, suitably rephonologized, in the 'Hawaiian' wordlists that continued to be compiled by foreign visitors. This English influence, negligible at first, was strengthened in the period between 1820 and 1850 by two factors.

The first was the tendency for many young male Hawaiians to join the crews of European and American vessels. These often arrived in Hawaii short-handed as a result of accident or disease, and many lost further crew members who jumped ship to escape the hardship and monotony of the seafaring life. Hawaiians, on the other hand, were eager to see new lands and able quickly to adapt their own seafaring skills to the rather different demands of sailing vessels. These sailors did indeed pick up the pidgin English that was becoming an ever more widespread lingua franca throughout the Pacific basin. However, we should once again beware of assuming that such traffic moved on a one-way street. As attested by a source as well-known as Richard Dana's *Two Years before the Mast*, Hawaiian sailors even in American ports employed a mixture of pidgin English and pidgin Hawaiian, and appear to have been able to make themselves understood in either. Indeed, a wide range of facts, from the Hawaiian words attested in North-West American Indian languages ( Drechsel and Makuakane 1982 ) to the examples of pidgin-Hawaiian words that appear in several wordlists from other Pacific islands, suggest that alongside Pacific Pidgin English there may have existed a Pacific Polynesian pidgin. However, further research is obviously needed before possibility can be confirmed.

The second factor that tended to increase the influence of English was the foundation of permanent expatriate communities in the major Hawaiian towns. While the largest of these, that of Honolulu, numbered only a few hundreds, it was responsible for employing a number of Hawaiians, many of them in positions (house-servant, gardener and so on) where they came into close and daily personal contact with their employers. Since contemporary testimony suggests that a large majority of long-term residents in Hawaii acquired some variety (even if only a pidginized one) of Hawaiian, we must again not be too hasty to assume that all or even most of these contacts involved some form of English. However, as the *haole* (originally 'stranger', later 'Caucasian') community increased in size, some of its members may have failed to acquire even pidgin Hawaiian, and even households where some variety of Hawaiian was used with Hawaiians, servants could hardly have failed to pick up some words of English through overhearing *haole* conversations. These facts, taken with the unacknowledged Anglocentric bias common in research on pidgins and creoles, have led a number of writers (e.g. Reinecke 1969, Carr 1972, and even, albeit to a lesser extent, Day 1987) to suggest that some form of English, known as *hapa haole* (literally "half-white") and containing a number of Hawaiian words, had become the commonest form of contact medium by around 1850, if not earlier.

Evidence accumulated in recent years, however, and summarized in Roberts (1991, to appear), suggests that pidgin Hawaiian, with little or no admixture from English, was the most common medium of contact between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians until at least the 1880s, and continued to flourish in some areas of the islands for several decades after that. Contemporary references abound testifying to the ease with which non-Hawaiians could acquire what to them appeared to be Hawaiian (but what was in most cases undoubtedly pidgin Hawaiian) and to the frequency of complaints from educated Hawaiians that their language was becoming corrupted through misuse by foreigners and even, on occasion, by Hawaiians themselves. Pidgin Hawaiian was even used as a contact medium between Chinese immigrants from different dialect areas. Indeed, the use of pidgin Hawaiian as a contact language between non-Hawaiians of different language backgrounds may have been a factor in its relatively early stabilization, while the fact that English was only ever used between native English speakers and others (there are neither attestations nor anecdotal evidence for its use between non-native speakers until almost the end of the century) would have led

to a *cocoliche*-type (Whinnom 1971) situation in which a true pidgin could not develop.

It has been claimed by writers such as Goodman (1985) and Holm (1986, 1988) that an English-based maritime pidgin was brought back to Hawaii by Hawaiian seamen and others, was used by them and by others in contacts with non-Hawaiians, and eventually gave rise to a plantation pidgin which had stabilized by the late 1880s. However, there is no empirical evidence for any such development. To begin with, there are no attestations of the use of any kind of English-based maritime pidgin *in Hawaii*; Hawaiian sailors who doubtless acquired such a pidgin seem never to have used it on their return home, or to have used it so infrequently that its occurrences went unrecorded. On the other hand, especially from the 1870s on, we find a growing number of attestations of idiosyncratic, unstabilized "foreigner's English", with no characteristic pidgin features beyond their disfluent and fragmentary nature, as well as a somewhat smaller number of utterances which seem scattered along a second-language-learning continuum that extended from the mangled epithets of prostitutes and barflies to the fluent educated English of some members of the royal family and their court - a continuum, in other words, very similar to the Hawaiian second-language-learning continuum that had come into existence late in the previous century. Indeed, the only significant difference between the English and Hawaiian continua was the fact that the latter branched at one point into a fairly stable pidgin, whereas the former had no such branch.

While during the first half of the nineteenth century the majority of immigrants to Hawaii consisted of Anglophone Caucasians, there were even then small numbers of non-Caucasian immigrants who increased steadily after the mid-century and underwent a demographic explosion in the century's last quarter, when the lowering of American tariff barriers against Hawaiian sugar led to an enormous expansion in Hawaiian sugar plantations and a consequent demand for labor that the shrinking Hawaiian population could not nearly satisfy. Prior to 1875, most of these immigrants were either Chinese or Pacific islanders. Most Chinese arrived as single males, many married into Hawaiian families and a number set up small retail stores in rural areas where they served a predominantly monolingual Hawaiian community. Under these circumstances, all learned some form of Hawaiian and undoubtedly some achieved a degree of mastery over vernacular Hawaiian. Of the Pacific islanders, many already spoke languages that were related to

Hawaiian; of these, perhaps a majority returned to their homelands after a spell of labor on the plantations, while some undoubtedly were absorbed without trace into the Hawaiian community.

This fairly stable situation (with Hawaiian the dominant language, pidgin Hawaiian the most common contact medium, and English a growing but still minor influence) was radically altered by the Reciprocity Act of 1876 which lowered American tariffs in exchange for a naval base at Pearl Harbor. The consequent influx of, first Chinese and Portuguese, subsequently Japanese, Koreans, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos (not to mention smaller groups of Spanish, Germans, Scandinavians and even Russians) had, by the end of the century, reduced the native Hawaiian population to a minority in its own land, while the increasing power, political as well as economic, of the *haole* minority had also, by that date, deprived the Hawaiians of their sovereignty. It is unsurprising, under those circumstances, that pidgin Hawaiian lost its dominance as a contact language. However, that loss was neither immediate nor sudden.

The response of the new immigrants to the linguistic circumstances of Hawaii was a mixed one. Some immigrants clung to their own languages, using their native vocabulary to eke out whatever words from other languages they picked up. Responding to this trend, the ever-flexible Hawaiians in many cases acquired small working vocabularies of Portuguese or Japanese words. Mayor Fern, a populist Honolulu politician around the turn of the century, used to pride himself on being able to address members of most ethnic groups in their own tongues. However, it seems likely that, at least during the first decade of massive immigration (roughly 1878-1888), large numbers of immigrants acquired pidgin (and a few, even vernacular) Hawaiian. Some exposure to Hawaiian was almost inevitable; plantations were located in rural areas, where there was still a clear majority of mostly monolingual Hawaiians, and at least the first cohorts of the new laborers had to be trained in their jobs by veteran Hawaiian plantation workers. On plantations where large numbers of Hawaiians remained in the workforce, it seems reasonable to conclude that pidgin Hawaiian remained dominant; elsewhere (and in striking contrast to the situation earlier in the century) English words, as well as words from some of the immigrant languages, began to occur in pidgin Hawaiian utterances.

What happened, in short, was not the replacement of pidgin Hawaiian by pidgin English, but the emergence, alongside a continuing (if diminishing in importance) pidgin Hawaiian, of a macaronic pidgin in which Hawaiian and English words formed more or less equal components. While its exact status will probably never be possible to determine with real accuracy, data presently available suggest that this macaronic pidgin may have been the most frequently used medium around about 1890. Meantime, especially in the towns, use of a fractured, imperfectly learned English, still too chaotic in form to be called a fully-fledged pidgin, was gradually spreading.

So much for the adults. What of the children of those adult immigrants? Evidence so far available indicates that until the 1890s (and later in some areas) children acquired Hawaiian, in some cases natively or near natively. Certainly in a school system where Hawaiian children were still a majority, they had sufficient access to vernacular Hawaiian to ensure that, while many might not achieve full native fluency (one text, in a Hawaiian newspaper and attributed to a Portuguese child, shows a variety almost exactly halfway between pidgin and standard Hawaiian), there could be no question of any kind of "creolized Hawaiian" developing.

However, this situation changed dramatically with the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and the subsequent annexation of Hawaii by the United States. The loss of Hawaiian self-esteem consequent upon these actions caused a sudden and rapid decline in the use of Hawaiian and its abandonment even by many Hawaiian children. It was at this point - somewhere in the mid 1890s - that many immigrant children also abandoned Hawaiian as their primary target and, together with the aforesaid group of Hawaiian children, switched their attention to the increasingly Anglicised but still highly unstable pidgin as the most viable medium of communication in the community as a whole.

The situation by the early 1900s was as follows. Among adult speakers, in addition to a rather narrow second-language-acquisition continuum that affected only a minority of residents, there was a broad spectrum of pidginised varieties extending from an almost purely English-lexicon variety at one extreme to an almost purely Hawaiian-lexicon variety at the other. This pidgin appears to have been somewhat more uniform in its word order than the extreme Japanese-influenced and Filipino-influenced varieties recorded in Bickerton and Odo (1976);

the latter varieties were spoken by immigrants who had arrived subsequent to 1905 and may not have developed prior to that date, but only at subsequent periods in which the Japanese and Filipino populations constituted a large, if not the largest, segment of the population.

It seems plausible to suggest that this degree of uniformity is due to the fact that the pidgin continuum derived from a fairly stable pidgin Hawaiian, in which SVO ordering had been firmly established for some decades. However, it must be emphasized that the pidgin continuum of the early twentieth century was at least as unstructured and as devoid of anything beyond clause-length utterances as the varieties reported on in Bickerton and Odo (1976) and subsequent work. Like those varieties, it lacked any kind of tense-aspect marking, any mechanisms for clause subordination, and indeed any of the features (apart from typical lexical items such as *bambai* 'later' and *pau* 'finished, after') that characterize the creole that had already begun to emerge.

For although contemporary sources show no changes in the pidgin continuum at least up until 1920s (except for an increase in English-lexicon content and a corresponding decline in the purely Hawaiian variety), sources from 1910 onwards record the emergence of a creole language structurally indistinguishable from the creole described in Bickerton (1977), with the same tense-aspect-modality system, the same *for*-subordination (including the *for* + tensed clause construction characteristic of creoles worldwide, see Bickerton 1984), the same distribution of determiners, the same use of pleonastic 'subject' pronouns, and a wide variety of related features equally characteristic of Hawaiian Creole English.

The striking thing about these features is that they emerge all together in a cluster. One finds no attestations whatsoever of any variety intermediate between the still highly-unstable and structurally inadequate pidgin and this fully developed, highly uniform creole which emerges quite abruptly and without any forerunners in contemporary sources during and after 1910. Significantly, wherever the age of the speaker quoted is mentioned (as it is in at least 50% of the cases), that speaker is invariably a child or an adolescent. Such facts are fully consonant with the supposition that creolisation began among children born in the early 1890s, who abandoned Hawaiian as a target after Annexation, as suggested above. Those children would have been in

their late teens in 1910; significantly, some of the smarter of them would have begun to be employed as cub reporters on local newspapers, and would therefore have faithfully represented what was, in fact, their own vernacular.

The suddenness with which a creole emerged, in Hawaii, from a virtually formless spectrum of pidgin varieties comes as an impressive confirmation of the language bioprogram hypothesis (Bickerton 1981, 1984) which predicts just such a sudden emergence, and an equally striking disconfirmation of the "gradualist" scenario of creole development proposed by Carden and Stewart (1988) and Arends (1989), among many others. Due to a misreading of Baker and Corne (1982), many creolists (e.g. McWhorter 1992) have assumed that a creole language could not occur until native-born speakers constituted an actual majority, or at least a very large percentage, of the relevant population. Clearly this is not the case. Those who pioneered Hawaiian Creole formed a minority of the population of Hawaii, at that time and for perhaps as long as two or three decades more.

Another myth demolished by the Hawaii evidence is that even if a creole begins to form, it can be influenced by the languages of subsequent immigrants if those immigrants arrive in sufficiently large numbers. Massive numbers of Japanese, and later equally large numbers of Filipinos, entered Hawaii after the emergence of the creole, indeed continued to arrive until the economic crisis of the early 1930s effectively stopped immigration into Hawaii until after World War II. Despite this continued influx, Japanese and the Filipino languages had absolutely no effect whatsoever on the creole. In contrast, the creole (especially after 1920, when its population of mature speakers had substantially increased) became a target for subsequent immigrants, so that from 1920 onwards, immigrants show increasing numbers of (usually imperfectly learned) creole features in their speech. And long before immigration resumed, the creole had spread to a majority of the population, and would be acquired, badly or well, by all subsequent immigrants who entered the community at a socioeconomic level that effectively denied them access to the more prestigious standard English.

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