



The “Pidgin Problem”: Attitudes about Hawai‘i Creole

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A few summers ago a relative of mine struck his six-year-old child because the child could not pronounce “three” and said “tree” instead. His mispronunciation angered the father, who wanted his son to speak “proper English.” Ironically, the father also spoke Hawai‘i Creole (HC). That same summer, when I was shopping at a convenience store, I overheard a mother scold her child for speaking Hawai‘i Creole. Again, the mother spoke Hawai‘i Creole; but this didn’t stop her from warning her daughter against speaking the language. These incidents motivated me to learn more about the attitudes that people in Hawai‘i have about the local language we hear so often in our everyday lives. Were they proud of this language? Were they ashamed of it? Was there a difference in attitude toward HC among residents of different ages? Did males and females have similar views? Did residents of Hawai‘i identify HC as part of their local culture? If not; why not? If so, how did they explain this connection?

Background

Hawai‘i Creole’s predecessor originated on Hawai‘i’s plantations where a lingua franca was formed in which a primarily English-lexified pidgin known as Hawai‘i Pidgin English (HPE) was developed to facilitate communication between plantation employees and employers (Sakoda & Siegal, 2003, p.6; Reinecke, 1969, p.105). Because plantation employees were recruited from various parts of the world, many came to Hawai‘i speaking little, if any English. As time passed, plantation employees adopted English as well as Portuguese and Hawaiian. Although they did not

become proficient speakers of English, they were able to form a pidgin composed mainly of English, Portuguese, and Hawaiian. Reinecke (1969) argues that this blend of pidgin may have been readily accepted because at the time there were no economic incentives for plantation workers to acquire a strong command of English (p. 101). Thus, HPE continued to be spoken on the plantation as the most efficient means of passing on and receiving duties. As its practice continued, recognizable patterns of the makeshift language were formed and HPE became the common medium of communication. This use of HPE within the plantation community was so common that it began to replace the child’s mother tongue for many families living on the plantations, a phenomenon that linguists mark as the time when HPE became Hawai‘i Creole (Sakoda & Siegal, 2003, p. 6). Thus, as these families increased in numbers, so did the numbers of Hawai‘i Creole speakers. Educators viewed this trend as a societal problem that was worsening as years passed. They failed to understand that Hawai‘i Creole was and is a distinct language with its own grammatical structure and pronunciation (Sakoda & Siegal, 2003).

Educators’ Views from the 1920s to the 1940s

Since the time HC was first viewed as the “pidgin problem,” Hawai‘i’s teachers and educational leaders have sought ways to stop the “broken-English” language that predominates in the community from being spoken. Just how successful have teachers and educational leaders been in solving the Hawai‘i Creole problem? Shortly after the 1920s when the HC problem was acknowledged, teachers and

educational leaders aggressively attempted to curb the use of HC in the classroom (Tamura, 1996). By the 1940s, many educators had published articles in the *Hawaii Educational Review* addressing HC as a problem in schools. Some wrote of the reasons why the HC problem persisted, and others wrote suggestions as to what should be done to solve the HC problem. Although these articles were written decades ago, the arguments can still be heard today. That is why I believe that the *Hawaii Educational Review* articles can give us a glimpse as to why the controversy over HC in Hawai'i has not been resolved.

Speech behavior became an important issue in Hawai'i during the early 20th century when the children from Hawai'i's plantations entering schools brought with them a language that sounded odd or broken when compared to the English familiar to Western educators. By the 1920s, many were concerned about this "language deficiency" and initially believed that solving this problem meant helping teachers become aware of the common grammatical and syntactical "errors" made by the children. An article published in the *Hawaii Educational Review* entitled "The New Course of Study" (1921) outlined a course of study implemented in 1920 for the early primary levels across Hawai'i to combat against the language—mistakenly identified as a pidgin, but by this time, a Creole—of Hawai'i's children. The article pointed to Hawai'i's plantation society as the main source of children's language deficiencies because it was a breeding ground for this so-called "broken" English. What the teachers heard in schools at this time, they called bastardized English tainted by Chinese, Hawaiian, and Portuguese influences. The anonymous author(s) argued that either because children were reared in isolated environments where English was used sparingly, or because of the mingling of children of different nationalities, Hawai'i's children were able neither to hear nor speak "proper English;" and that the first time many of these children heard Standard English was in school. Teachers, therefore, became the "guardians of the language," combating the so-called "broken English" of their students, and creating a hostile environment for HC (Sato, 1989; p. 264).

Educators felt that they needed to fix the speech problems that were rooted in the community. Some tried to create a community within the school—a Standard English-speaking community—to counter the HC speaking community of Hawai'i. An early example of the schools'

attempts to mandate the speaking of Standard English in all forms of school activities occurred in 1939. Two teachers at Kalākaua Intermediate School published an article outlining how the school achieved modest success towards speech improvement through an "all-school speech program." Acknowledging language as a social activity, the school attempted to rectify students' speech problems by introducing extracurricular activities that encouraged students to speak Standard English throughout the semester. The all-school speech program included activities like daily speech drills, song contests, and weekly speech slogans (Enos & Van Buskirk, 1940, p. 12). English classes were no longer the only time a student was to hear or practice Standard English.

Promoters of the all-school speech program must have recognized the inability of Hawai'i's community to provide the student with these opportunities to speak Standard English. Therefore, when the all-school speech program began, Enos and Van Buskirk explained, the first step in their program was to create a desire for "speech improvement" (p. 12). The authors, however, did not state exactly what was said to motivate the students to change their speech habits.

Despite allocating many of its resources to the all-school speech program, Kalākaua Intermediate School, according to the authors, reported no significant speech improvements. However, immediate speech improvement was not expected. Instead, the authors credit the all-school speech program for encouraging students to adopt the teacher's perspective, and that was to praise Standard English. The all-school speech program aimed to encourage a social value that aligned with the mainland rather than Hawai'i's plantation communities. Thus, the authors praised the program for uniting students and teachers and combating the problem of "bad English" in Hawai'i (p. 12). For example, the authors recognized a change of attitude in the students. Enos and Van Buskirk (1940) reported that the students no longer insulted children for speaking Standard English, but instead the "taunts [went] to users of the worst pidgin" (p. 12).

Educators believed that in a community where Standard English was rarely spoken, schools served as a first opportunity for most children to learn Standard English. However, they also believed that Hawai'i's schools could only provide so much to a child whose environment constantly bombarded them with "bastardized" English. Thus, Enos and Buskirk believed that because improving speech was an internal process, by teaching children to value Standard English

and to devalue Pidgin, or more correctly, Hawai‘i Creole, children would be able to reject the latter and become willing to change their speech behavior. Furthermore, this attitude would become a societal value as many would begin to see how Standard English affected one’s life chances, such as attending college and finding career opportunities on the mainland.

Thus, the “Pidgin problem” was viewed by educators as being rooted in society and that meant that solutions needed to target societal values if the schools were to correct students’ speech behavior. Educators redefined the Pidgin problem to be more than just a problem of mixed up grammar and syntax; educators redefined HC as a social element that needed to be replaced by Standard English, which was needed to fully participate in Western society.

In February 1946 an article titled “The Language Arts,” published in the *Hawaii Educational Review*, attempted to distinguish between English and language arts, following the popular practice of adopting the latter term for speech improvement programs. English, according to the article, was an archaic term, irrelevant to the current needs of improving speech habits. “Language arts,” on the other hand, was an effective term because it shared many positive connotations. Language arts allowed speech studies to occupy the same realm as the other arts, specifically fine arts, liberal arts, and practical arts. What this new term implied was that speech improvement pedagogy should extend beyond concern for just grammar and syntax improvement; speech improvement also meant improving society in terms of creating civilized citizens. The anonymous author(s) were calling for curriculum that they felt would help unite educators under one purpose: employing the language arts curriculum to improve speech and create better citizens. This meant that combating speech behavioral problems in Hawai‘i required programs that helped teachers and students identify and correct Hawai‘i Creole, established essential speech habits that allowed for one to achieve a level of mastery in Standard English, and further promoted literature on Standard English that connected language to life. What educators were pushing for in Hawai‘i was an idealism valued by Western educators; language arts provided these educators with a foundation to correct Hawai‘i’s speech behavioral problems.

By 1946, educators were encouraging teachers to connect Standard English to future endeavors. Standard English was becoming an important skill to have, as it

provided access to certain opportunities in Hawai‘i. For example, if a student wished to pursue higher education at the University of Hawai‘i, the student would have to pass a speech review demonstrating his/her command of English; failure to pass this speech exam would ultimately lead to failure to graduate. Educators in Hawai‘i believed that the command of Standard English was necessary for a person to be successful in life, as it was the root of all fields of study (Buzzard, 1946, p. 168).

Since the annexation of Hawai‘i in 1898 that made the islands a territory of the United States, many Westerners had foreseen the likelihood that Hawai‘i would become a state. It was only a question of when. Therefore, the movement to promote Standard English in the schools and in the community was viewed as a preparation for statehood. Educators like Elizabeth B. Carr, an instructor of speech at the University of Hawai‘i, compared poor speech habits to poor appearances. Those who spoke HC, she argued, should be treated like children who do not comb their hair or take a bath. Carr believed that HC was filled with errors of speech, and that it was the obligation of those who knew better to help clean up the mess (Carr, 1946, p. 167). Thus it was the aim of many educators to Americanize Hawai‘i—to prepare the children of Hawai‘i, just as parents prepared their children before sending them out of the house. Educators had transformed the HC problem from a grammatical and syntactical problem to a social problem as a means of combating HC at its roots.

An article titled “The Farrington High School Speech Program” reveals an instance where an educator connected the “Pidgin problem” to cultural differences. Myrtle King Kaapu (1946), the head of Farrington High School’s speech department, argued that in order for educators to correct a student’s speech problem, they needed to know how to identify which children needed assistance. Kaapu had experience in teaching English to non-English speakers in many countries, and offered her experience at Farrington High School. Kaapu attributed the success of Farrington High School’s speech program to a system that “objectively” evaluated each child’s command of the English language. She believed that the Farrington model could serve as a standard for other schools.

Below are two indicators that Kaapu provided to help a teacher detect “poor” speech habits (p. 181):

He can be heard with difficulty. His enunciation is so

poor that one can't tell whether his English is correct or not, or whether he pronounces correctly or not. He talks to the air, or the floor—just “recites.”

He uses either the Hawaiian Islands melody (raising and lowering the pitch in a different pattern from the mainland ones) or speaks in a monotone.

The objectivity of these indicators is questionable. For example, Kaapu wrote of students who “talk to the air, or the floor.” What Kaapu identified was not so much an indicator of a student with poor speech behavior, but an indicator of a student who carried values and beliefs that were different from Kaapu's. The second indicator clearly showed that the Farrington High School model relied on identifying cultural differences as a means of identifying poor speech habits. Why did Kaapu consider the “Hawaiian Islands melody” to be poor? Interestingly, the author later admitted that there could be variations of Standard English. The author argued that “since regional pronunciations vary on the mainland, it was not worthwhile to insist upon the sounding of final r in the western or general American way” (p. 182).

Kaapu did not consider Hawai'i Creole and Standard English to be two separate languages. Instead, she saw HC as a variation of Standard English and wished to eliminate this so-called variation. It is ironic that an educator with cross-cultural experience promoted non-cross cultural values. In the final analysis, the system that Kaapu and Farrington High School used relied largely on cultural differences as a means of distinguishing poor and good speech habits.

Although educators in the 1940s believed that schools served as one of the few places for children to correct speech habits, they were at a loss as to how to combat the HC problem effectively. Articles published in the *Hawaii Educational Review* revealed that educators in Hawai'i were confused. Their solutions blurred between language and social-cultural contexts.

While teachers noticed that students were speaking Hawai'i Creole, they could not understand what it was about the students' language that made it different from Standard English. Some educators felt that they were unqualified to be in a position to correct students when they barely knew what to address. Some educators who recognized this problem voiced their frustration with the Territory of Hawai'i Department of Public Instruction, and demanded that it offer a curriculum that could help teachers in the classroom. In 1941, Myrtle H. Thompson, who once sat on

the speech committee organized by the Department of Public Instruction, argued that for speech improvement in Hawai'i to occur the curriculum needed to employ strategies that helped inform teachers. She argued that the books assigned to classes were “too general, and too highly technical” (p. 298). Thompson believed that teachers were capable of teaching students “proper” speech behavior, but that they needed training on how to use the textbooks as well as how to apply speech correction strategies in the classroom. Other educators also voiced similar opinions on the matter. Carr (1946), however, believed that the speech problem would persist as long as educators failed to see it as a set of problems (167). What is clear is that educators in the 1940s discovered that the Pidgin problem was a complex problem and that a single solution was insufficient.

The “Pidgin problem” in Hawai'i continued to confound educators. Although they held different reasons for believing that education could not solve it, they could only agree on one thing: the “Pidgin problem” was deeply connected to the nature of Hawai'i's society. What teachers were facing was, therefore, more than just a “misspelling” of words or “mispronunciation” in the classroom. They were facing a cultural difference that they did not understand, nor one they wanted to understand.

The frustrations expressed by those educators might help to reveal why people believe that the “Pidgin problem” is still with us today. Speakers and non-speakers of HC express similarly negative attitudes towards HC and help to perpetuate misconceptions of the language as if it were slang. Underlying this misconception is the recognition that HC is connected to Hawai'i's local community. In the remainder of this essay I focus, not on the linguistic or grammatical differences between HC and Standard English, but on the connections people have made with HC and their own identity.

Interviews on the subject of Hawai'i Creole

Many studies on Hawai'i Creole have helped to distinguish it as a language (e.g., Sato, 1989; Sakoda & Siegel, 2003). However, despite these scholarly publications, Hawai'i Creole still faces criticism by both speakers and non-speakers of the language. In order to understand why the HC issue continues today I decided to interview residents of Hawai'i. I sought to understand the different values people hold towards this language.

The interviews conducted for this research involved eight adults. The aim of the research was to get an idea of people's lives and their thoughts and attitudes towards Hawai'i Creole. I was able to find people who had attended both private and public schools, who attended college and/or lived on the mainland, and who hold or held jobs in Hawai'i. I conducted the interviews on Oahu in spring 2007. Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees.

Ages Twenty to Thirty-Five

- ❖ Charlotte Aoki is twenty-one. She was born and raised in Kapolei, Hawai'i. She attended both public and private schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade, and she is currently attending the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa where she is studying communications.
- ❖ Betty Fujitani is twenty-two. She was born and raised in Waipahu, Hawai'i. She is attending the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa where she is studying English.
- ❖ Ethel Kirimatsu is twenty-four. She was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i. She attended private schools from seventh grade to twelfth grade, and she is currently attending the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa studying chemistry. Earlier, she attended the University of Washington.
- ❖ Clayton Moritomo is twenty-five. He was born and raised in 'Ewa Beach, Hawai'i. He resides in Kailua and is employed as a nurse. He attended public schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade and Vermont Technical College for his undergraduate studies where he received a bachelor's degree in nursing. His father speaks HC, while his mother, who was born in Japan, speaks some HC and English.

Ages Thirty-six to Sixty

- ❖ Sheryl Takitani is fifty-one. She was born and raised in Wahiawā, Hawai'i. She lives in Waipahu, and works as a paralegal. She is a graduate of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa where she majored in human resources. She attended public schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade.
- ❖ Paul Yoneda is fifty-nine. He was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i. He attended public schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade. He earned an Associates degree from Honolulu Community College. He is cur-

rently employed by the navy and works at Pearl Harbor Shipyard.

Ages Sixty-one to Eighty

- ❖ Amy Kohatsu is seventy-two. She was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai'i. She lives in Hawai'i Kai and is a retired paralegal. She attended public schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade and later studied at the Hawai'i Business College.
- ❖ Russell Sasaki is seventy-eight. He was born and raised in Makawao, Hawai'i. He lives in Hawai'i Kai on Oahu and is a retired lawyer. He attended private school from the seventh grade to the twelfth grade, and he attended the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa where he studied political science. He also obtained a law degree from Creighton University.

Interviewees, regardless of gender or age, shared beliefs with the educators who wrote in the *Hawaii Education Review*: they considered HC a "broken English," not a language separate from Standard English with its own grammatical and pronunciation rules. Limited exposure to the scholarly literature about HC was evident throughout the interviews. Seven of eight interviewees were unaware that studies on HC are available. Instead, most of the interviewees based their understanding of HC on their own biases and personal experiences.

Although scholars argue that HC is a language, because their research rarely reaches the public, most people have created their own opinions of HC. The language is spoken by over 600,000 people; however, many of these speakers have never taken any formal classes on HC. Currently, the only classes the researcher is aware of that cover HC can be found in higher education institutions like the University of Hawai'i and Hawai'i Pacific University. Furthermore, materials on HC are scarce, with only one dictionary on HC available (Tonouchi, 2005).

The interviewees also revealed that they were not familiar with the term "Hawai'i Creole," except one interviewee, Betty Fujitani who had been aware of the term since her freshman year in college. Those who were not familiar with HC preferred that the more common name, Pidgin, be used throughout the interview. For example, Clayton Moritomo asked if "we were still talking about Pidgin?" after referring to the language as HC. Midway through the interview,

Moritomo switched back to “Pidgin,” feeling that it was “more comfortable because [he] grew up using the word.” Mistaking a language for a pidgin leads to complications such as disregarding the language’s credibility by mistaking it for slang. One could also say that the term “creole” can also create misunderstanding. Russell Sasaki, upon hearing the introduction of my study, immediately corrected my usage of HC as a language and explained that if HC was in fact a language, then the term “creole” was used improperly. Also, when interviewees were asked to state their first spoken language, all interviewees replied “English” or “Standard English”; none of the interviewees mentioned HC as a first language.

Most interviewees, nevertheless, admitted to speaking HC before learning the term “Pidgin” and before being aware that they were speaking a language unique from Standard English. Other speakers of HC denied that they spoke it. What this suggests is that HC speakers are either unsure or unaware of the linguistic differences between HC and English. Therefore they may be hesitant to acknowledge HC as their first language.

Although the interviewees had a limited background knowledge of HC, they shared common understanding of the language’s history. Betty Fujitani was raised primarily by her grandmother, who was born on a plantation and spoke HC. Fujitani, therefore, felt that HC was a product of the plantation culture. All interviewees believed that HC was rooted in plantation life and was “part of Hawai’i’s culture.” As Sheryl Takitani stated, “Locals speak Pidgin, that’s all there is to it.”

Interviewees, like educators in the 1920s to 1940s, associated HC with Hawai’i’s culture, suggesting that they believed that linguistic differences were responsible for only part of the “Pidgin problem.” Both interviewees and educators compared HC and Standard English. Similarly, interviewees’ attitude towards HC was influenced by their exposure to “mainland culture” and how much they valued that “mainland culture.” For example, Ethel Kirimatsu concluded that HC was “broken English.” Her observations of HC speakers attending the University of Washington in Seattle reinforced her prior belief that HC was an incorrect way of speaking. She observed that HC speakers had difficulty adjusting at the university. She attributed this difficulty to poor English comprehension and speaking skills. Her mother was a reading teacher and Kirimatsu had also attended private school since the 7th grade. She also believed that private schools were

superior to public schools in terms of academics and later success because private schools reflected the values taught on the mainland. Kirimatsu’s opinion of public schools reflects the belief that limited exposure to Standard English is due to Hawai’i’s relative isolation and that this contributes to the speech problem in the islands. Like Kirimatsu, Betty Fujitani’s experiences influenced her perspective on HC. She remembered that her high school classmates spoke HC to “fit in,” as the language was deemed “cool.” She believed that this was the case because the “cool kids” were speaking HC. She had attempted to speak HC; however, after enrolling in honors courses, Fujitani stopped using it because she felt that HC would not help her in class. Rather, she felt that HC would hinder her success in her honors classes. Part of her reasoning came from her other honors classmates not speaking HC. Also, her first honors teacher said “you write how you speak, so if you don’t speak well, you don’t write well.” Today, Fujitani continues to exclude HC from her speech behavior. She says that she does not view HC as an inferior language, but that she feels awkward when she tries to speak it. She believes that “local is a state of mind.” In other words, one does not need to speak HC in order to be a “local.”

Comparisons between the two languages have only helped to perpetuate the prejudice against HC. In “Power, Status, and Hawai’i Creole English,” Tamura (1996) notes that the term “Standard Hawai’i English” was used by Charlene Sato, a linguistics professor at the University of Hawai’i, when she testified at a trial involving James Kahakua and George Kitazaki and their use of HC. Sato said that the two men spoke Standard Hawai’i English. Kahakua and Kitazaki had accused the National Weather Service of discrimination, but the court ruled against them, reasoning that because they “mispronounced words,” they were not discriminated against (p. 451). Sato claimed that “Standard Hawai’i English” was a version of Standard English spoken by most educated professionals born and raised in Hawai’i (p. 453). The trial judge apparently did not recognize Standard Hawai’i English as legitimate. Sato (1989) concluded that “there appears to be a consensus, then, that SE is not tied to a particular accent” (p. 263). The trial is a reminder of Kaapu’s (1946) article in which cultural and social issues are mistakenly identified as language behavior problems.

Unfortunately, comparisons between HC and Standard English continue to perpetuate negative opinions and biases against HC speakers. In 1999, the chairman of the Board of

Education, Mitsugi Nakashima, blamed HC usage for poor scores on national standardized writing test scores among public school students. This sparked a debate in Hawai‘i where many of its citizens took sides and defended the use or the abolishment of HC. Governor Benjamin Cayetano once spoke of HC as if it should be exterminated, saying that it should only be studied as if it were an artifact—a vestige of something long extinct. Ironically, in making his argument the governor employed HC.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, linguists, students, and teachers continue to argue for the use of HC because of its potential in helping students in the classroom (Kua, 1999). Some educators have reasoned that low scores on tests are a direct result of the low esteem in which Pidgin is held and the consequent demeaning of the students’ culture.

The belief that language serves as an important factor in one’s economic success influenced educators in the 1940s to create culture-altering programs. These educators felt that it was necessary to make HC speakers aware of the connection between social success and speech habit. Similarly, HC speakers today believe that economic success is tied to language capabilities.

Clayton Moritomo reported his experiences when colleagues and superiors on the mainland had difficulty in comprehending him. He concluded that speaking SE instead of HC would help him to appear more professional. However, Moritomo always speaks HC when he is at home. Paul Yoneda also expressed a similar conviction, becoming more aware of his speech when in the presence of non-HC speakers. Working for the navy at Pearl Harbor shipyard, Yoneda was aware that he had to “speak pretty good” to non-HC speakers in order to carry out jobs. At the same time, Yoneda stated that he did not like speaking SE because “this is Hawaii and you should speak HC. If I was living on the mainland, I would speak good English.” Yoneda felt insulted at times when people asked him to switch from HC to SE. Other interviewees showed insecurities about their ability to speak SE. Charlotte Aoki’s experience in college had amplified her insecurities because of her inability to “code-switch” to Standard English. She “gave up trying” after feeling that her HC behavior was inevitable. As a communications major, Aoki attributes her interest in non-verbal communication studies to this experience. These experiences reveal that HC speakers deliberate on the value of HC usage in their everyday lives, especially

when confronted with situations that challenge their communication skills.

In their youth, however, interviewees recalled the value they placed on speaking HC. Charlotte Aoki stated that she was first aware of HC while in seventh grade when a teacher corrected a classmate for speaking HC. She and her classmates had found the situation to be humorous, and they used HC among themselves when “joking around” or “acting stupid.” Russell Sasaki recalled arguing with his fifth-grade teacher about his preference in speaking HC. He believed that speaking HC was part of his identity.

In adulthood, these views often took a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn. Without regret, several interviewees stated that HC was a dying language that is “hardly spoken today.” Other interviewees expressed disdain for HC despite speaking in the language. Sheryl Takitani said that she felt like “slapping” those who spoke HC. Ethel Kirimatsu stated that a person’s potential for success was reflected by his or her speech habits, noting that those who spoke HC were “retarded sounding.” Like educators in the 1940s, the people I interviewed connected language with economic success. This opinion influenced the low esteem that people held for HC because of its apparently “weak” market value. Reinecke (1969) had argued that HC’s predecessor was popular among plantation workers because it was the market-language of that era. But now, people are able to find more career and educational opportunities outside of the plantation. Most of these opportunities require a different set of skills, such as the ability to speak SE, which reflects the demands of an economic environment different from the plantations era.

Conclusions

The people I interviewed considered themselves to be middle class, and that had a strong influence on their attitudes toward Hawai‘i Creole. The persistence of this language issue reveals an interesting conflict that lies beneath the surface of Hawai‘i’s local culture. It reveals that people in Hawai‘i are still divided on issues of material success and local identity.

The interviews reveal that many HC speakers are affected unconsciously by numerous factors that challenge their identities. Ironically, HC serves as a means of identifying local culture that translates variously into a source of pride and shame. HC is more than a language; it is an expression of cultural identity that can be used to establish a sense of

belonging to Hawai'i and, at the same time, can bring a sense of distance or separation from mainland values. Age and gender had no significant influence on the perspectives of the interviewees on Hawaii Creole and Standard English, all of them betrayed feelings of uncertainty in expressing their thoughts about language and identity.

The "Pidgin problem" reveals a shift in cultural power that is occurring in Hawai'i. Language is cultural capital. Educators in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, and my interviewees, viewed Standard English as a key to success. The cultural power of Standard English has influenced many to become guardians of language. Terms like "slang" and "broken English" are examples of the words that people use to devalue Hawai'i Creole and protect Standard English's market value. But such devaluation has a price. It is imposed at the expense of the identities of those who speak HC and value its inheritance.

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