

**'Da State of Pidgin'
hana hou:
Still Waiting for
'da Big Pidgin Revolution?'**

Brainstorming

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In 2002, Lee A. Tonouchi first discussed the problem of language-based discrimination, or linguicism, on the Hawai'ian Islands in "Da State of Pidgin Address" from *Living Pidgin: Contemplations on Pidgin Culture*. The essay, later reprinted in 2004 by *College English* and now fourteen years old, displays the author's outline of the language attitude situation in Hawai'ian classrooms and charts the local language debate surrounding Hawai'ian Creole English.¹ Written in Pidgin, the piece also served, as Tonouchi's work often does, to resist language norms in the process of knowledge production by avoiding the usage of Standard English and, in a very hands-on approach, to display the adequacy of Pidgin in a scholarly setting. Tonouchi ends with a bittersweet prognosis of the direction Pidgin acceptance was taking at the time: somewhere better, not fast enough with "[I]ittle anecdotal bright spots hea and dea" (Tonouchi 2004: 82).

¹ The term *Pidgin* (capitalized) in both Lee Tonouchi's titles and my own usage here refer to Hawai'ian Creole English (aka Hawai'i Creole), an English-lexified contact language that developed on the Hawai'ian Islands during the late nineteenth century. For more information on the language and the distinction between this and other languages that developed on the islands, see Roberts (2013) and Velupillai (2013).

Although I would like to say that the pace has picked up, that seems an overly optimistic statement. Still, fourteen years have seen impressive strides in the prevalence, acceptance and usage of Pidgin in classrooms, mainstream media and academic discourse – and not only on Hawai'i. A student of mine at Bielefeld University in Germany, an aspiring educator whom I will henceforth call Merribeth, recently sent me an essay on the language situation in Hawai'ian schools. Merribeth attended my seminar on Pidgin literature and media, "Talk Haole or Talk Local", and, as a result of our discussions about language-based discrimination in schools and the workplace, pursued her interest in how best the needs of her future students can be served in a multilingual environment using Pidgin and educational research conducted on Hawai'i as her basis of comparison.

Admittedly, this is not the type of attention to write home about and remains anecdotal. Nevertheless, my course and her work were both made possible by the legwork done by a generation of scholars before us along with easily accessible and fairly common, contemporary channels of knowledge transfer. Pidgin course materials are largely available online making it quite easy for lecturers to find, create or integrate

meaningful examples of cultural production by Pidgin speakers. Bradajo's spoken word poetry can be downloaded (for a modest fee) from Amazon; YouTube has songs by Sudden Rush and the Beamer Brothers or short videos by Lois Ann Yamanaka as well as grassroots documentaries. These serve as great audio samples of Pidgin for students that also relate issues relevant to Pidgin speakers – and this list just scratches the surface of the available corpus on the Internet alone.

The academic corpus has also grown considerably – to the point that the socio-linguistic discourse on Pidgin has taken on a new dimension of distinction. Until and including "Da State", most of the socio-linguistic writing seems to have revolved around the adequacy of Pidgin as a language, the various domains in which its usage has or has not been socially tolerated and the binary language attitudes that were observable mauka and makai² of the language's native speakers. More recently, an element of differentiation between various Pidgin-speaking communities has been added to the

² Here meaning figuratively 'in and around the communities' of Pidgin speakers. These are two Native Hawai'ian language (Ōelo Hawai' i) prepositions of movement that are used in Pidgin: *mauka* literally meaning *toward the mountains* and *makai* meaning *toward the ocean*.

discussion in order to explore a finer distinction in determining authorial purpose and identity formation practices (Hiramoto 2011; Nordstrom 2015, for example). While this development arguably detracts from the positive, unifying spirit of the local language mystique that many have attributed to Pidgin (cf. Booth & Young 2009), it simultaneously reveals the subtle complexities inherent in what earlier detractors termed a "simplified" language.

So, at the risk of being moderately optimistic, there have been some developments worth writing home about beyond the anecdotal bright spots, it would seem. Does this make da current state better than that of 2002? I will defer to Tonouchi, here. Although "da big Pidgin revolution" has not arrived, perhaps a slower and more sustainable revolution is a workable solution (Tonouchi 2004: 82).

References

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