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Pidgin and Education: A Position Paper

Da Pidgin Coup

What follows is an adaptation of a position paper written by Da Pidgin Coup, a group of concerned faculty and students in the Department of Second Language Studies (SLS).¹ In fall 1999, the group became concerned about a statement made by the chairman of the Board of Education implicating Pidgin in the poor results of the students of Hawai‘i on national standardized writing tests. The group’s discussions led to the writing of this position paper. Their aim was to provide well-researched advice about the complex relationship between Pidgin and English, and the issues involved in discussing the role of Pidgin in education.

Pidgin is the name speakers use for the language variety which is technically called Hawai‘i Creole or Hawai‘i Creole English by linguists. Throughout this document we use the popular name Pidgin to refer to this variety. Pidgin examples in this paper are generally written in the writing system designed for linguists to represent the sounds of Pidgin. The use of this writing system (known as the “Odo orthography”) enables the language to be accurately represented, and is likely to reduce the reader’s feeling that Pidgin is bad English. However, members of Da Pidgin Coup are aware that this orthography is not widely used by Pidgin speakers. For this reason, where this essay quotes Pidgin speakers interviewed by Laiana Wong, it uses the modified English writing system, such as is widely used by well-known Pidgin writers, including Darrell Lum, Eric Chock and Lois-Ann Yamanaka.

Standard English is used in this document, in a way similar to the definition provided by Webster’s Dictionary, to refer to English that has these characteristics:

- ❖ it is substantially uniform in spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary; although
- ❖ there are regional differences, especially in pronunciation;
- ❖ it is widely used in formal and informal speech and writing, generally of educated people; and
- ❖ it is widely recognized as acceptable wherever English is spoken and understood.

The Issue

In fall 1999, the Hawai‘i State Board of Education Chairman, Mitsugi Nakashima, implicated Pidgin in the poor performance by Hawai‘i students on standardized writing tests. “I see writing as an encoding process and coding what one thinks, and if your thinking is not in Standard English, it’s hard for you to write in Standard English,” he said. This statement was the catalyst for the group of language and writing experts listed above to prepare this position paper on the recurring issue of Pidgin and education. The group strongly questions Nakashima’s assumptions and conclusions, and a number of related statements being made about Pidgin. There is no dispute as to the importance of students learning standard written English, but there is no evidence that Pidgin speakers are less capable of learning to write, or that Pidgin cannot be used to facilitate learning. The notions that spoken or written Pidgin is inferior “Broken English” and that children who use it are deficient, are not only unjustified and biased, but also wrong.

Pidgin is a language, just as English is a language. Language is the carrier of culture, and Pidgin is the carrier of “local” culture. It is part of what makes Hawai‘i different from the rest of the United States. Denigration of Pidgin is denigration of its speakers, a majority of the population of Hawai‘i. Pidgin is inclusive, a reflection of our historical attitudes and the value placed on getting along and trying to find common ground. It is non-hierarchical, and puts people on an even footing.

Given the unique value that Pidgin holds for its speakers and for the community as a whole, we should go beyond seeking mere tolerance in regard to its use and protection from discrimination for its speakers. We should in fact seek to provide a fostering environment that nurtures and appreciates the communicative skills that Hawaii’s children bring with them to school. By recognizing and celebrating excellence in the use of Pidgin, we encourage the child to develop those skills further. There is much room for Pidgin and English to coexist peacefully and form a symbiotic relationship in which the two are mutually enriching. Should we begin to move in this direction, school would certainly become a more positive experience for all concerned.

Over the past twenty years, written Pidgin has become a means, both popular and accepted, of composing poems, stories, and essays. In Hawai‘i and on the mainland, literature in Pidgin is increasingly seen on approved reading lists inside schools. Educators now see Pidgin in the context of multi-cultural education, or education which recognizes children’s cultural identities.

Identity, for many, is intimately linked to language. The Pidgin speakers quoted below talk about the importance of their language to their identity:

I Hawaiian eh, but I no can speak Hawaiian. I speak Pidgin. That’s my language. That’s how I perform, brah!

It’s like a way of life. It’s like eating poi or going swimming. You hear it everyday. You can’t get rid of it. . . . It’s like the air you breathe. It’s around you constantly.

What is Pidgin?

Myth: Pidgin is a pidgin.

Reality: What is popularly called Pidgin (with a capital P) was historically a pidgin (technically called Hawai‘i Pidgin

English). But the vast majority of Pidgin speakers today are actually speakers of a creole (technically known as Hawai‘i Creole or Hawai‘i Creole English, HC or HCE).

Explanation: A pidgin is a new language which develops in situations where speakers of different languages need to communicate but don’t share a common language. The vocabulary of a pidgin comes mainly from one particular language (called the “lexifier”). A pidgin is quite restricted in use and variable in structure.

Once a pidgin has emerged, it is generally learned as a second language and used for communication among people who speak different languages. Examples are Nigerian Pidgin (Nigeria has a variety of tribal languages) and Bislama (spoken in Vanuatu, a Pacific island nation having over 100 languages).

When children start learning a pidgin as their first language and it becomes the mother tongue of a community, it is called a creole. Like a pidgin, a creole is a distinct language that has taken most of its vocabulary from another language, the lexifier, but has its own unique grammatical rules. Unlike a pidgin, however, a creole is not restricted in use, and is like any other language in its full range of functions. Examples are Gullah, Jamaican Creole, and Hawai‘i Creole.

Note that the words “pidgin” and “creole” are technical terms used by linguists, and not necessarily by speakers of the language. For example, speakers of Jamaican Creole call their language “Patwa” (from “patois”) and speakers of Hawai‘i Creole call theirs “Pidgin.”

Background: Hawai‘i was first visited by Europeans in 1778, and it quickly became an important stopover for ships involved in whaling and trading with Asia. At this time, some of the expressions from the Pidgin English of China and the Pacific were introduced to Hawai‘i.

The first sugarcane plantation was established in 1835, and the industry expanded rapidly in the last quarter of the century. Thousands of laborers were brought from China, Portugal, Japan, Korea, Puerto Rico, Russia, Spain, the Philippines, and other countries. With so many nationalities, a common language was needed on the plantations. At first, this was Hawaiian and Pidgin Hawaiian, but later in the century a new variety of pidgin began to develop.

In the 1870s immigrant families began to arrive and more children were born on the plantations. Children learned their parents’ languages and picked up English at school.

But the kind of English they spoke on the playground was influenced by the Pidgin English earlier brought to Hawai‘i, by the Hawaiian spoken by their parents, and by their own first languages, especially Portuguese. By the turn of the century a new Hawai‘i Pidgin English began to emerge with features from all of these sources. This pidgin became the primary language of many of those who grew up in Hawai‘i, and children began to acquire it as their first language. This was the beginning of Hawai‘i Creole. By the 1920s it was the language of the majority of Hawai‘i’s population.

History of Attitudes toward Pidgin

Myth: The terms—bad English, improper English, broken English—originated with our parents, or our teachers in elementary school.

Reality: These negative terms for Pidgin have a history in powerful island institutions, going back much further than our own parents or teachers. The terms have shaped island attitudes toward the language and its speakers.

Not everything passed down to us by history is a gift. The notion of Improper English should be sent back to its place in history and made to stay there.

Explanation: These names for Pidgin in Hawai‘i go back three or four generations. In the 1920s, these explicit phrases attained sanction and approval when they were printed in curriculum materials written for territory teachers in public schools, and then published at the directive of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the journal, *Hawai‘i Educational Review*. “Hawaii is the land of broken English,” claims one of the anonymous authors of these materials in 1921. “Tell [children] that the Pidgin English which they speak is not good English; that it is not spoken by good Americans. . . .” Show the children, the author continues, that “Pidgin English implies a sense of inferiority” (The New Course of Study, 1921, pp. 9–10).

Not all educational authorities or experts were so absolutist in their views. Anthropologists and sociologists generally viewed Pidgin as a matter of culture. But in the 1930s and 40s, University of Hawai‘i professors of speech and English, who were charged with teaching Standard English, generally adopted the negative terms. With ears trained to hear Standard English, they heard Pidgin not as a different language variety but as English that came up short. They used the term lazy language and

the adjectives ungrammatical, faulty, sloppy, and slothful. One elementary teacher writing for the *Hawaii Educational Review* claimed that children should be taught contrasting images to associate with Pidgin and good speech. “Words spoken correctly and pleasingly pronounced,” she wrote, “are jewels, but grammatical errors and Pidgin are ugly.” She urged teachers to tell children that Pidgin was like the “frogs, toads, and snakes” in the fairy tales they were reading. Good speech was like the roses, pearls, and diamonds that dropped from the lips of the good sister who helped people and was beautiful (The New Course of Study, 1921, pp. 9–10).

As speech sounds came into fashion as a topic of scientific study in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s in American universities, there was a trend in Hawai‘i toward identifying Pidgin as incorrect sounds and as evidence of speech defects. In 1939–40, newly trained speech specialists tested for speech defects in twenty-one schools. They found them in six-hundred and seventy-five of the eight hundred children they tested. The new terminology focused on Pidgin dialectalisms, a defect listed alongside “language handicaps, reading handicaps, mental deficiency, and cleft palate speech” (Wood, 1941, p. 148). Elizabeth Carr (1946, p. 167), one of the mainland speech experts who described Pidgin sympathetically with an understanding of its usefulness in island culture, nevertheless saw it as faulty English, full of “phonetic errors.” In sum, the new, more scientific terms for Pidgin, less loaded with character assassination, still portrayed the language as trying to be English and failing.

Some of the same negative phrases have historically had a prominent place in Honolulu newspapers as well. Though framing their coverage as “news reports,” the *Honolulu Advertiser* and the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* have typically cast Pidgin in the role of problem: How bad is it? What to do about it? (Coffman, 1966). Their coverage of Pidgin as a facet of island culture has generally been relegated to the Features or Letters to the Editor section. Editorials have been largely negative. In 1962, a *Star-Bulletin* editorial entitled “Why Not Just Grunt?” compared Pidgin to the language of animals.

Throughout Hawai‘i’s English-speaking history, the negative terms have exacerbated the confusion surrounding Pidgin and literacy (skills in reading and writing). For example, many people believe that Pidgin is related to

poor spelling. That belief has been nurtured through the decades by educational authorities who have had their views spotlighted in highly visible publications.

As for test scores in reading and writing, the negative terms have left islanders with an ingrained attitude. If they call Pidgin bad English, isn't it logical to link Pidgin with bad English scores? The reality is that students are tested for literacy skills, not speech skills, and that the terms bad English and improper English are misleading terms. Yet many island residents continue to use these terms as synonyms for Pidgin. The words linger, passed down from history with all their attendant attitudes.

Pidgin speakers are aware that negative, insulting, and racist attitudes to Pidgin are still common today. In the words of one speaker, "Non-English speakers are [seen as] backwards, barbarian, unintelligible and they [speakers of haole English] are advanced, and to solve the problem, WE gotta catch up to THEM. . . . Any attempt to turn around and face us is seen as regression on their part."

Is Standard English the Best Language?

Myth: Standard English is the best language.

Reality: While many people are convinced that Standard English is better than Pidgin, it's quite clear to scholars of language that no language variety is inherently better than any other. That is, there is nothing that makes Standard English linguistically better than Pidgin (or than any other language, whether it's French, or Latin, or Australian English or African American English). All of these languages and dialects—which we can refer to as language varieties—are fully grammatical systems that their speakers can use for effective communication on any topic and in any situation.

But while Standard English has no linguistic advantage over any other variety, it does have a prestige advantage in many countries, and specifically here in Hawai'i. This is a result of centuries of social and political processes, as well as on-going prejudices and misconceptions.

Myth: There is only one Standard English.

Reality: In fact there is no single Standard English. There is a great deal of variation in spoken English, even the most formal spoken English. Just listen to Former President Bill Clinton and Former Governor Ben Cayetano delivering a speech, and you can hear differences in formal spoken

American English. Then add formal spoken English from Sydney, London, and Edinburgh, and you hear differences, not just in pronunciation, but also in grammar. Thus when people talk about spoken Standard English, it is important to remember that there are many regional standards.

There is so much variation in spoken English, that many scholars now agree that the term Standard English can really only refer to the written standardized variety of language, such as that widely used in newspapers and textbooks. It is a widespread misconception that we should speak the way we write, but in fact no one does. Spoken and written language varieties are different: they have different purposes, different patterns, different conventions, and different constructions.

Explanation: Linguistic research on African American English (aka Black English Vernacular, Black English, African American Vernacular English or Ebonics) has established since the late 1960s that related language varieties are not linguistically inferior in any way (see for example Labov, 1972). While many people hold fast to the idea of the linguistic superiority of Standard English, there is no good reason for this. Many studies have shown that beliefs in the superiority of Standard English are just that: beliefs. But they are uninformed beliefs born out of a single perspective, which does not take account of other perspectives. These beliefs are supported by matters of prestige, status, and power, but they find no support in the analysis of language varieties, and the comparison of their communicative effectiveness.

For example, one of the arguments for the superiority of Standard English is that it is more explicit than other varieties. Thus, it can be argued that English is more effective than Pidgin because it distinguishes gender in the third person singular object pronoun (using either "him" or "her"), where Pidgin uses just one form (om).

But this is a dangerous comparison game to play. For example, we can see that Pidgin is more explicit in its second person pronoun system. In English the ambiguous form "you" can refer to one person or more than one person. Pidgin does not have this ambiguity, as *yu* refers to one person and *yu foks* or *yu gaiz* refers to more than one person.

The reality is that all languages have some areas which are more explicit than others. Speakers work with language in context to disambiguate.

Complaints about variation in English are not new.

Milroy and Milroy (1985) document a long tradition—about 300 years—of complaints about people who do not speak “proper” English. The work of these scholars and others led Lippi-Green (1997) to an analysis of what she calls “standard language ideology,” that is, a bias toward an abstract idealized spoken language, which is modeled on written language and the spoken language of the upper middle class. The dominant institutions in society, particularly education, play a major role in imposing and maintaining this bias. Lippi-Green documents the ways in which this bias toward the abstract and idealized spoken language, often called “good English” or “Standard English,” discriminates against speakers of other language varieties. These other varieties are trivialized or denigrated in many ways, through what she calls “the language subordination process.”

Lippi-Green’s model of the language subordination process is relevant to the current debate about Pidgin. Lippi-Green (1997, p. 68) details a number of steps in the language subordination process, including those below, to which we have added examples of how this process is being applied to Pidgin in Hawai‘i.

- ❖ Authority is claimed. People claim that Standard English is better. They make pronouncements about Pidgin speakers’ intelligence and future prospects.
- ❖ Misinformation is generated. It is claimed that Pidgin is not a language, it’s just lazy talk, bad English or slang.
- ❖ Non-mainstream language is trivialized. Pidgin is said to be OK for joking around and having fun, but it’s not OK for school.
- ❖ Conformers are held up as positive examples. People who were forbidden to speak Pidgin at school claim that this is a major factor in their success, e.g., Governor Ben Cayetano, quoted in an October 24, 1996 article in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*.
- ❖ Explicit promises are made. People are told that if you speak Standard English you’ll get good jobs.
- ❖ Threats are made. People are told that if you speak Pidgin, you’ll never have a good job or own a house.
- ❖ Non-conformers are vilified or marginalized. Pidgin speakers are regarded as dumb and less able to succeed in school.

The work of scholars such as Malcolm et. al (1999), Eades (1993), and others in Australia; Harris-Wright (1999)

in Georgia; and Wolfram and his colleagues (1999) in North Carolina shows how teachers can be educated about language varieties, and can develop students’ competence in standard forms of English, without engaging in the language subordination process and denigrating the home language of the students.

Pidgin at School

Myth: The best way to help Pidgin-speaking students is to make it clear that Pidgin is an unacceptable, sloppy way of speaking and that Standard English is the only acceptable mode of communication.

Reality: Children do best at school when they are able to make use of their home language and culture. A basic and well-established educational principle is to build on the strengths that children come to school with. Local children tend to have linguistic strengths which include exposure to and knowledge of a variety of languages and abilities to move between language varieties for various purposes. Building on these strengths would entail discussing language and language variation as part of the school curriculum.

On the other hand, telling children that the way they speak is bad, incorrect or inappropriate often leads to one of the following consequences:

- ❖ children withdraw and choose not to speak and participate in class rather than risk saying something “wrong;”
- ❖ children develop negative academic self-concepts labeling themselves as “bad students” and behave accordingly;
- ❖ language becomes an issue and a site of struggle between students and teachers creating a counter-productive educational atmosphere.

Since language is such a central part of identity, to attack someone’s language is to attack them (Fordham, 1999).

Myth: Denigrating Pidgin at school will make it go away.

Reality: There has been an unsuccessful movement to eradicate Pidgin for decades. One might conclude that Pidgin has significant value to local people to have resisted death for so many years of abuse. It is a language that has brought people together in spite of their differences in ancestral culture and language, and has created a “local” culture that blends ideas and flavors (Sato, 1991).

Explanation: Most people agree that all children should

learn the standard variety in order to have access to wider opportunities. However, children’s home language or dialect does not need to be left out of the classroom. In fact, failing to respect the children’s first language or dialect and failing to use it in school may actually make learning the standard variety less likely and more difficult.

Two programs in Hawai‘i in the 1980s and early 1990s (Project Holopono and Project Akamai) included some activities to help Pidgin speaking students recognize differences between their language and Standard English. This recognition of the children’s home language was further supported with the use of some local literature using Pidgin. Both projects reported success in helping the students develop Standard English proficiency.

Many non-standardized varieties (such as Pidgin) have been successfully included in classrooms in the United States as well as Australia. They use the home language in a variety of ways including literature, discussion, music, writing, and lessons focused on understanding how language varies and what this variation means in society. They also avoid harmful practices such as confusing children by correcting pronunciation while they are in the beginning stages of learning to read and correcting or criticizing students’ language to the point where the students refrain from speaking.

The following speakers testify to the way in which many Pidgin speakers feel most comfortable when speaking Pidgin. When asked what it would be like if he couldn’t speak Pidgin, one Oahu man said “Would take me long time fo’ say stuff.” Another Oahu man compared speaking Standard English and Pidgin in this way: “When I speak Standard English I gotta tink what I going say. . . . Pidgin, I jus’ open my mout’ and da ting come out.”

When the home language is acknowledged and made use of rather than denigrated at school, it has been found to have these positive consequences.

- ❖ It helps students make the transition into primary school with greater ease.
- ❖ It increases appreciation for the students’ own culture and identity and improves self-esteem.
- ❖ It creates positive attitudes towards school.
- ❖ It promotes academic achievement.
- ❖ It helps to clarify differences between the languages of home and school.

It is important to understand that Pidgin in Hawai‘i has “covert prestige,” meaning that many wear it as a badge of honor, which gives a sense of identity and sets locals apart from people from the mainland and elsewhere. There is evidence that indicates that in situations of conflict (such as Pidgin being denigrated at school) language use (particularly that of school age adolescents) will move away from that of the dominant group.

Children speak as those around them speak (the language of their peers rather than that of parents, teachers, or people on television). This reflects the social nature of language as an important marker of the group one belongs to. People can learn to speak in new ways as they encounter new groups of people and/or new situations. They will be more likely to do so if they have positive feelings toward the speakers of the new variety and if doing so is not a threat to their central ways of speaking and being.

The time has come to move away from superficial celebrations of diversity to true respect for students’ home languages and cultures demonstrated through concrete actions. Evidence suggests that this is a key part of helping students to succeed and meet the high standards that we set for them (August & Hakuta, 1997; Crawford, 1989; Lucas & Katz, 1994; Osborne, 1996).

Pidgin speakers whose language has been denigrated at school feel that educators work against them, not for them. In the words of one Pidgin-speaking woman, “Education is Western based so da guys who teaching it, they come to Hawai‘i, they have hard time understanding our people, so instead of working with us, they going work against us and make us look bad.”

Speaking Is Different from Writing

Myth: If you speak Pidgin, you think Pidgin, you write Pidgin.

Reality: The pathway from speaking to writing is not nearly so direct as the myth implies. The logic of the statement above, made by Mitsugi Nakashima, State Board of Education Chairman, seems natural: you write what you speak. The natural conclusion, following this logic, is that errors or faults in writing stem from errors or faults in speech. But this statement overlooks the substantial differences between speech and writing. What the statement does is oversimplify the process of learning to write by

making it appear strictly linear. The facts are these: Speech does not lead naturally into writing. Every learner, no matter their variety of spoken English, makes errors in writing because writing is different from speech (Jacobs, 1995; Kroll, 1981).

Explanation: Speech is the child's first entry into writing. This is true especially when beginning writers are first encouraged to spell words and form sentences that they can already produce without effort in speech. But, as they are led into a differentiation phase, they are taught (or sometimes discover on their own) that writing takes on different forms (such as casual or formal), serves different purposes (such as informative or persuasive), and can be published. In some classrooms, students find how varied writing can be as they make their own books and engage in a cottage industry of publication. At this point, they learn how to put their spoken language back into this very different written medium in order to make it interesting, but they realize that writing is something like an art project you work on and construct, quite unlike speech (Rynkofs, 1993).

Teachers, too, see a difference between speech and writing. As they know from helping students with stories, poems, and essays, writing requires an array of skills that speakers never have to think about. To write even a short essay requires planning ahead, keeping the absent reader in mind, and maintaining a coherent line of thought from sentence to sentence. Speakers, except when making presentations to large audiences, rarely plan so consciously. Under ordinary speaking conditions, thoughts are composed much more spontaneously because the listener's presence, and sometimes the listener's questions or comments, show speakers what to say next. In the case of speech, transitions, topic markers, and complete sentences are often not needed to make speech comprehensible. Neither are illustrations or explicit terms. But in writing, these devices of coherence and explanation are necessary. "Writing begins," says analyst Mina Shaughnessy, "where speech leaves off—with organizing, expanding, and making more explicit the stuff of dialogue so that the thought that is generated in speech can be given full and independent form" (1977, p. 32).

The difference between speech and writing proved interesting to Shaughnessy, who studied the process of learning to write. Young writers, she found, have problems where they wish to show a relationship between ideas.

Speech has its ways of doing this. Speakers use their voices to slow down or speed up or to change the pitch in order to show that THIS and th...a..t go together. But what causes writers difficulty is having to use relational and connective language as well as complicated sentence structures to convey these connections. All this new language and unfamiliar syntax amounts to what James Sledd, a linguist, has called a foreign language. "Writing," he said, "is a foreign language for everybody" (Sledd, 1983, p. 667). The point he was making was that speakers of stigmatized varieties of English (he was referring to rural speech or African-American speech in Texas) are no more prone to error than those who speak prestige varieties.

There is still some debate on the question of who has a harder time learning to write (Davis, 1991; Siegel, 1999). Shaughnessy says that the difficulties may be exaggerated for non-standard speakers. Sociolinguists generally assume that differences of speech will show up in writing, and that these differences will be seen as errors by readers who expect mainstream American idiom. But a few studies (including Jacobs, 1995 and Rynkofs, 1993 in Hawai'i) suggest that speakers of non-standard varieties write a standard written language in school, and that whatever errors they make, the errors are not recognizable as a stigmatized variety of speech. This says nothing about the degree of difficulty they have, but shows how wrong it may be to implicate their Pidgin speech as the cause of error. Students who talk about the issue say that they do not make Pidgin errors, and that, in any case, they do not know how to write Pidgin and would find it hard to do so.

The ability to write well in forms such as story or essay is related primarily to two factors: writing experience and reading experience. In other words, young writers are not retarded by their knowledge of Pidgin. But they are helped by their familiarity with the look and the flow of written prose and poetry. They become better writers with good instruction and—on their own part—a confidence in their own voices and their sense that they have something to say that other people find worthwhile. Pidgin doesn't hurt. What hurts is the lack of exposure to written language (Scott, 1993).

Pidgin and Testing

Myth: If we could do away with Pidgin, our children's writing scores would go up.

Reality: The relationship between Pidgin and English is too

complex to suggest that simply by eradicating Pidgin we will raise scores. Very little research has been conducted to understand the relationship between Pidgin and English. To implicate Pidgin as the cause of children's poor Standard English writing skills is academically unjust and scholastically irresponsible.

One of the reasons Pidgin has endured for more than a century is because it is a language of identity and history. It is a language that has brought people together, in spite of their differences in ancestral culture and language. It has created a "local" culture that blends ideas and flavors, such as manapua or shave ice, giving of money for weddings and funerals, taking off shoes before entering the house. It has taught us to be not just tolerant but accepting. It has allowed immigrants to begin new shoots without losing old roots.

Although there have been significant studies done in the past, there has been very little research focused on understanding the relationship between Pidgin and English in the classroom. The research done by the KEEP Project (Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate Early Education Program) focused primarily on understanding how children learned (which led to "talk story" as an instructional method) and how children acquired English. Part of the reason for little attention is that there is a prevailing idea that Pidgin will become an English with proper remediation. However, there is sufficient evidence to state that Pidgin is a language with its own rules and patterns, and that people can acquire Standard English without losing Pidgin.

The studies that have been done do not show that using Pidgin in the classroom has any detrimental effect on the acquisition of Standard English (Actouka & Lai, 1989; Afaga & Lai, 1994; Day, 1989; Rynkofs, 1993). Studies need to be done to better understand how the two languages (Pidgin and English) interact and the impact of that interaction on classroom discourse and academic success. Because of the long history of suppression of Pidgin in schools, there may be several generations of children who have developed a mixture of languages. Writing test scores may reflect this linguistic complexity, as well as attitudes, the hegemony of a "standard," and the use of language in school. It is anticipated that teachers need to be much more knowledgeable about Pidgin in order to better instruct our children.

Testing the writing of teenagers adds to the complexity. As children mature into adolescence, they struggle with personal identity and question beliefs and values. This criti-

cal examination of "who am I" and "where do I belong" is strongest during adolescence. If "standard" English is related to being Anglo-American, and Pidgin is related to being "local," then how I speak reflects my identity. These kinds of beliefs may impact on motivation to do well on national tests.

Myth: A test such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the best or the most important way to assess how our children are doing at writing.

Reality: While the NAEP can give us certain kinds of information about students' writing abilities, the constraints of constructing a test for national use that is reasonably easy to score and that can be administered without taking away too much class time limit the test in ways that are important to recognize. We must be cautious in our interpretations of tests, aware of their limitations, and be clear about the kinds of information they can and cannot give us.

Explanation: Assessment should be matched to good instruction and knowledge about language systems. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment should be aligned with the standards, being sensitive to and respectful of the language(s) children have acquired.

Tests should not be the exclusive index of success. High stakes testing seems to dampen good pedagogy. While large scale testing seems to benefit some schools, it does not benefit all schools.

Alternative, authentic assessments provide a fuller picture of a student's ability. Students are multi-faceted: the more we know about an individual, the better able we are to recognize the "diamond in the rough."

Some assessment should be in accord with local language culture. We live and work in Hawai'i; our schools ought to reflect our unique place among the states.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Pidgin is a language just as English is a language. Children whose first language is Pidgin come to school with a language. That language should be respected and never denigrated. No one should be prevented from using Pidgin where it works in the learning process. While teachers should teach standard forms of English at school, in no way should English replace Pidgin.

Informed understandings of the type described in this paper lead teachers to build on students' strengths at school.

We therefore recommend language awareness seminars, classes or in-services for teachers, which include strategies for building on the home language, and for understanding language systems. We would also like to see language awareness programs made available to students so that rather than relying on the common myths, they can understand the history and social functions of both Pidgin and English. Language awareness classes for students could help to achieve many of the standards set out by the Department of Education, including the following language arts goals:

- ♦ Students will understand diversity in language, perspective, and/or culture and use speaking and listening to foster understanding.
- ♦ Students will communicate orally using various forms—inter-personal, group, and public—for a variety of purposes and situations.
- ♦ Students will demonstrate confidence as communicators, and find value and satisfaction in communicating with others.

Language awareness classes for students would also help in the achievement of foreign language learning goals:

- ♦ Students will demonstrate an understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

By comparing their own language and the new language, learners develop a greater understanding of their own language and the nature of language itself. Knowledge of the conventions of a language, its linguistic system, grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and other features allows learners to communicate precisely and strengthens students' ability to develop hypotheses about the structure and use of language.

This standard focuses on 1) knowledge of the ways different language systems express meaning; and 2) knowledge of how vocabulary, expressions, structures, and language functions within a system are used to communicate ideas in a variety of ways.

We should recognize that Pidgin is the first language of many students, and that the process of comparing Pidgin to English and other languages will be an extremely effective means of developing understanding of variation in world languages and preparing students for the acquisition of additional languages. The goals regarding comparison

described above in combination with understanding of sociocultural processes and language would be at the heart of any language awareness program.

Finally, we would recommend that more research be carried out on relationships between Pidgin and school success, and on how best to build on the language that students come to school with in the achievement of school success.

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ENDNOTES

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