

## EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION

### Pidgin Voices

#### Introduction

*Hanh thi Nguyen*

Pidgin or Hawaii Creole English (HCE, sometimes referred to as Hawaii Creole) is a crucial part of society in Hawaii. Existing on a continuum (Bickerton, 1973), Pidgin can be almost inaccessible to English speakers in its

Prapa Da Pidgin



religious practice forces assimilation to SAE (Standard American English) by most, if not all, of its users.

When asked about code switching between HCE and SAE, all three informants described using "proper" English (SAE). One speaker defined Pidgin as "broken English." Using HCE signaled roles, contexts, even geography for the speakers. For them it

## "Dat's Pidgin Kinda Talk, Yeah?"

*Monica Smith*

Two local Pidgin speakers, a repairman and a mother, were interviewed. Excerpt 1 is from the interview with the repairman and Excerpts 2-5 are from the interview with the mother.

### Interview Excerpt 1

The interviewee, K, is a 53-year-old local man who does repair work as employment. He was in my apartment repairing a hole in the roof in the shower. He graciously granted me an

interview while he worked. In this and the other excerpts, M stands for the interviewer.

K's attitude toward Pidgin seemed to be very positive. He was not shy in claiming that he speaks Pidgin and seemed to take pride in giving me examples of Pidgin (Excerpt 1). He additionally stated that his family and friends frequently had gatherings where they exclusively spoke in Pidgin. It gave them a sense of pride and camaraderie in their

Interview Excerpt 2

M: What would you talk to your grandmother about?

L: What we used to talk about? Oh, like. Things like. You know coz' like in da olden days, Hawaiian days, all da girls do everything. I don't know if you know about dat but, mens just lay back and not

L

## "The Culture Is Changing"

*Emily Moore*

The interviewee, G, works as an education assistant at a local elementary school. He was born and raised on Oahu. He primarily grew up in Kaimuki, attended Kaimuki High School and later moved to Kaneohe once he

was married. He has three children who are in their mid to early thirties. He grew up speaking Pidgin at home and also used it at school.

Interview Excerpt:

E: Do you think Pidgin is dying out today?

G: Yes.

E: And how do you feel about that?

G: It shouldn't be.

E: Yea.. and.. Can you tell me.. or, how did you grow up or where did you grow up in Hawaii?

G: Kaimuki.

E: Kaimuiki?

G: Yup.

E: And was there a lot of-

G: Definately a lot of Pidgin goin on all ova. All though high school and afta high school too, but you no hear it as much anymore and it's sad. The culture is changin, it isn't like how it was when I was a child or teenager growing up.

(...)

E: And what about your children? Do you speak Pidgin to them at home too?

G: To some extent, yea. You know like... my kids are all big now and dey teaching der own kids stuff on der



G: Yea... yea.. some of da kids are from pretty nice neighborhoods and some are from more of da country, country life kien of ting.

E: So do you think the kid that live in the country tend to use it more?

G: Yea definitely. Definitely. Look a J, in da fourth grade.

E: haha.

G: When he was, when he was in M's class all he wen talk about is pigs in Pidgin and he is one of da few kids who still speaks Pidgin on a daily basis.

E: He talks about chickens a lot too.

G: yea, but befo all he would talk about is pigs.

E: What was school like for you as a kid?

G: My teachas were strict. They had one big stick. If you ac up they wen give you one big crack.

G: Wen I was in da forth grade.. it was like.. wow. about the first week of school I just wen shut my mout. You know what.. I look back on it now.. and...

#### Interviewer's Comments

G believes the language he grew up with should be preserved; however, because it is not socially accepted anymore at school or in the workplace, it is slowly diminishing and he feels discontent about this cultural change. Pidgin was the main variety of language he used when he was growing up. However, once his children moved away from home and had their own families, he believes his children didn't speak much Pidgin anymore. I am not sure why this happened, but I am assuming Pidgin was slowly lost in his family because the children either married spouses from other places in the United States, or they attended colleges where Pidgin was not used.

When I asked G what he thought about children speaking Pidgin today in school, he stated that it is a normal way of communicating and it should be used if needed. He agrees that children should learn Standard English, but at the same time if they are having trouble getting their point across, or need something and can't express it in Standard English, they should have every right to use Pidgin to convey their meaning or ideas. This view, coming from a teacher, shows that Pidgin may be given a place in education and may be tolerated more in some schools these

days, an improvement from the past (cf. The Pidgin Coup, 1999).

Currently, G observed that some kids at his school still speak Pidgin, but not everyone does, as this also depends on what geographical location you are from. For example, if you grow up in an affluent neighborhood, most likely