



Pidgin in the Classroom¹

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Introduction

Like plate lunches, aloha shirts, and lei, Pidgin is an important part of local identity in Hawai'i. While some people still think of Pidgin as “broken English,” many now realize that it is a distinct creole language, similar to others that have developed in multilingual environments, and call it Hawai'i Creole or HCE (Hawai'i Creole English). Whatever you call it, Pidgin is integral to the development of modern Hawai'i and therefore it is surprising that there is nothing about it in the school curriculum. Even more surprising, however, is that in many schools, Pidgin is frowned upon and the language is kept out of the classroom.

In some cases, Pidgin is even denigrated, and its speakers constantly corrected (see Romaine 1999; Hargrove and Sakoda 1999). But even when there is no overt negative treatment, teaching is often done completely in standard English² as if Pidgin did not exist. In either case, Pidgin-speaking students are not allowed to express themselves in the language they feel most comfortable with. Again, this is surprising, since teachers and educational administrators normally have the interests of their students at heart, and want to do what's best for them. They generally try to follow the well-known educational principle of moving from the known to the unknown, and they encourage their students to express themselves so they can develop intellectually. Most teachers would never think of putting their students down because of their ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Yet, when it comes to language, many teachers and administrators seem to abandon these principles—especially with regard to Pidgin—and these practices are supported by

parents and the general community. Why is this?

Part of the answer is that the acquisition of standard English is considered to be one of the most important goals of formal education. Most people in Hawai'i see a knowledge of standard English as the key to academic and economic success, and Pidgin as the greatest obstacle to the acquisition of this knowledge. Therefore it seems logical to avoid Pidgin at all costs, especially in the schools. But is this really logical? Instead, why not start with Pidgin (the known) and gradually move to standard English (the unknown), letting students use Pidgin in the classroom until they feel comfortable with standard English? Why not treat Pidgin as a bridge to the standard, instead of an obstacle? Couldn't this be a better way to teach our children?

In this article, I attempt to answer these complex questions by examining some of the reasons behind current practices and looking at whether they are justified according to research into language varieties and alternative educational programs that do make use of vernaculars such as Pidgin. These reasons fall into three categories: (1) beliefs about the nature of Pidgin, (2) confusion about the nature of educational programs that would use Pidgin, and (3) concerns that the use of Pidgin in schools would be detrimental to students' acquisition of standard English. I then discuss some of the potential benefits of alternative programs.

Beliefs about the Nature of Pidgin

In publications starting from the 1920s, Pidgin was labelled with negative terms such as “lazy,” “faulty,”

“sloppy,” “slothful,” and “ugly” (Da Pidgin Coup, 1999, pp. 6–8). Even today, although there are more positive attitudes towards Pidgin, many people, including teachers and administrators, still think of it as a deviant form of English. Terms such as “broken English,” “incorrect English,” and “bad English” are common, and in the classroom, Pidgin-speaking children are often considered not as learners of a new variety of language, but as careless or lazy speakers of standard English.

What is the reason for these attitudes? For one thing, since Pidgin and standard English share much of the same vocabulary, they are considered to be the same language. The average person does not learn about language diversity in school, but instead believes that there is one English language, and the form known as “standard English” is the correct or “proper” way of speaking and writing it. So when different words are used or the words are put together in patterns that differ from those of the standard, these are considered not as mere differences, but as inaccuracies or “bad English.”

It is interesting, however, that such negative attitudes towards difference seem to be reserved for vernaculars such as Pidgin. The standard dialect of British English, for example, also has features that are “incorrect” in standard American English. It uses words such as *rubber* instead of *eraser*, and it has unacceptable expressions such as *I haven’t a book* instead of *I don’t have a book*. Just as those “broken” vernaculars “leave out” sounds in words and words in sentences—like saying *tol* instead of *told* and *He sick* instead of *He is sick*—British English leaves out the ‘r’ sound in words like *park* and leaves out words as well, as in *My father is in hospital* (instead of *in the hospital*). But in contrast to what many people say about Pidgin, they would not say that British people speak “bad” or “incorrect” English—just that they speak a different kind of English.

One reason for the negative attitudes toward Pidgin as opposed to other varieties is the misconception that it is haphazard – that there are no grammatical rules, and no correct or incorrect ways of speaking. However, since the 1960s, sociolinguists have been showing that creoles such as Pidgin are legitimate, rule-governed languages that differ in systematic ways from the language from which most of their vocabulary is derived. To illustrate that Pidgin has its own grammatical rules, different from those of English, we will look at the formation of negatives, based on materials from

workshops run by Kent Sakoda. The first column in table 1 contains sentences in Pidgin with English translations. The Pidgin sentences are written in the Odo orthography, a writing system developed specially for Pidgin. (Following in parentheses, the sentences are written in an English-based orthography.) In the second column are the same sentences put in the negative. Also included are some sentences beginning with an asterisk. The asterisk indicates that the sentence sounds strange, or that it is not the usual way of saying something. In other words, the sentence is ungrammatical in Pidgin, just like saying “*I are eating” is ungrammatical in English.

These examples demonstrate that Pidgin has at least four different negative markers, each occurring before an auxiliary, modal, or verb, and each having its own function and rules for usage:

Nat is used (1) before the predicate in sentences without a verb, (2) before the *-ing* form of the verb when it’s not preceded by *ste*, and (3) before the modal *sapostu*;

No is used (1) before the plain, unmarked verb, (2) before the modals *kaen*, *gata*, and *haeftu*, and (3) before the progressive marker *ste*;

Neva is used before the verb to indicate both negative and past tense simultaneously; and

Nomo is used as a negative existential to mean ‘there isn’t’ or as a negative possessive to mean ‘don’t/ doesn’t have.’

In contrast, standard English has only one negative marker, *not*, or its contraction *n’t*, which always occurs after a modal or auxiliary such as *can*, *is* or *do*.

Thus, Pidgin is not haphazard; it has its own grammatical rules, different from those of English. And with regard to the formation of negatives, the grammatical rules of Pidgin are more complex than those of English.

Another reason for negative attitudes towards Pidgin in comparison to a variety such as British English is that British English is standardized. It has a standard writing system used in published texts, in some cases differing from American English (e.g. *colour* versus *color*). It also has a long historical tradition and a body of literature, and is the language of education in Britain. In contrast, while Pidgin is now commonly used in literature, it is written in a variety of

Table 1: Negatives in Hawai‘i Creole

<i>Da kæt it fish. (Da cat eat fish.)</i>	<i>Da kæt no it fish.</i>
<i>Da gaiz wrking. (Da guys working.)</i> 'The guys are working.'	<i>*Da gaiz no wrking.</i> <i>Da gaiz nat wrking.</i>
<i>Dei ste lisining. (Dey stay listening.)</i> 'They're listening.'	<i>*Dei nat ste lisining.</i> <i>Dei no ste lisining.</i>
<i>Mai sista wan bas jraiva.</i> (<i>My sister one bus driver.</i>)	<i>Mai sista nat wan bas jraiva.</i> 'My sister isn't a bus driver.'
<i>I kæn du twenti pushap.</i> (<i>I can do twenty pushup.</i>)	<i>I no kæn du twenti pushap.</i> 'I can't do twenty pushups.'
<i>Da бага braun. (Da buggah brown.)</i>	<i>Da бага nat braun.</i>
<i>Kærol hæftu wok. (Carol have to work.)</i>	<i>Kærol no hæftu wok.</i>
<i>Yu sapostu du dæt.</i> (<i>You suppose to do dat.</i>)	<i>Yu nat sapostu du dæt.</i> 'You're not supposed to do that.'
<i>Ai wen si om. (I wen see 'em.)</i> 'I saw it.'	<i>*Ai no wen si om.</i> <i>Ai neva si om.</i>
<i>Gat kaukau in da haus.</i> (<i>Got kaukau in da house.</i>) 'There's food in the house.'	<i>*No gat kaukau in da haus.</i> <i>Nomo kaukau in da haus.</i> 'There isn't food in the house.'
<i>Nau wi gat ka. (Now we got car.)</i> 'Now we have a car.'	<i>*Nau wi no gat ka.</i> <i>Nau wi nomo ka.</i>

ways, using English orthography (e.g. *like that* versus *li'dat* versus *ladat*). Most people in Hawai‘i are not familiar with the Odo orthography, even though it is used in some publications (e.g., Tonouchi, 2001 and Sakoda & Siegel, 2003). But there is no large body of literature in Pidgin and, of course, it is not used in education. Therefore, even if positive attitudes exist towards it as an important badge of social identity, or as language perfect for creating solidarity among family and friends, there is still the belief that it is fine for informal communication but that it has no place in the school, where standard English should be the norm. It should be noted, however, that five hundred years ago English itself was an unstandardized language, and considered inappropriate for use in learning. (At that time, Latin was the standard language of education.) Many other formerly unstandardized languages have become important vehicles of education,

government, and literature—for example, Bahasa Indonesia.

So, there is nothing intrinsically inferior about Pidgin or other vernaculars. Like any other variety of language, they have their own grammatical rules and the potential to be standardized and used in education or any other domain.

Confusion about the Nature of Educational Programs

There is also some confusion in the community about how Pidgin would be used in the education system. Would it actually be taught? Would it displace standard English? The answer to both questions is “no”. Here I describe three types of educational programs (instrumental, accommodation, and awareness) that make use of vernacular varieties such as Pidgin, and clarify which types are being advocated for Hawai‘i.

Instrumental programs use a vernacular as a medium of instruction to teach initial literacy and sometimes content subjects such as mathematics, science, and health. Such programs are useful mainly when the vernacular is markedly different from the standard language used in education—so different, in fact, that the two varieties are not always mutually intelligible. Thus, instrumental programs are similar to bilingual programs in that the children’s home language (the vernacular) is used at first while they are learning a second language (e.g., standard English). Such programs exist for speakers of creole languages in Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Seychelles, Haiti, and the Netherlands Antilles, and in the USA with immigrants speaking Haitian Creole and Cape Verdean (see Siegel, 1999a, 2007). However, this type of program has not been advocated for Hawai‘i.

In accommodation programs, students’ vernacular varieties are not used for instruction, but are accepted in the classroom. The standard educational language remains the medium of instruction and the only subject of study. However, in the early years of school, students are allowed to use their home varieties of language for speaking and sometimes writing, and teachers may utilize their students’ own interactional patterns and stories for teaching the standard. For example, Christie (2003, p. 46) reports that according to the recent Reform of Secondary Education Project in Jamaica, “students should be allowed to express themselves freely, employing whatever variety makes them comfortable in the classroom and outside.” Large scale and individual accommodation programs have existed in Hawai‘i (see Boggs, 1985; Rynkof, 1993; Eades, Jacobs, Hargrove & Menacker, 2006). At the higher levels, literature and creative writing in a vernacular may be accommodated into the curriculum, as has been done in Trinidad and Tobago (Winer, 1990). This has also been occurring with Pidgin in many schools in Hawai‘i (see Tonouchi, 2002).

In awareness programs, the standard language still remains the medium of instruction, but students’ vernacular varieties are seen as a resource to be used for learning the standard—and for learning in general—rather than as an impediment. This approach has three components. First, students’ vernacular varieties are accepted at times in the classroom, as just described (the accommodation component). Second, students learn about the many different varieties of language, such as dialects and creoles, and about the socio-historical processes that lead to a particular variety becoming

accepted as the standard (the sociolinguistic component). Third, students examine the linguistic characteristics of their own varieties and see how they differ from those of other students and from the standard (the contrastive component).

Awareness programs, or programs with awareness components, are found in the USA, Australia, and the Caribbean. For example, the Academic English Mastery Program in Los Angeles (LeMoine, 2001) trains teachers to build knowledge and understanding of various vernaculars and the students who use them, and then integrate this knowledge into instruction in standard English and other subjects. The handbook for this program, *English for Your Success* (Los Angeles Unified School District & LeMoine, 1999) outlines activities for contrasting African American English and standard English. Other current awareness programs include the Caribbean Academic Program in Evanston, Illinois (Fischer, 1992a) and Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools (FELIKS) in Australia (Catholic Education Office, 1994; Berry and Hudson, 1997). In Jamaican High Schools, the communication studies syllabus includes a “Language and Society” module that focuses on the linguistic situations in Caribbean countries and their historical background, as well as on aspects of the grammar of the students’ creole language as compared to English (Kouwenberg 2002). (For details about these programs, see Siegel, 1999a, 2007.)

Programs with awareness components have also existed in Hawai‘i. The first was the Hawai‘i English Program (HEP), which ran from 1968 to 1983 (Rogers, 1996). This included lessons dealing with language varieties and language choice, as well as some exercises designed to contrast features of Pidgin and English. However, these components of the program were not widely covered by teachers (Eades et al., 2006, p. 158). Two experimental programs with contrastive activities were also carried out in Hawai‘i. The first was Project Holopono, which took place from 1984 to 1988 (Actouka & Lai, 1989). It involved approximately three hundred students of limited English proficiency in grades four to six in eight schools, half of which were Pidgin speakers. The program consisted of one hundred and fifty hours per week of instruction, including some awareness activities such as contrasting features of Pidgin and standard English. The second program was Project Akamai which ran from 1989 to 1993 (Afaga & Lai, 1994). This program was aimed at more than six hundred Pidgin speakers in grades nine and ten in eleven schools. It also involved some contrastive awareness

activities as well as the use of local literature containing Pidgin.

The programs that I advocate for Hawai‘i are accommodation and awareness programs that would bring Pidgin into the classroom. They would not involve teaching in Pidgin, but rather using and learning about Pidgin, and they would be part of a language arts curriculum that has the goal of teaching standard English. The objectives of these programs would be to give students some opportunity to express themselves and read literature in a language they feel comfortable with, to make them aware of language diversity and the origins of both Pidgin and standard languages, and to help them acquire standard English by focusing on how it differs from Pidgin in both structure and use.

Concerns that the Use of Pidgin Will Be Detrimental to Students

Even though many teachers and administrators recognize Pidgin as a rule-governed language in its own right and realize the nature of educational programs that are being proposed, they still have concerns about the possible effects that using Pidgin in the classroom would have on their students—concerns that on the surface may seem quite legitimate. The major concern is that Pidgin will interfere with students’ acquisition of the standard (the “interference” concern). Another concern is that using Pidgin will further disadvantage already disadvantaged Pidgin-speaking students by not giving them an education equal to that of other students (the “ghettoization” concern). Let us look at each of these concerns in more detail.

Interference

Interference, or “negative transfer,” can be defined as the inappropriate use of features of the first language (L1)—here Pidgin—when speaking or writing the second language (L2)—here standard English. There are many reports showing that fear of interference has kept other creole vernaculars out of the classroom. For example, with regard to the Caribbean, Elsasser and Irvine (1987, p. 137) say that one of the reasons for the lack of teaching literacy in the local creole vernacular is the assumption that “students’ limited writing ability is due to linguistic interference.” Similarly, Winer (1990, p. 241) notes that “both educators and the public are concerned over the extent to which acceptance of the vernacular might negatively affect students’ competence in

standard English.” The same is true in Hawai‘i, as indicated by these quotations:

If your thinking is not in standard English, it’s hard for you to write in standard English. If you speak pidgin, you think pidgin, you write pidgin. . . . We ought to have classrooms where standard English is the norm. (Mitsugi Nakashima, Chairman of the Hawai‘i State Board of Education, Honolulu Advertiser, September 29, 1999)

Hawaiian Creole is a kind of shadow language, without a fully developed grammar and vocabulary, that seductively undermines and corrupts the study of Standard English. (letter to the editor, Honolulu Advertiser, April 25, 2001, quoted in Eades et al., 2006, p. 144)

But let us look at the evidence, and see whether using Pidgin in the classroom would really interfere with the acquisition of standard English.

Although not as significant as once thought, transfer clearly does occur in second language acquisition. Research over the last twenty-five years has concentrated on the factors that promote or inhibit transfer. (For a summary, see Ellis, 1994). One of these is “language distance,” or the degree of typological similarity or difference between the L1 and the L2. It seems that the more similar the varieties are, the more likely it is that transfer (and thus interference) will occur. Such is the case with creoles that are similar to the standard variety, at least superficially, in their vocabulary and many grammatical rules. As Hargrove and Sakoda (1999) point out for Pidgin and standard English in Hawai‘i, students are often confused about the boundaries between the two languages.

But the evidence that such interference occurs in the classroom is not so clear. For example, in the Caribbean, a study of the writing of first year and final year secondary school students in Trinidad (Winer, 1989) revealed that interference from the local creole accounted wholly or partially for 65 percent of errors in standard English. In contrast, a study of the writing of children aged nine to eleven in St Lucia (Winch & Gingell, 1994) found no significant indication of interference from the local creole. However, these and other studies have been done in classrooms where the standard is the only language used. So even if there were hard evidence of interference, there is absolutely no evidence that using a creole in the classroom would exacerbate the

interference and be detrimental to students' acquisition of the standard language of education. In fact, an examination of programs where creoles are used in the classroom actually demonstrates the opposite.

Formal evaluations have been carried out on three instrumental programs using different creoles: Kriol (a creole language spoken in northern Australia) (Murtagh, 1982), Seselwa (the French Creole of the Seychelle Islands) (Ravel & Thomas, 1985), and Tok Pisin (the expanded pidgin/creole of Papua New Guinea) (Siegel, 1997). In each case, the prediction of educators opposed to the programs was that acquisition of standard English would suffer due to both interference and time wasted on studying the creole. However, in each case the results showed that students who were educated in both the creole and standard English achieved higher test scores in English and other subjects than students who were educated only in standard English.

Similar findings exist for accommodation and awareness programs using creoles. In the Caribbean, Elsasser and Irvine (1987) describe an experimental program in the US Virgin Islands integrating the study of the local creole and English in a college writing program. They report that the program did not interfere with the learning of standard English. Rather, it led to increased interest in language in general, and to a greater "understanding of the role of grammatical conventions, standardized spelling, and the rhetorical possibilities of both languages" (p. 143). In another example, Decker (2000) reports on a study carried out over thirteen weeks in a grade three classroom in Belize. Four grammatical areas were identified which differ in Belize Kriol and standard English: plural marking on nouns, past time reference, present time reference, and subject-verb agreement. The teacher discussed with the students, in Kriol, how these features function in Kriol, and students were asked to write in Kriol using these features. The teacher then moved on to describe, again in Kriol, how the corresponding features function in standard English, and then gradually switched to discussing this with the students in English. Students were then engaged in various story-telling, writing, and translation activities using these features in both languages. The results, on the basis of a pre-test and post-test, were that the students involved showed statistically significant improvement in performance in these areas of standard English.

The Caribbean Academic Program (CAP) at Evanston Township High School near Chicago, mentioned above,

is an awareness program for creole-speaking high school students who have migrated to the area from the Caribbean. Both standard English and various Caribbean English creoles are used in the classroom for speaking, reading, and writing (Fischer, 1992a; Menacker, 1998). A study was done on the progress of the students involved in the program. In the 1991–92 school year, 73 percent of the fifty-one CAP students were placed in the lowest of the four levels (or tracks) in the school based on academic ability; none of them were in the two highest levels. But after one year in the program, only 7 percent remained in the lowest level; 81 percent had moved up at least one level; 24 percent had moved up two or more levels; and 26 percent were in the two highest levels (Fischer, 1992b).

Back in Hawai'i, Day (1989) describes an accommodation program involving Pidgin-speaking children in kindergarten through grade four. In this program, teachers were first made aware of the history of creole languages such as Pidgin and their rule-governed nature. The teachers appeared to accept Pidgin as a language, and did not react negatively to students' using it in class (pp. 301–2). The study showed a significant increase over time in the scores of the students involved in the program on standardized tests of abilities in both Pidgin and standard English. Rynkof's (1993) presents an ethnographic study of one teacher's accommodation program involving writing workshops for Pidgin-speaking second graders. The children were allowed to write in any variety, and early versions of their work included many Pidgin features. But through a process of modeling and recasting in the workshops, rather than correction, the students became more proficient in written standard English.

Evaluations were also done of the two Hawai'i programs with awareness components mentioned above. The evaluation of the final year of Project Holopono showed an increase in oral proficiency in standard English among 84 percent of the students (Actouka & Lai, 1989). And the final year evaluation of Project Akamai reported increases of between 35 percent and 40 percent in tests of standard English use and oral language skills (Afaga & Lai, 1994).

These studies demonstrate that despite the occurrence of interference with closely related varieties of language, there is no evidence that using a creole vernacular in education will exacerbate the problem. None of these evaluations or experimental studies show any negative effects resulting from the use of a creole in the classroom, clearly illustrating

that the concern about interference is not justified. In fact, these studies show positive effects in increased ability in standard English and general academic performance, indicating that there are important benefits to using a creole in the classroom. These are discussed below.

Ghettoization

The term “ghettoization” in this context is related to the belief that the use of language varieties other than standard English is a part of the disadvantage of marginalized groups, and a major factor that keeps them in urban ghettos. While there are no ghettos, as such, in Hawai'i, there is still the belief that people who speak Pidgin will be disadvantaged, as indicated by this quotation:

Any child today who grows up speaking pidgin English will never get a good job and never be able to afford a house. (letter to the editor, Honolulu Advertiser, October 6, 1999)

Of course, the thousands of local people in Hawai'i who are successful in business, various professions, and politics demonstrate that this is not true. People who have grown up speaking Pidgin can become bilingual in standard English, and continue to use both languages in different contexts.

The real concern, however, is that devoting valuable class time to a creole deprives children of the instruction they need to learn standard English and in turn to get the economic benefits that speakers of standard varieties have, thus ensuring that they remain disadvantaged (Snow, 1990). For example, in the early 1990s Shnukal (1992, p. 4) noted that in the Torres Strait (Australia) people were “reluctant to accept the use of creole as a formal medium of instruction in their schools, seeing it as a method of depriving them of instruction in the kind of English that white people use, and thus condemning them to permanent under-class status.” But as we have just seen, the evidence shows that accommodation and awareness programs for creole-speaking students help rather than hinder acquisition of the standard language of education. Such programs clearly do not result in students from disadvantaged groups being left behind. On the contrary, these programs give students the opportunity to catch up to and even go ahead of students who already speak varieties closer to the standard.

A related concern is that Pidgin-speaking students in special programs would be isolated in the schools, and that

they would not receive the same kind of instruction as other students or get the chance to interact with students who speak varieties closer to the standard. But in the kinds of programs being advocated for Hawai'i, all students would be in the same classroom and treated the same. In accommodation programs, all students could initially use the variety of language they are most comfortable with, and all students would have the opportunity to study Hawai'i literature that uses Pidgin. In awareness programs, all students could learn about varieties of language, the origins of Pidgin and other creoles and the development of standard varieties. They could also examine the features of their ways of talking in comparison to the ways of others. The same curriculum would be used for all, with no one group singled out. Consequently all students would benefit from learning about the diversity of language in Hawai'i's history and how their current home language compares to those of other students and to the standard.

Benefits of Bringing Pidgin into the Classroom

So far in this article, I have shown that the various reasons for keeping Pidgin out of the classroom are not really justified if we look closely at the facts:

1. creoles such as Pidgin are legitimate, rule-governed languages;
2. when a creole is used in the educational process, it is not actually taught, but is used to help students in their educational development;
3. the use of creoles in education does not interfere with the acquisition of the standard by exacerbating interference, and therefore it does not disadvantage students.

At the same time, the research on accommodation and awareness programs described above has demonstrated some positive advantages from using creole vernaculars in the classroom: higher scores in tests measuring reading and writing skills in standard English and increases in overall academic achievement. The particular benefits of using creoles that account for these results appear to be related to three possible factors affecting students: greater cognitive development, increased motivation and self-esteem, and ability to separate codes and notice differences.

Greater cognitive development

It is well known that children's self-expression is facilitated in a familiar language, especially when there is no

fear of correction (see, for example, UNESCO, 1968, p. 690), and that children are clearly disadvantaged when they are not allowed to express themselves in their own variety of language (Thomas & Collier, 1997). This is because self-expression may be a prerequisite for cognitive development (Feldman, Stone, Wertsch & Strizich, 1977). For example, in a study of cognitive development and school achievement in a Pidgin-speaking community in Hawai‘i, Feldman, Stone, and Renderer (1990) found that students who do not perform well in high school have not developed “transfer ability.” This refers to the discovery or recognition by a learner that abstract reasoning processes learned with regard to materials in one context can be applied to different materials in a new context. For this to occur, new materials must be talked about, described, and encoded propositionally. According to the authors, a problem exists in Hawai‘i because the vernacular variety of many students (i.e., Pidgin), is conventionally not used in school and these students do not feel comfortable expressing themselves in the language of formal education, standard English. Thus, one possible benefit of accommodation and awareness programs is that students would be able to express themselves in their own varieties, thus better facilitating cognitive development.

Increased motivation and self-esteem

Most theories of second language acquisition agree that the affective variables of learner motivation, attitudes, self-confidence, and anxiety have some effect on L2 attainment. These factors are especially important with regard to speakers of creoles, who often have a negative self-image because of the frequent correction of their language in the schools and, sometimes, the denigration of their speech and culture as well. It may be that the use of the creole in formal education results in positive values to these variables with regard to learning the standard. Certainly, many of the studies referred to above describe increased participation and enthusiasm in the educational process. As Skutnabb-Kangas (1988, p. 29) points out, when the child’s mother tongue is valued in the educational setting, it leads to low anxiety, high motivation, and high self-confidence, three factors which are closely related to successful educational programs. In Hawai‘i, Reynolds (1999, p. 310) observes

My own experience has revealed that when I am not trying to snatch away the language of my students, they do not feel that they have to hang onto it so

tightly. Instead, the more we talk and plan and practice with both HCE [Hawai‘i Creole English] and ASE [American Standard English], the more interested we all become in both languages.

Another related factor, although seemingly contradictory, is the creole vernacular’s covert prestige as a marker of the socio-cultural group and a part of members’ social identity. As Delpit (1990, p. 251) observes, children often have the ability to speak standard English, but choose “to identify with their community rather than with the school.” As Tamura (1996, pp. 439–40) points out for Hawai‘i

Moreover, using nonstandard English [i.e. Pidgin] symbolizes their solidarity within a social group. Such peer-group loyalty is especially strong among youths. As an intermediate school girl noted, “If we speak good English, our friends usually say, ‘Oh you’re trying to be hybolic (acting superior by using big words) yeah?!’”

This is backed up by the report of a recent survey on language attitudes in Hawai‘i (Leong, 2000, p. 20):

Seventeen out of twenty-three participants acknowledge HCE as being a special language unique to Hawai‘i, belonging to the locals; they also found that an advantage of speaking HCE is that it lets one bond with other locals. Maka [one of the participants] said “Pidgin is an integral part of the local culture. We all need to belong and in Hawai‘i, Pidgin is the glue that binds us together.”

The report continues (p. 25), “Several people said they find that at times using Pidgin is necessary so they won’t be seen as someone who is *high makamaka* [trying to act high and mighty].”

Because of the ideology of correctness attached to the standard, students may fear that learning it means abandoning their own language and, thus, risking being ostracized from their social group. The use of the creole vernacular in the classroom would reduce some of this anxiety. Also, according to Clément’s (1980) Social Context Model, such use of the L1 would be expected to reduce fear of assimilation and, thus, increase motivation to learn the L2 (standard English).

Ability to separate codes and notice differences

We have seen that the similarities between a creole vernacular and the standard may make it difficult for learners to separate the two varieties. However, in the study of the Kriol/English bilingual program in Australia described above, Murtagh (1982, p. 30) attributes the higher language proficiency of students in the bilingual program to their “progressively greater success at separating the two languages” as a consequence of “the two languages being taught as separate entities in the classroom.” (For a psycholinguistic discussion of the notion of separation, see Siegel, 1999b, pp. 711–716).

A closely related possible benefit is that using a creole such as Pidgin in educational programs may make learners aware of differences between it and the standard that they may not otherwise notice. For example, Craig (1966, p. 58) notes that often when speakers of Jamaican Creole are being taught standard English, “the learner fails to perceive the new target element in the teaching situation.” Cheshire (1982, p. 55) also observes that nonstandard dialect-speaking children in British schools are unaware of specific differences between their speech and standard English: “They may simply recognise that school teachers and newsreaders, for example, do not speak in quite the same way as their family and friends.”

Again we turn to second language acquisition theory. According to Schmidt’s “noticing hypothesis” (1990, 1993), attention to target language forms is necessary for acquisition; these forms will not be acquired unless they are noticed. It may be that in the contrastive component of awareness programs, looking at features of their own varieties compared to the standard helps students to notice features of the standard that are different, which is the first step of acquisition.

Conclusion

We have seen that current educational practices generally do not allow Pidgin in the classroom. These practices may be well-intentioned and have the support of parents and the community. But a detailed examination of the reasons behind these practices shows that they are not justified, and that because of them, students are missing out on several potential benefits that would be gained from using their own vernacular in the educational process.

The benefits of the alternative programs described in this article have been mainly in terms of test scores measuring the acquisition of the standard variety and academic achievement. But there are many other, more fundamental benefits as well, for example, the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of Pidgin-speaking students and local culture into the education system.

We can only hope that more teachers and educational administrators will look more closely at research in both linguistics and education, and base their classroom policies not on preconceptions, previous practices, or current ideologies, but rather on the facts, no matter how radical or counter-intuitive they may seem. These educators can then take the lead and inform parents and community members about how alternative teaching programs that make use of Pidgin can benefit their children and their communities.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This article is based on Siegel (2006). Thanks go to Diana Eades for valuable comments on an earlier draft.
- ² The author specifically avoids capitalizing “standard” so as not to privilege this style of English as a distinct variety.