
Overview

This tribute begins with a summary of the essay, *John E. Reinecke: His Life and Work*, written by Dr. Charlene J. Sato and Aiko T. Reinecke (1987). The essay serves as the introductory chapter to a collection of works compiled in memory of Dr. John E. Reinecke (1904-1987). The sections following the summary will explore ways in which J. E. Reinecke’s personal and professional endeavors served to inspire and guide future study of Pidgins and Creoles and challenged the inequalities and prejudices faced by the common people of Hawai‘i. The final section will discuss aspect of Dr. Charlene J. Sato’s career that may have been influenced by Dr. Reinecke’s life and work.

Remembering John E. Reinecke

The essay in remembrance of John Reinecke tells of a man of humble beginnings who, through experience and education, came to devote his life to seeking justice and social equality in the Territory of Hawai‘i, which later became the State of Hawai‘i. John Reinecke supported and contributed a great deal of time to the growth of labor unions in Hawai‘i such as those representing Hawai‘ian Electric Company and Honolulu’s bus operators. “The thousands of volunteer hours he had put into the cause of labor reflected John’s total commitment to unionization” (Sato & Reinecke, 1987). Reinecke’s devotion to helping others was influenced by global events such as Hitler’s rise to power, as well as local situations such as the 1932 Massie-Kahahawai murder case and the Honoka’a plantation community’s growing dissatisfaction with their living and working conditions. Reinecke was more than emotionally moved by events such as these. He was a man of action. For instance, he actively advocated for eight and a half hour work days and overtime pay for the plantation workers. At that time, many plantation laborers worked
twelve hours or more per day without overtime pay.

Reinecke was also a teacher with the Hawai‘i Department of Public Instruction (DPI). He taught on the Big Island of Hawai‘i, as well as on O‘ahu. His interaction with the people of Hawai‘i both in and out of school turned his interest to studying “Hawai‘ian-Island English,” a topic about which he eventually wrote his master’s thesis entitled Language and Dialect in Hawai‘i: A Sociolinguistic History to 1935.

Unfortunately, Reinecke’s views and actions were often in conflict with the powerful upper class elitists in Hawai‘i, and in post-war years, he, along with his wife Aiko, were wrongfully accused of being communists. On November 25, 1947, John and Aiko, who was also a teacher, were suspended without pay from their teaching positions. The Reineckes were put on trial and on October 29, 1948, both John and Aiko were deemed unfit to teach in Hawai‘i. Both were condemned for being unfit teachers even though the Territory of Hawai‘i failed to provide evidence that the Reineckes taught communistic principles in their classrooms (See Holmes, 1976, for more on the Reinecke Case). Despite the misfortune imposed upon them by the Territory of Hawai‘i, John and Aiko continued to support unionization to further social equality in Hawai‘i. It was 28 years later, in 1976, that the State Board of Education (no longer the Territorial Department of Public Instruction) voted to revoke John and Aiko’s dismissal from teaching in Hawai‘i (Holmes, 1976; Sato & Reinecke, 1987).

Source of Inspiration

Reinecke was a pioneer Creolist whose work helped to raise the awareness and status of Pidgins and Creoles. As early as 1933, he focused on understanding Hawai‘i Pidgin English and Hawai‘i Creole English, which he referred to as Hawai‘ian-Island English. Reinecke criticized the available literature on Hawai‘ian-Island English for treating it as vulgar and substandard English in need of eradication. He felt that such labeling did not lead to an understanding of its creation or possible value as a “literary vehicle.” Reinecke recognized Hawai‘ian-Island English as a dialect that would likely be spoken in Hawai‘i for “as long as English is spoken in Hawai‘i” and for this reason, it warrants further and more descriptive investigation (Reinecke, 1933).

In 1943, Dr. Reinecke co-authored a paper with Aiko T. Reinecke in which they described the English language in Hawai‘i as a dialect continuum.

...Hawai‘ian English is best considered as a dialect continuum, ranging from the crude efforts of a simple immigrant to make his needs known in the most broken English, to the speech of a university graduate who may speak English both adequately and forcefully, and yet not be quite at home among the subtleties of the English language.
The terminology Reinecke used to describe the English of Hawai‘i differs from that which is commonly used in 1996. However, his description of the language situation is quite similar and has indeed served to inspire a multitude of Pidgin and Creole studies and theories throughout the world (See Gilbert, 1987). Although the status of Pidgin and Creole dialects is determined by many social factors, Reinecke’s efforts to understand and to document Pidgins and Creoles has contributed greatly to the growing recognition and awareness that they are indeed valid as dialects and languages.

Charlene J. Sato

Dr. Charlene J. Sato was a native speaker of Hawai‘i Creole English. She, like Dr. Reinecke, focused much of her time on studying Pidgin and Creole languages, especially Hawai‘i Pidgin English (HPE) and Hawai‘i Creole English (HCE) (See other tribute contributions). Dr. Sato’s work views the language situation in Hawai‘i through a sociolinguistic perspective. She sought to describe how Pidgins and Creoles are intertwined within the intricate linguistic network of society. Like Reinecke, Dr. Sato’s work reveals inequality and unfairness associated with languages stigmatized as being inferior to Standard English. She also describes in depth a Creole continuum that exists in Hawai‘i due to unequal decreolization of speakers from different economic and social backgrounds.

As much as Dr. Reinecke was a man of action, Dr. Sato was a woman of action. In 1985, Dr. Sato spoke out against linguistic inequality and prejudice:

She [Dr. Sato] testified that the local-accented speech of the plaintiffs was easily intelligible to all residents of Hawai‘i, including white newcomers, and that for the majority of residents who themselves have some level of a local accent, communication was enhanced by speech in that accent (Matsuda, 1991).

This testimony was given on behalf of James Kahakua, who was denied employment as a weather forecaster because according to a speech consultant, Kahakua’s “Creole-tinged” speech was not acceptable for weather broadcasting (Matsuda, 1991). In 1987, Dr. Sato was one of several language experts to publicly speak out against the Board of Education’s proposed Standard English-only policy. According to Hartwell (1987), Dr. Sato believed that a Standard English-only policy “perpetuates prejudice...you might even call this linguistic bigotry” (Also see Hollos, 1987).

Summary

Both Dr. Reinecke and Dr. Sato have contributed tremendously to the study of Pidgins and Creoles as well as to the pursuit of justice and equality for non-standard English and its speakers. They fought a battle against imperialism, prejudice, and linguistic
discrimination. Those who choose to study language greatly benefit from both the knowledge they have created as well as the strength and spirit they have shown in actively defending their beliefs.

References
Sato, C. J. (See other tribute contributions).

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