Introduction

During her lifetime, Charlene Sato remained actively dedicated to decreasing the social, socio-political, and economic discrimination faced by speakers of Hawaiʻi Creole English (HCE), whose L1 continues to be placed in a lower status group than the current language of power, Standard English (SE). Much of her work was aimed at heightening awareness and increasing understanding of the problems faced by members of this Hawaiian linguistic community. In this paper, two of the works published by this much respected researcher will be reviewed. These publications, whose titles are “Linguistic inequality in Hawaii: The post-creole dilemma” and “Sociolinguistic variation and language attitudes in Hawaii,” were published respectively in 1985 and 1991. In this present endeavor, an attempt will be made to describe three aspects of their impact on the field of sociolinguistics, namely their long-lasting implications for societal and cultural issues, legal issues, and educational practices in Hawai‘i.

Although these two articles were written for somewhat different purposes and are separated by a span of several years, it is surprising to see how well they compliment one another. While the earlier article provides an excellent summary of the historical processes which have shaped and led HCE to its current status in Hawai‘i, the latter details the current battles being waged for the soul of HCE in the courtrooms, the classrooms, and the society at large.

From HPE to HCE—From a Pidgin to a Language

As Sato mentions in her first article (1985), native Hawaiians, the descendants of Polynesian settlers who may have landed on the islands as far back as the eight century
A.D., lived in peaceful isolation for most of their history. It was not until the arrival of Captain James Cook in 1778 that contact with the West began and there followed a stream of sailors, traders, and missionaries to the islands in the early nineteenth century. Because the native Hawaiians held power, "[t]here was no need then for the numerically dominant and socially secure Hawaiian population to learn English, the outsider's language" (Sato, 1985, p. 257), and the medium for trade (in the form of Maritime Pidgin Hawaiian), for Bible translations, for instruction in the schools, and for communication throughout the islands remained Hawaiian.

Although the language of the foreigners was kept at bay, their religious, political, and economic influence was not, which led to great changes in Hawaiian society:

As it happened, Christianity was soon associated with capitalism, as the missionaries were rewarded for their efforts at educating the ali`i (‘chiefs’) and their children with an entré into elite diplomatic and social circles and, most importantly, with gifts of land. They became political advisors to the Hawaiian royalty and thus steered the island kingdom toward a capitalist economy, the basis of which was the sugar plantation. (Sato, 1985, p. 257)

It was on these sugar plantations where the story of Hawai`i Pidgin English (HPE), the precursor of Hawai`i Creole English (HCE), begins. Because the Hawaiian workers did not like the harsh working conditions on the plantations and their numbers were quickly decreasing, immigrant workers from all over (Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Korean, Filipino, Micronesian, etc.) were brought in at different times during the latter part of the nineteenth century to replace them. The different ethnic groups were housed separately, which served as both a linguistic advantage for the immigrants (since they were able to use their L1s exclusively and maintain their cultures) and a power advantage for the plantation owners (since the groups could not easily organize against them with this kind of set-up). It was on the fields and in the mills, however, where everyone met, worked, and had to communicate and where HPE was born as a "secondary mode of communication for speakers who conducted the bulk of their interactions in their native tongues" (Sato, 1985, p. 259).

Although it may seem from the name "Hawai`i Pidgin English" that it was a singular entity or type of pidgin, it actually serves more as an umbrella term for the different plantation pigidins that arose from each ethnic group, the tie, of course, being that English, and perhaps to a lesser extent Hawaiian, were always present in them:

Scholars agree that the pidgin was probably highly unstable and that it varied widely among the different ethnic groups and from locality to locality. Basically, HPE consisted of Hawaiian and English vocabulary embedded in the grammatical structure of a speaker’s native language. Even today, the ethnic background of the few
remaining pidgin speakers can be accurately determined from features of their speech such as pronunciation and word order. (Sato, 1985, p. 258)

Three ethnic groups in particular had a great impact on the development and promulgation of HPE: the Portuguese, the Japanese, and the Filipinos. Because the Portuguese were one of the first groups to arrive and stay and because they were European:

... they occupied a socioeconomic position between that of the haole plantation owners and the Asian laborers. They held what might be called 'middle management positions, they served as hunas (overseers), along with some Hawaiians. Because they came into close contact with both their English-speaking bosses and the non-English speaking workers, the Portuguese were forced to reconcile whatever English they could pick up with the plantation Hawaiian then in use... (Sato, 1985, p. 259)

It was not only vital for them to communicate with both those above and below them on the socioeconomic ladder (via HPE), but it was also important to them that their children be educated in English so that they could continue in their advantaged positions. "In sum, both occupational and educational circumstances favored the Portuguese assimilation and their adoption of a new language.

Japanese immigrants, who arrived during the first few decades of the twentieth century and became the largest ethnic group on the islands at that time, had quite a different experience and effect on HPE compared to the Portuguese. Unlike the Portuguese, they did not have any original intention of settling down on the islands. Instead, they wanted to make their money and return to Japan with it. However, since many of them ended up marrying (through picture brides) and having families, the prospect of the trip back home grow more and more remote. What the Japanese did instead was to form a tight-knit community and maintain their home culture and language. This had the dual effect of keeping their exposure to English limited and "increasing the amount of Japanese features that became conventionalized in HPE because there were so many of these speakers around" (Sato, 1985, p. 260).

Filipino workers, mainly single men who were slow to marry and start families, arrived at the tail end of the mass immigration period and at the border zone between HPE and HCE:

They associated most regularly with their own countrymen and less often with other co-workers. Because of their late appearance on the scene, the Filipinos heard a lot of HCE, in addition to HPE, being spoken around them. As a result, their variety of HPE contains many creole forms, although it sounds distinctly Filipino. Some linguists have described this situation as 'repidginization'. (Sato, 1985, p. 260)

When these immigrant groups settled down and started having families, it signalled the birth of HCE:
Hawaii Creole English served as the mother tongue of the children of the pidgin-speaking immigrants. According to our definition of creole languages, the earliest Hawaii-born children of immigrant parentage were, technically, HCE speakers. However, most of them tended to be bilingual in their ancestral tongues as well as in the creole, as they received considerable input from members of their own ethnic groups. It was not until the mid-1930s or so, when HCE usage was at its peak—judging from the greater proportion of locally-born to immigrants in the population—that significantly more of the second and third generation offspring approached monolingualism in the creole. (Sato, 1985, p. 261)

As mentioned above, the input these children received was at first a mixture of their parents’ L1 and then predominantly the plantation pidgin, which to them and their children became their native tongue, HCE. They did not develop a “standard” (haole) form of English for the same reason. Even though many of them may have received a “standard English” education (besides language education in their parents’ L1), it was limited to the classroom (almost like an EFL situation) and they rarely interacted with native English-speaking peers from the haole population, especially since they attended private schools. Thus, both the home and school environment led to the birth and propagation of HCE. But, that was soon to change.

**Decreolization**

After World War II, and especially after 1959, when Hawai‘i was declared a state, HCE became widely considered something that should be corrected and eventually overcome. It is at this point that the insights found in Sato’s 1991 study come into play.

At the outset of this second work, she again reminds the reader of the uniqueness of the Hawaiian linguistic situation, as it is the only state in the nation where no single ethnic majority exists, and where Asians and Pacific Islanders outnumber Euro- and African-Americans. With such a societal formula in place, the fact that a creole developed seems almost to have been an inevitability.

While HCE was at its height in the 1920’s and 30’s, the process known as *decreolization*,1 where “a creole merges over time with its lexically related standard language” (Sato, 1991, p. 649), began shortly after WWII, brought about by a diversification of Hawai‘i’s economy, which drew workers away from the plantations into other jobs, and the greater exposure to “standard English” in the public classrooms.

In order to help us more fully comprehend the current status of HCE in the islands, Sato (1991) illustrated that there are several important factors surrounding this issue that should be taken into consideration. These factors can be arranged into two categories: (a) those associated with *low socioeconomic status and achievement* and (b) those associated with *solidarity*. 
**HCE and Low Socioeconomic Status/Achievement**

In her 1991 article, Sato cites a study in which attitudes about HCE, of both teachers and students in Hawai’ian schools, were examined. The study concluded that both students and teachers felt that HCE was associated with (a) Asians and Pacific Islanders, (b) low academic achievement, and (c) low socioeconomic status. The negative associations of points (b) and (c) have unfortunately been reinforced in the adult world, in the form of “sanctions in the workplace” against individuals who utilize linguistic (e.g. phonological) features associated with HCE. For such individuals, obtaining “higher-status” employment opportunities is often next to impossible.

Negative associations about HCE, the inability to succeed in an SE-speaker dominated world, and general misunderstanding have only served to foster a cyclical dilemma, wherein negative stereotypes about HCE continue to reemerge and thrive.

**HCE and Solidarity**

While accepting the validity and usefulness of such studies as the one mentioned above, Sato offers persuasive criticisms of the narrowness of their vision. Especially among rural community members, she points out that HCE is very often seen as an important marker of local identity. Especially in light of openly discriminatory educations and legal policies, Sato writes that many Islanders reject the “status-based interpretation of linguistic diversity in Hawai’i” for one that “more accurately reflects the social and political reality of their lives” (Sato, 1991, p. 657).

**HCE vs. Standard English**

Unfortunately, many individuals in both the public at large and in academic and political arenas continue to view HCE as a substandard form of SE. However, Sato (1991) points out the flaws in this illogical assumption. For instance, whereas HPE reflected largely the linguistic bias of its various speakers L1s, HCE, on the other hand is marked by highly standardized features, such as (a) an elaborated tense-, aspect-, and modality-marking system and (b) a standardized phonological system, which are present in all stable languages and dialects (to the degree that this distinction can legitimately be made) of the world. These facts, combined with the knowledge that HCE did not develop out of English, but has its roots in a variety of languages, demonstrate the absurdity of considering HCE a substandard form of SE. It is unfortunate that, in spite of such convincing arguments, many HCE and non-HCE speakers alike continue to view HCE as a degenerate form of Standard English.

As to the future status of HCE in Hawai’i, Sato (1991) notes that, although the decreolization, which began in the 1940s, is likely to continue, it is “simplistic” to view a
shift towards mainland SE as the only option, nor as the most interesting one.

Conclusion: Personal Tributes

In this section, we would like to include our own personal tributes using our names as subheadings to differentiate them.

Kayleigh Garman. Charlene Sato, perhaps more than any other individual in academia, contributed a life’s work to the achievement and preservation of not only the political rights of HCE speakers, but also their linguistic and personal dignity. She continued diligently in this struggle, despite facing negative feedback from even those she fought to protect. It is our desire, and the desire of all those who have contributed to this project, that her name and efforts never be forgotten, not only in honor to Charlie (as those in the ESL Department at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa and people who were close to her knew her), but also in honor of the struggle for which she fought, and which is nowhere near being over—the fight for linguistic equality in Hawai‘i and in the world.

Steve Ko. “Life is short, so better party!” Charlie once said. Being true to her words, she was always full of life enlivening people around her with her mischievous smile and good sense of humor. However, she was much more than just a good-natured colleague or dedicated teacher to those who knew her. She was also a responsible scholar who wanted to inform and educate people with her expertise on the language attitudes toward the indigenous languages of Hawai‘i, namely Hawaiian and Hawai‘i Creole English (HCE). Moreover, she was an activist who fought hard to install the rightful place for HCE in the local community. One such effort could be found in her role as an expert witness in the employment discrimination trial of two local National Weather Service employees in 1987 (as also reported in Sato, 1991).

In the employment discrimination trial, Charlie testified for the two local employees in their fight for equal employment opportunities. The trial began when the two men filed a federal lawsuit claiming that the United States National Weather Service discriminated against their HCE accentedness in its hiring practice. The two plaintiffs, one with Japanese and the other with part-Hawaiian origins, believed that they were the victims of job bias stemming from the discrimination against their race, national origin, and HCE accent.

Charlie’s contribution came when she testified to support the two plaintiffs’ claim as an expert witness. She substantiated her claim that the two local men spoke standard English variants which were not much different from standard English, with the phonetic analysis of a taped weather forecast by the two plaintiffs. Although the residing judge, who had flown in from California for the trial ruled in favor of the United States National Weather Service, Charlie’s effort was noble and professional in defending the right of the local community and its indigenous language. She was more than willing to help Hawai‘i Creole speakers in their cause to maintain their language and social identity.
As the example above illustrates, Charlie was a special person who fought relentlessly for social justice and linguistic equality in Hawai‘i. When I went to her funeral and saw multitudes of people who were mourning her loss and celebrating her life at the same time, I felt a sense of great loss for myself. While I was saddened by her untimely and much too early departure from this world, I was also struck by the grief that I had just lost an irreplaceable teacher and a true friend to the local community.

Jim Yoshioka. Although Charlene Sato was only with us for far too brief a time, she has nevertheless left an indelible mark on “education” in two senses. In the most general sense, she has educated both the public and scholars alike about pidgins, creoles, the history and melding of different languages in Hawai‘i, the specific niche that Hawaiian Creole English (HCE) fills, its often testy relationship with “Standard English,” the problems and process of decreolization, language attitudes, the dangers of linguistic imperialism, and so on. Her numerous articles in sociolinguistics have served both to expand and enlighten the field and put particular focus on the linguistic battles played out in the Hawaiian courtrooms, policy boards, classrooms, and media for the soul of HCE.

She was a fearless fighter in all of these arenas, and surely, it is through the tireless work of Charlene Sato and others like her that educational policy in Hawai‘i has begun to slowly change. This is her impact on education in the most specific sense. The war is far from over, however, as she points out in her articles represented here, but it is clear that they were major strikes to help elucidate and elevate the status of HCE in society and the schools.

The relationship between schooling and language has an interesting history in Hawai‘i (as delineated in her two articles). Often schools during the plantation era were monolingual and somewhat separatist, reserved for those in power or seeking power or for specific ethnic communities to help preserve the culture. Such schools did not generally hinder the development of HCE, which flourished outside the school in the plantations as a bridge for communication for working immigrants and the native language for their children. Now, that the plantations days have ebbed and English (in its various forms) has emerged as the dominant language (due to power upheavals, changes in government, world events...the list goes on) in society and the schools, the “Standard English” from the outside (the tie to power and upward mobility) and HCE (the marker of local identity) have now entered into an uneasy dance with each other, most of the time with Standard English stepping all over HCE’s toes and HCE bearing with it.

DOE (Department of Education) policy about what to do with HCE has paid lip service to HCE at best and been contradictory and ineffective at worst. It is almost amazing to see how slowly the DOE bureaucratic machine turns even though the public and even the State Legislature (for once!) have poured out support for HCE, encouraged its use, and petitioned for its elevation and survival, as chronicled in Charlene Sato’s
articles. It fills me with anger and frustration, but perhaps that is what she intended. I believe this is why she wrote these articles—to tell Hawai‘i, “Hey! HCE is your native (and mine)! We need to reexamine our attitudes. What do we want for our children in the schools and for our future. If we need to fight, let us do so, but armed and educated with linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge!” And she led the fight... and it is up to us to remember and continue it!

NOTE
1 Sato notes that most studies assume De Camp’s (1971) creole continuum model.

References

Kayleigh Garman, Steve Ko, and Jim Yoshioka
Department of ESL
1890 East-West Road
University of Hawai‘i
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96822

e-mail: kayleigh@hawaii.edu
e-mail: kos@hawaii.edu
e-mail: jkyosh@hawaii.edu