EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND CULTURE IN HAWAII

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Introduction

The title suggests an incongruity. The living presence of a large number of European languages in Hawaii appears to belie any substance inherent in this suggestion. Nonetheless, the question of incongruity is posed in all seriousness since it would seem to the casual observer that the middle of the Pacific Ocean is indeed a curious place to find a mini-Europe. And not only a contemporary mini-Europe, but also impressive vestiges of an older and more ancient Europe in all its classical glory are readily uncovered without much effort.

Scientists, historians, and poets have most effectively described the probable origin of our islands and have depicted the mysterious and clearly magnificent manner in which the transformation from barren lava to a land with a complex of extraordinary features took place. Over the centuries the seas and the winds brought the flora and fauna; the same sea and winds brought to these shores the various groups of people who are still here today, arriving at different periods of time under differing circumstances. These people, wherever they came from, brought with them their most prized possession, their ability to communicate with one another in their native language, and planted their language here where it, together with its speakers, thrived and was perpetuated.

Linguistically this mid-Pacific archipelago has the unique co-attributes of convergence and divergence. Hawaii, as the saying goes, is where East meets West—where a convergence of opposite is manifest. A stroll down the street, through a given area, or across the campus would bear this out. Yet, when one leaves Hawaii traveling in a westerly direction the more Eastern the culture and people are; conversely if one travels from here in an easterly direction the more Western are the culture and people. Curiously this anomaly functions as a unifying force which assumes the function of a motif in the language setting and in the social setting. Converging polarity resulting in significant divergence is one of the ramifications of the history of Hawaii.

Products and By-products

One of the products of the historical events in Hawaii is a semi- or quasi-colonial situation similar to that in Iceland, for example. The significance of this lies in numerous areas, among them in the development of an offshoot of a language, independent of its development in the 'mother country,' that some would call 'old fashioned' or 'provincial.' For European languages this situation is perhaps less significant than for some of the Asian languages perhaps, but is nonetheless important, especially in the area of lexicography.

Creoles, pidgins, and the like, have come into being and enjoy much use. They are presently the object of intensive linguistic investigation. Their very being has bearing on the language situation in the classroom from the elementary through the university.

How one group relates to another in this convergence of people; and the degree of empathy, conscious or subconscious, there may be among the ethnic groups is to some extent more the concern of sociologists and anthropologists than of the language teacher. But every society and social group has a face, presents a self-depicting tapestry, and the language teacher therefore needs to look at the textural fabrication to come to an understanding of the total image.

Bilingualism and trilingualism are not uncommon, engendering an interesting chain of interrelated happenings which might be called linguistic confrontation, jostling, adjustment, adaptation, acceptance, and, to complete the circle, reciprocity. The colloquial English of the community, for example, includes many lexical items from the various languages established in the State. This is not the same as a creole or pidgin; this is more on the order of an infusion of available terms and words from one language becoming common to many or all.
Of course, the most significant result of converging cultures in Hawaii is awareness of language per se. The magic word aloha enjoys a semantic range and interpretation of considerable scope similar to that of agape in the Christian tradition. It reflects an attitude, a behavior pattern, a set of mores, and an interweaving of fibers which in their totality represent a special kind of people who are the living sources of a wonderful multiplicity of linguistic and cultural realities. Thus without specifying the processes leading up to the current state of affairs, we can demonstrate the existence of a language situation which is not unique nor unparalleled, but which is fascinating on a popular level and fruitful to the linguistic investigator, the teacher of language, and the transmitter of culture through language.

Any development nationally also affects Hawaii. The national awakening of interest in minority and ethnic groups has focused on various ethnic communities and made possible night school classes in the Portuguese language for people with varying degrees of facility in the language even in an area as remote as Hana, Maui. Language as Education, Language in Education

The teacher in the language classroom here probably has certain advantages over his counterpart in many sections of the mainland United States. The teaching of pronunciation deserves particular emphasis. The situation is not without difficulties and obstacles, but if one is familiar with the local language 'scene' one can readily build on the fact that the so-called Latin vowels abound in Hawaii and are already familiar to local students. Those familiar with Japanese have already heard and used the /ts/ cluster in the initial position. This presents an obvious teaching advantage in the German and Russian classrooms. There is a willingness to try to pronounce in spite of a natural reticence to perform in front of others. Nonetheless, the student already knows that different languages have different sounds, and meaning can be obscured by attempting sound substitution. This insight stems in part from the acceptance of language as a practical reality rather than an educational abstraction. Such insight may have little to do with motivation, but it can contribute to student satisfaction in the successful completion of an important task. Oftimes less time needs to be spent on problems of pronunciation, allowing additional time in other areas.

Off-campus classroom and language laboratory are often realized. When Russian scientific expeditions dock in Honolulu harbor there is suddenly a floating language laboratory. The students may not all be well-versed in scientific Russian, but they are able to communicate with the Russians in their tongue and the results are mutually delightful and rewarding. Ships from other lands put into port also, and usually become resource centers for both language and culture. There is generally a reciprocal arrangement and informal gatherings are held on ship and at the University.

The teacher of European languages shares in some of the difficulties faced by many of his colleagues on the Mainland who are away from language communities. It is possible that our insular geographical situation lends more punch to this problem. Can one 'import' France and French or Germany and German, and at the same time avoid a certain artificiality? To a large extent the answer is a qualified 'yes!' There are problems, however, as one might expect. Take Germany for example. Many people are active in things German. They participate in some special German radio program or German festivals, or get involved with occasional dramatic groups with local support or visiting scholars who will speak to student and faculty groups. However, there is a considerable distance between Hawaii and Germany which cannot be discounted. This semi-isolation is a strong argument for support from various foreign governments for teaching materials and aids. Insularity can in part be its own cure in that it tends to cause the language 'community' to become more tightly-knit than elsewhere, functioning as a source of solidarity, spawning common linguistic and cultural causes upon which one can draw for resource material.

The goals stated and implied here are both centrifugal and centripetal. An attempt is made to create a place for language in our system of education and at the same time to consider language as education or as a means of educating beyond itself. As a community of teachers of language, European languages specifically, our aim is to tempt the student to get outside of his self—through exposure to another language and learning it to whatever degree of proficiency desired. This is a learning experience, a multi-faceted centrifugal and centripetal experience with bountiful rewards for the individual. There is
awareness of how others communicate verbally and non-verbally. There is awareness of how
others view the world around them. For green is
not always the same as green. The old riddle 'What
is red when it is green?' can be used to illustrate
meaning differences; the Russians, for instance,
do not necessarily recognize the wrist as a sepa­
rate entity since they designate arm and hand
with one word.

Naturally one can read about these approaches
to life and to the viewing of reality and interpre­
tation of abstractions. This is, however, not the
same as learning by doing; to watch an artist
paint is not the same experience as learning to
paint and to express oneself artistically.

Beyond Language Skills

As a compliment to language programs which
introduce the student to the language proper,
guide him through its intricacies and help him
to experience the thrill of comprehension and
self-expression, we are concerned with aspects
of contemporary culture and of the culture and
influences of times gone by. Outside of the lan­
guage classes we endeavor to offer a panoramic
view of the tradition of the Europeans in the Pa­
cific. This is usually attempted in the form of
course-work and deals with aspects of European
culture which are perhaps less intensively treated
at other universities and colleges, but which none­
theless are part and parcel of the Western, and
to some extent Eastern, aspect of our local com­
plexion.

The French have long been in the Pacific and
we examine their presence, especially in Tahiti,
in relation to French literature, art, culture and
civilization. In doing so attention is paid in par­
ticular to the works of Bougainville, Diderot, Vol­
taire, Pierre Loti and Paul Gauguin. Allied is the
examination of Spanish and Portuguese expan­
sion to the Pacific and their cultural heritage. The
Iberian Asian and Pacific world, which has in­
cluded parts of India, Malaysia, Indonesia, as well
as the Philippines in the past four centuries, is
demanding attention because of the rich Spanish
and Portuguese heritage. One can learn to ap­
preciate the role of these languages in East-West
relations and to comprehend the phenomena of
colonialism and nationalism as exemplified in
epics, fictionalized travelogues, and in 19th and
20th exoticism. Moreover, the German influence
and German traditions in Western Samoa, the
Marshall Islands, New Guinea and Hawaii are
worthy of careful examination. Detailed attention
is given to the literary, scholarly, and musical
contributions of the Germans in this area, espe­
cially their cultural impact on the islands of the
Pacific and on the reflexes of Polynesia mirrored
in Germany proper. The Russians, the Dutch, and
other groups are also subjects of research.

The essays in this issue deal with the ongoing
programs, research and teaching in the Depart­
ment of European Languages and Literature as
well as with the important contributions of the
language laboratory. Clearly only specific aspects
can be dealt with; the subject in its totality is too
vast for proper treatment. Much of what is pre­
sented serves as in-depth reviews of present re­
search, and a reassessment of the current status
of the teaching of European languages, a review
of goals, which may lead, perhaps, to a more re­
fined understanding of the interrelationships of
language, literature, and culture, real and ideal;
and the students' part in these developments.

The future will be exciting as we reach out to
continue the tradition of Europe in the Pacific in
the best possible ways. The doors to understand­
ing our Western roots and European civilization
here will be more easily opened through vital
language study and language-related topics.