Creoles and Minority Dialects in Education: An Update[1]

Jeff Siegel
University of New England (Australia) and University of Hawai'i

This paper renews the call for greater interest in applied work to deal with the obstacles faced in formal education by speakers of creoles (such as Hawai'i Creole and Jamaican Creole) and minority dialects (such as African American English). It starts off with an update on developments in the use of these vernacular languages in educational contexts since 1998, focusing on educational programmes, publications and research by linguists and educators. It goes on to discuss some of the research and public awareness efforts needed to help the speakers of these vernacular varieties, with examples given from Hawai'i.

> Pidgin ranks right up there with ebonics. It's broken English. And when something is broken, you fix it. (*Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 12/10/99)

> For the benefit of Hawai'i children, pidgin should become a thing of the past . . . There are some things that deserve to die. (*Honolulu Advertiser*, 9/4/02)

These quotations from letters to the editor reflect the common view that speaking a creole language – in this case, Hawai'i Creole, locally called 'Pidgin' – is detrimental to students' progress in formal education. Such views have also been held by education department officials, as indicated by the following words spoken by Mitsugi Nakashima, Chairman of the Hawai'i State Board of Education:

> 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. (*Honolulu Advertiser*, 29/9/99)

The statement was in reaction to the 1999 National Assessment of Educational Progress writing assessment, where only 15% of eighth graders from the state scored at or above proficient compared with 24% nationally. So, once again poor educational results were blamed not on misguided educational policies or underfunded public schools, but on the local creole language. And once again the solution was to ban the creole language from the classroom, and by implication, from the entire educational process.

It is true that speakers of creole languages, such as Jamaican Creole and St Lucian Creole French in the Caribbean, and minority dialects such as Aus-

tralian Aboriginal English and African American English, need to learn the 'standard' variety if they are to succeed in formal education. It is also true that, on the whole, speakers of these vernacular varieties do not do well in the formal education system. For example, in the Commonwealth Caribbean, only a very small percentage of students reach the level needed to attend secondary school and even a smaller percentage of those pass the Caribbean Examinations Council examinations in English (Craig, 2001: 72). In the USA, in the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment, 63% of African American fourth graders were reading below the basic level compared to 27% of their white counterparts (Green, 2002: 228). As Winford (2003: 34) observes, 'Everyone knows that the methods currently used to teach reading, writing and language arts to African American children are an abysmal failure.'

Unlike education officials in Hawai'i and elsewhere, many linguists, myself included, do not believe that this failure is a result of creoles or minority dialects being allowed in the classroom. Rather, it is the result of their being excluded from the classroom and from the educational process in general. An earlier review of the use of creoles and minority dialects in formal education through 1998 (Siegel, 1999a) described the obstacles faced by speakers of these vernacular varieties when the 'standard' is the only accepted form of language. These obstacles include: (1) negative attitudes of teachers towards students whose language differs markedly from the standard, (2) negative self-image of students because of denigration of their language and culture, (3) repression of self-expression because of the requirement to use an unfamiliar form of language, and (4) difficulty of acquiring literacy and other skills in a second language or dialect. In this article, I renew the call for greater interest in applied work to deal with these obstacles. To start off, I give an update on developments in the use of creoles and minority dialects in education since 1998, focusing on educational programmes, publications and research by linguists and educators. Then I discuss some of the research and public awareness efforts I think are needed to help the speakers of these vernacular varieties.

Educational Programmes

It would seem logical that the obstacles mentioned above could be overcome if teachers recognised creoles and minority dialects as legitimate forms of language, if children were allowed to use their own language to express themselves until they learned the standard, and if they learned to read in a more familiar language or dialect. But a different type of logic seems to reign: the vernacular is seen as the greatest barrier to the acquisition of the standard, which is the key to academic and economic success, and therefore the vernacular must be avoided at all costs.

Because of this logic, there are very few formal educational programmes that actually make use of vernacular varieties. To my knowledge, only three creoles in four countries or territories are officially used in a nationwide instrumental programme – that is, as the medium of instruction in primary schools for teaching literacy and content subjects such as mathematics (Siegel, 1999a). These are Seselwa in the Seychelles (Bollée, 1993; Mahoune, 2000), Haitian Creole

in Haiti (Howe, 1993), and Papiamentu in the Netherlands Antilles (Appel & Verhoeven, 1994; Dijkhoff, 1993) and Aruba (Ferrier, n.d.).

Other creoles have a more limited role in formal education. Tok Pisin is widely used in instrumental programmes in some areas of Papua New Guinea, where the local community chooses the language of instruction for the first three years of primary school (Ray, 1996; Wiruk, 2000). In the USA, there appear to be some bilingual programmes still running in Florida and New York that use Haitian Creole (Zéphir, 1997). Small-scale experimental instrumental programmes are being carried out with the local creole on Guadeloupe (Faure, 2000) and on San Andres Island (Morren, 2001).

But since 1998, some things have gone backwards in this area. The Kriol-English bilingual programme in Barunga, Australia – one of the longest running instrumental programmes, and one with proven effectiveness (Murtagh, 1982) – was cut by the Northern Territory government in 2000. The horrific civil war in Sierra Leone has led to the end of a pilot project using Krio as a language of education in some schools. The overturning of the Massachusetts Bilingual Education law in 2003 resulted in the scrapping of bilingual programmes using Cape Verde Creole (de Jong-Lambert, 2003).

However, the instrumental use of creoles is still more frequent in non-formal programmes run by government or by non-government organisations (NGOs) teaching initial literacy to preschool children and to adults – for example, in Haiti (U.S. Library of Congress, n.d.), The Seychelles (Mahoune, 2000), Mauritius (UNESCO, 2003) and Melanesia (Siegel, 1996). Adult literacy in Haitian Creole has also been taught in Florida in the USA (Dade County Public Schools, 2001), and in other French-lexified Caribbean creoles in the United Kingdom (Nwenmely, 1996).

I am not aware of any current instrumental programmes – either formal or non-formal – for speakers of minority dialects. The closest to such a programme in the past was the use of 'dialect readers' (Rickford & Rickford, 1995), such as those used in the *Bridge* programme in the 1970s (Simpkins *et al.*, 1977).

Another way of using vernaculars in the educational process is through accommodation programmes. These accept the use of the students' home language in the classroom in telling stories and writing, or in the study of literature or music lyrics in the vernacular. In the Commonwealth Caribbean, there has been some accommodation to the use of creole varieties in creative writing and the study of literature. Christie (2003: 46) reports that according to the recent Reform of Secondary Education in Jamaica, 'students should be allowed to express themselves freely, employing whatever variety makes them comfortable in the classroom and outside'. With regard to minority dialects, in Western Australia, some government-sponsored primary school programmes still accommodate Aboriginal English by using children's own stories and avoiding correction of their speech. In the USA, however, it is difficult to find an officially supported accommodation programme for speakers of African American English, although some individual examples are reported in the literature (e.g. Baker, 2002).

Finally, awareness programmes incorporate accommodation (as just described) as well as two other components. In the sociolinguistic component, students learn about different varieties of language, such as creoles and social and regional dialects, and about how one particular variety becomes accepted

as the 'standard'. In the contrastive component, students examine the rule-governed phonological, morphosyntactic and pragmatic characteristics of their own varieties compared to the standard. This is sometimes called contrastive analysis (Rickford, 1999, 2002; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 1998). Although one of the original awareness programmes for creoles, the Afro-Caribbean Language and Literacy Project in London, is no longer running, others described earlier (Siegel, 1999a, 2002) are still going strong. These include the Caribbean Academic Programme in Evanston, Illinois (Fischer, 1992), and FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools) in Northern Australia (Berry & Hudson, 1997; Catholic Education Office, 1994). With regard to African American English (AAE), the Bidialectal Communication Programme is still running in DeKalb county, Georgia (Harris-Wright, 1999), as is the Academic English Mastery Programme (AEMP) in Los Angeles (LeMoine, 2001). Both of these programmes emphasise a contrastive approach, and the AEMP also includes a sociolinguistic component.

There have also been some new developments with regard to awareness programmes. The CAPE syllabus 'Communication Studies' in Jamaican high schools 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 Creole vernaculars as compared to English (Kouwenberg, 2002). In Western Australia, the 'Two-way English' programme for students who speak Aboriginal English has been further developed (Malcolm *et al.*, 1999). This programme recognises and explores cultural and linguistic differences as a rich educational opportunity for both teachers and students. A useful resource kit, including videos and information booklets about Aboriginal English, has been produced for classroom use (Cahill, 2000; Western Australia Department of Education, 2002). Resources for teachers of creole-speaking students that have appeared since 1998 include Craig's (1999) book containing a comprehensive programme for 'teaching English to speakers of a related vernacular', Christie's (2003) book on language and education in Jamaica, and Sakoda and Siegel's (2003) grammar of Hawai'i Creole for teachers and students.

Publications and Research

A comprehensive bibliography on creoles, AAE and other vernaculars in education has been published by Rickford *et al.* (2004). The vast majority of post-1998 entries are concerned with AAE Books with chapters discussing general issues include those by Baugh (1999, 2000), Green (2002), Morgan (2002), Rickford and Rickford (2000), Smitherman (2000) and Wolfram *et al.* (1999). Volumes with relevant chapters or articles include those edited by Adger *et al.* (1999), Delpit and Dowdy (2002), Lanehart (2001), Perry and Delpit (1998) and Wassink and Curzan (2004).

A significant amount of research has been conducted on the cognitive dimensions of Aboriginal English and their relevance to educational issues – for example, Malcolm and Sharifian (2002), Sharifian *et al.* (2004) and Sharifian (2005).

In contrast, only a few publications discussing creoles in education in general have appeared since 1998. These include chapters in books written by Christie (2003), Hazaël-Massieux (1999) and Nero (2001), and edited by Christie (2001).

A survey article on approaches to teaching the standard variety to speakers of creole languages was published by Simmons-McDonald (2004).

These publications and others discuss some specific issues regarding the role of vernaculars in education: (1) the question of legitimacy, (2) use in education, and (3) the need for special teaching approaches. I will discuss each of these and some of the controversies involved.

Legitimacy

Many linguists and educationists have pointed out that constant correction of students' vernacular is 'very ineffective and counterproductive' (Green, 2002: 234). There is also general agreement that stigmatisation of the students' home language in the classroom is one reason for school failure (e.g. Christie, 2003: 40). Thus, many authors call for an end to the denigration of the vernacular (e.g. Baugh, 2001, Wyatt, 2001) and instead, for its validation in the educational process as a legitimate form of language (e.g. Dowdy, 2002; Wynne, 2002). Smitherman (2002: 172) refers to unpublished research done in the 1980s demonstrating 'that Blacks who were conscious of their own language as a legitimate system were more receptive to learning the language of wider communication [i.e. standard English]'.

Use

There is less agreement, however, about whether vernaculars should have a role in formal education. One prominent view in the wider community is that children will learn the standard variety if they are immersed in it (and nothing else) in the school environment (as reported for Jamaica by Christie, 2003: 41). McWhorter (1998: 242) agrees, saying that 'people learn speech varieties best by immersion', and pointing to successful language learning by English speakers in French immersion programmes in Canada and by immigrants who go to English-medium schools in the USA. With regard to vernaculars, he refers to places like Stuttgart, where students speaking the local dialect, Schwäbisch, learn standard German through immersion in it.

However, there are several problems with these arguments. First of all, the second language (L2) immersion programmes in Canada are actually bilingual programmes. Teachers are bilingual and the content in the L2 is modified to make it more understandable to students. After the first few grades, there is a strong emphasis on development of the first language (L1) and instruction is in both languages (see García, 1997). This certainly does not happen in educational programmes for students speaking AAE or most creoles. Furthermore, it has been found that genuine L2 immersion programmes are effective only for learners from dominant, majority language groups, whose L1 is valued and supported by society in general (Auerbach, 1995: 25) – again not the normal case for speakers of AAE and creoles.

With regard to so-called immersion programmes for immigrants, these are really 'submersion' programmes – 'sink or swim' programmes where 'linguistic differences are not overtly recognised in the curriculum' (García, 1997: 411). Research has shown that such programmes have negative effects on many children (Cummins, 1988: 161). Of course, it is this type of programme which is generally the rule for speakers of vernacular varieties, and many studies have

shown such immersion (really submersion) simply does not work with regard to AAE-speaking or Caribbean English Creole-speaking students acquiring standard English (Craig, 2001; Rickford & Rickford, 2000: 179).

Finally, the teaching situation in Stuttgart is quite different from what is normally found in the USA or the Caribbean. Children are allowed to speak in their vernacular dialect in the classroom and not pushed to speak standard German (Fishman & Lueders-Salmon, 1972).

Another reason for opposition to use of the vernacular in formal education is the common view that it interferes with the acquisition of the standard. Therefore, the assumption is that the use of the vernacular in the classroom will exacerbate this interference (or negative transfer). However, an examination of educational results in contexts where the vernaculars are actually used in the educational process (Siegel, 1999b) shows that this assumption is not founded. In fact, the research findings indicate that using students' vernaculars in educational contexts may actually help them to acquire the standard and improve academic performance in general.

The few research studies that have been done in this area since 1998 back up these findings. Blake and Van Sickle (2001) and Van Sickle *et al.* (2002) describe a curriculum that takes students' knowledge and experience into account, and allows them to express themselves in their own language – here, Gullah. This resulted in improved ability to switch to standard English and greater academic achievement, particularly in science and mathematics. Bryan (2001, 2002) relates the effectiveness of using a bilingual approach in Jamaican schools to engage students in the lesson and move them towards the target standard variety. Henry (2000) describes the use of Creole alongside standard English at a Saturday Supplementary School in London attended largely by students of African and Caribbean origin. The author notes this increased students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

Special approaches

Since 1998 there have been more calls for curricular reform to incorporate creoles and minority dialects into the formal educational process – not only for pedagogical reasons but also as a matter of equality and justice (Zéphir, 1999). Many writers have pointed out the need for special programmes for speakers of creoles and minority dialects, such as those described above. For example, Christie (2003), Craig (2001), Green (2002), Rickford (1999, 2002), Pollard (2002) and Simmons-McDonald (2001) all discuss the advantages of a contrastive approach to help students recognise the structural (and functional) differences between the vernacular and the standard. Wolfram (1999, 2001) and Wolfram *et al*. (1999) call for the use of 'dialect awareness' for speakers of AAE, utilising the sociolinguistic and contrastive components of the awareness programmes described above, and recognising the importance of the variety to ethnic identity. Christie (2003) explores the possibility of an instrumental programme in Jamaica, teaching initial literacy in the children's creole, as is done in other countries with Haitian Creole, Seselwa and Papiamentu. Green (2002), Rickford (1999) and Simpkins (2002) also return to the idea of using reading materials, or 'dialect readers', in AAE, although recognising the complicated issues of community acceptance of such materials.

However, again, there is not total agreement with these views. McWhorter (1998: 208–11) argues that compared to other dialects – such as Schwäbisch, colloquial Finnish and Scottish English – AAE is a lot more similar to the respective standard variety. He asserts that if speakers of these dialects don't need special programmes to help them learn the standard, why should speakers of AAE?

This question of similarity is of course highly debatable. Scholars such as Palacas (2001) have illustrated substantial typological differences between AAE and standard English, showing that 'an unbridgeable chasm separates the grammatical systems of these two languages' (p. 344). He also observes (p. 349): 'The difficulty for student and teacher is not in a confusion that comes from the fact that the two language varieties are very similar, but a confusion from the fact that they are so very different yet *seem* so very similar' [emphasis in original]. In one study, Pandey (2000) used the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) to gauge the standard English proficiency of a group of AAE-speaking pre-college and first-year college students who were raised in the inner city and were basically monodialectal. She found that their performance on the test was similar to that of low level ESL/EFL students.

But even if we accept the view that AAE and standard English are very similar, that still is not a convincing argument against the use of the vernacular in the educational process. It is well known that when two varieties are similar, the subtle differences cause special learning difficulties. For example, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998: 287) observe:

> When two systems are highly similar, with minor differences, it is sometimes difficult to keep the systems apart . . . In some ways, it may be easier to work with language systems that are drastically different, since the temptation to merge overlapping structures and ignore relatively minor differences is not as great.

However, McWhorter (1998: 209) disagrees with the idea that similarity may be a problem, saying that 'we see hundreds of cases around the world where schoolchildren sail over just this type of narrow dialect gap'. In support of this statement, he says that there is no problem for children speaking Canadian French learning standard French and similarly for rural Southern white children in the USA learning standard English. However, in contrast to these assertions (which are not backed up by any evidence), there are many reports of problems arising from similarities between the vernacular and the standard. For example, Cheshire (1982: 55) mentions difficulties caused by minority dialect-speaking children in British schools not being aware 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'. Similarly in the Netherlands, Van den Hoogen and Kuijper (1992: 223) indicate that speakers of regional dialects learning standard Dutch often cannot detect errors in their speech caused by linguistic differences between the varieties.

This lack of awareness of differences, according to some scholars, may be one cause of the high degree of interference between similar varieties (e.g. Ellis, 1994: 102; Van den Hoogen & Kuijper, 1992: 223). Siegel (1999b) concludes that one benefit of using students' vernaculars in educational contexts is that by

looking at features of their own varieties, students are more likely to notice features of the standard that are different. This not only increases their perceptions of language distance, but also helps them to acquire the procedural knowledge needed to build a separate mental representation of the standard – factors that reduce interference rather than promote it.

Research results published since 1998 provide additional evidence that use of AAE in the classroom, especially in contrastive analysis, has positive effects. Rickford (2002: 37–8) presents figures showing that from 1995 to 1997, students involved in the DeKalb Bidialectal Communication Programme, mentioned above, made positive gains from 6.7% to 12.8% each year in reading composite scores (based on pre-tests and post-tests). In contrast, students in control groups, who were not involved in the programme and used only standard English in the classroom, made a gain of 5.2% in one year but losses in two other years.

A comprehensive evaluation of the Los Angeles School District's Academic English Mastery Programme (AEMP), also mentioned above, was conducted in 1998–99 (Maddahian & Sandamela, 2000). The evaluation again had a pre-test/post-test design, here using the Language Assessment Writing Test. Results showed 'a statistically significant and educationally meaningful difference between experimental and control groups' with the AEMP programme participants out-performing those who did not participate in the programme (p. vii). The researchers concluded that the AEMP is 'an effective programme in improving academic use of English language for speakers of non-mainstream English language' (p. vii) and recommended that the programme be continued and expanded.

Two experimental studies on the use of AAE in the classroom have also appeared. Fogel and Ehri (2000) compared the effectiveness of three instructional treatments on improving the standard English writing of groups of AAE-speaking 3rd and 4th grade students, targeting six syntactic features which differ in the two varieties. They found that the most effective treatment was instruction which included guided practice in translating sentences from AAE into standard English and then providing corrective feedback – a technique often used in the contrastive approach.

Finally, in the research involving the group of AAE-speaking pre-college and first-year college students mentioned earlier, Pandey (2000) studied the effectiveness of a six week experimental programme using what she called 'the contrastive analytic approach' to teach standard English as a second dialect. This approach had both the contrastive and the sociolinguistic components of an awareness programme. Pandey found that the approach led to more relaxed attitudes towards learning, increased bidialectal awareness and marked improvement in performance on TOEFL tests.

Even though creoles are usually more distant from the standard than minority dialects such as AAE, there are still problems caused by similarity. Back in the 1960s, Craig (1966: 58) noted 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' because of similarities between the varieties. This view has been reiterated by Simmons-McDonald (2001: 40) who observes that 'learners (and in some cases teachers) have difficulty in determining the differences in some grammatical structures of the varieties'. Craig (1966, 1976,

1983) also pointed out that in situations where standard English is the target for speakers of vernaculars such as Caribbean creoles, learners already recognise and produce some aspects of it as part of their repertoires. As a result, in addition to the other problems of separation, speakers of vernacular varieties are often under the illusion that they already know the standard. This has also been pointed out by Fischer (1992) and Nero (1997a, 1997b) with regard to Caribbean immigrants in the USA.

Research showing the effectiveness of using a contrastive approach with creole languages and the standard has been summarised previously (Siegel, 1999a, 1999b, 2002). The only post-1998 research that I am aware of is an experimental study of the contrastive approach carried out over 13 weeks in a grade 3 classroom in Belize, reported on by Decker (2000). Four grammatical areas were identified which differ in Belize Kriol and standard English. 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 storytelling, writing and translation activities using these features in both languages. Although there were some methodological problems with the study, 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.

It seems, then, that one reason for the success of awareness programmes with a contrastive component is that they help students separate the vernacular from the standard, no matter how similar or different they are.

Evidence up to 1998 of the effectiveness of teaching literacy in creole languages and of instrumental programmes in general has also been reported. There have been some more recent reports and studies as well. The first primary school in the Netherlands Antilles with Papiamentu as the language of instruction, the Kolegio Erasmo, added a four year high school in 1997, Skol Avansá Integrá. Arion (2003: 1) reports: 'Passes of the High School are high and promising (82% in 2001; 95.2% in 2002) compared to the national average score of around 70%'. An experimental study was conducted in St Lucia by Simmons-McDonald (2002, 2004). Three grade 5 and 6 children reading at the beginning level were taught literacy in Kwéyòl along with English. The results were that at the end of the study, after only three terms, all three children had not only learned to read Kwéyòl, but also increased their reading levels in standard English – two to grade 1 level, and one to grade 3 level. Simmons-McDonald concludes (2002: 1): 'The study found a positive transfer of reading abilities from the native to the second language'. Regarding the experimental instrumental programme on San Andres Island, mentioned above, Morren (2004) presents the preliminary results of a diagnostic reading inventory in the local creole, administered to children after they completed first grade. These indicate that the programme has been successful in teaching the various skills needed to become a successful reader.

Although the benefit of teaching initial literacy in the first language is widely recognised, the idea of teaching it in the first dialect is far more controversial. For example, in opposition to those promoting the use of AAE in dialect readers, McWhorter (1998, 2000) claims that there is no conclusive evidence that

children learn better when their vernacular is used to teach reading (which he calls the 'bridging approach'). He writes that there are only seven publications on research studies that appear to present evidence for positive effects of the bridging approach (1998: 218–20). Two of these were done in Scandinavia using reading materials in a regional dialect (Bull, 1990; Österberg, 1961). McWhorter says these are not relevant because the dialects and the standards in question are much more different than AAE and standard English are. He also dismisses studies done by Piestrup (1973) and Taylor (1989), asserting that they are not concerned with the use of the bridging approach to teach initial literacy. (See Rickford, 1999 for a description of these studies.) That leaves three articles on the use of dialect readers for AAE-speaking students. One of these, by Rickford and Rickford (1995), presented results of some preliminary studies, which McWhorter says were inconclusive. Another was a study by Leaverton (1973) which had methodological problems. That leaves only Simpkins and Simpkins (1981), which showed very positive results from the use of the *Bridge* series readers.[2]

McWhorter then refers to nine studies which he says test the use of AAE in teaching reading. He claims that these studies show that 'dialect readers, and contrastive analysis had *no effect* on African-American students' reading scores' (1998: 220, emphasis in original). However, a close examination of these studies shows several shortcomings. First, they all were short-term experimental studies in contrast to Simpkins & Simpkins' (1981) longitudinal study. Second, in at least six of them (Nolen, 1972; Marwit & Neumann, 1974; Mathewson, 1973; Schaaf, 1971; Simons & Johnson, 1974; Sims, 1972), the children were already familiar with reading in standard English but not in AAE. So the results were most probably influenced by the factors of the novelty and apparent inappropriateness of the dialect materials to the students. In fact, the authors of four out of these six studies pointed this out themselves.[3] Two of these six studies (Schaaf, 1971; Sims, 1972) had methodological problems as well: a small sample size and failure to equate texts (mentioned by Simons & Johnson, 1974: 340).

The three remaining studies did not really address the question of the effectiveness of using the vernacular to teach reading. Melmed (1971) tested the assumption that AAE interferes with reading standard English. He found no difference in reading between African-American and white groups, but used only standard English reading materials.[4] Torrey (1971) tested whether or not preliminary training in a feature of standard English helped to improve reading comprehension in the standard. Simons (1974) examined the hypothesis that African American children can read standard English words that are closer to their AAE pronunciation better than words that are further away – e.g. *coal* vs. *cold.* Thus, the evidence does not really lead to the conclusion that the use of AAE or any other vernacular in teaching reading is ineffective.

In summary, while there has not been a great deal of research, all the studies that specifically examine the use of creoles and other vernaculars in the educational process demonstrate positive benefits, such as increased motivation and improvements in use of the standard variety and in general academic performance. No study that I have found describes either negligible or negative effects.

A Greater Role for Applied Linguistics

Despite these research results, however, the *status quo* largely remains; creoles and minority dialects continue to be excluded from the classroom and speakers of these varieties continue to be disadvantaged.

There have been many calls for linguists (especially creolists) to deal with this disadvantage by getting involved in more applied rather than theoretical work (e.g. Alleyne, 1994; Rickford, 1997; and most recently DeGraff, 2001, 2003). Siegel (1999a, 2002) called for a greater role for applied linguistics in two major areas regarding creoles and minority dialects: research and public awareness. Here I would like to reiterate that call.

Research

As shown earlier, there has not been much research on the use of creoles and other vernaculars in education and a lot more is needed – especially evaluations of educational programmes that do make use of these varieties. Part of the problem is that research funding in this area is not readily available, at least not in the USA. Creole languages do not come under any special category of funding from the National Science Foundation or other government agency. And even with all the talk about the 'achievement gap' affecting African Americans, and the well-known relationship between language and school success, research on the role of AAE and education is not a priority. In fact, since the Ebonics debate in the late 1990s, research in this area may be seen as too controversial to fund, or blocked by ignorance about the issues involved.[5]

Leaving funding problems aside, associations dealing with vernacular languages, such as the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics and the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, could also do more to promote research in applied areas. This could be done by having more special sessions on educational issues at conferences and by encouraging publications in this area – for example, with a special journal issue on creoles and dialects in education.

Public awareness

For more than 40 years now, sociolinguists have been writing about language variation and saying that creoles and minority dialects are valid, rule-governed varieties of language, and in no way intrinsically inferior to other varieties.

But these 'facts' have not filtered down to many educators and administrators, or to the general public. One of my favourite quotations sums it up: 'Only before God and linguists are all languages equal' (Mackey, 1978: 7). Still prevalent in modern society are both the 'standard language ideology' (Lippi-Green, 1997; Winford, 2003) that promotes the superiority of one form of language, and the ideology of monolingualism (Silverstein, 1996; Wiley & Lukes, 1996) that marginalises bilingualism and bidialectalism. So, for example, many people in Hawai'i still think of the local creole, 'Pidgin', as 'bad English' and therefore an obstacle to academic and economic success. As one letter writer expressed it: 'Any child today who grows up speaking pidgin English will never get a good job and never be able to afford a house' (*Honolulu Advertiser,* 6/10/99). So it seems that if linguists want educators to bring in new approaches towards language use that will really

benefit their students, they will need to first change the entrenched attitudes of teachers and the general public (as pointed out by Morgan, 2002: 140).

Siegel (1999a: 525) recommended some actions that could be taken to make the wider public aware of findings in sociolinguistics. Here I describe some efforts along these lines that have been going on in Hawai'i over the past few years.

First, with the help of a grant from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the Language Varieties website was established in 1999 (www.une.edu.au/langnet). This site is meant to provide non-technical information for non-linguists on Hawai'i Creole and other vernacular varieties of language. The site defines terms such as pidgin and creole, describes the sounds, vocabulary and grammar of Hawai'i Creole, and includes a short quiz on it. Pages with similar information have since been added on the following varieties: Tok Pisin, Bislama, Singapore Colloquial English, African American Vernacular English, Australian Aboriginal English, Cameroon Pidgin English, Newcastle-on-Tyne (Geordie) English, Krio, Papiamentu, and Trinidad French Creole. The site also has pages with references, links to other sites, teaching tips for using vernacular varieties in the classroom, and a form for people to submit their own tips. Recently, sound has been added for Hawai'i Creole, Bislama and Geordie English. A great deal of positive feedback has been received from people using the site, especially from students doing projects on some of the varieties.

Second, since 1998, a group of people, mainly from the University of Hawai'i, have been meeting regularly to discuss linguistic, sociolinguistic and educational issues concerning Hawai'i Creole, locally known as Pidgin, and other creoles and minority dialects. This group is called 'Da Pidgin Coup' (all puns intended). Following the public debate over the statement from the Chairman of the Hawai'i State Board of Education quoted at the beginning of this column, Da Pidgin Coup wrote a position paper, 'Pidgin and Education', as a basis for discussions with education officials and teachers, and for public education efforts as well. The aim was to provide information, backed up by research, about the complex relationship between Pidgin and English, and about the equally complex issues surrounding the use of Pidgin in education.

The position paper can be seen on the web at (www.hawai'i.edu/sls/pidgin.html). It is written mostly in non-technical language and presents information and discussion on the following main points (Eades, 1999: 6–7):

(1) an explanation of the origins and development of Pidgin, and its linguistic status as a creole language;
(2) a history of attitudes to Pidgin, showing how negative terms to describe Pidgin have a powerful history in shaping island attitudes towards the language and its speakers;
(3) the concept of standard English, rebutting the notion that it is the 'best' language, and showing the relevance of Lippi-Green's (1997) language subordination model to Pidgin in Hawai'i;
(4) why researchers in the fields of education and language support the important role of language varieties such as Pidgin in the learning process;
(5) why writing is a 'foreign language for everyone', and why there is no

good reason to assert that Pidgin speakers are held back in their writing
development by their Pidgin language;

(6)   the myth that Pidgin is English, providing some examples to illustrate
        features of Pidgin;

(7)   issues central to current concerns over Pidgin and testing, arguing that the
        relationship between Pidgin and English is too complex to suggest that we
        can raise students' test scores simply by eradicating Pidgin; and

(8)   recommendations about the important role that Pidgin plays in the
        learning process.

Da Pidgin Coup and their position paper received wide coverage in the local
newspapers. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* had a feature article on 20 November
1999 and a front page story on 30 November. More recently, the position paper
was featured in an article on Pidgin in the *Honolulu Advertiser* on 29 April 2001.
These articles presented the basic information in the position paper in a positive
light. In January 2000, the state Superintendent of Education attended a meeting
of Da Pidgin Coup to discuss the issue of Pidgin in education. He made it clear
that while oral expression in standard English is a top priority in schooling,
there is no need to eradicate Pidgin from schools, and it could potentially be
used as a tool for learning. It was agreed that Da Pidgin Coup would work on
research on the effect of Pidgin on writing and would get involved in running
voluntary professional development workshops on Pidgin and education for
teachers and administrators.

Since then, members of Da Pidgin Coup, especially Kent Sakoda, Ermile
Hargrove and Terri Menacker, have run many workshops for teachers and
presented information about language awareness at conferences run by
organisations such as the Aloha State Council of the International Reading
Association, the Hawai'i Association for Supervision and Curriculum Develop-
ment (HASCD) and Hawai'i TESOL. The content of the workshops includes the
following areas:

- information about the origins and development of pidgin and creole
  languages in general, and Pidgin in Hawai'i in particular;
- an analysis of Pidgin phonology and comparison to English phonology
  (concentrating on vowels and prosodic features);
- some lexical and morphological aspects of Pidgin;
- a demonstration of how Pidgin is rule-governed, and in some areas, more
  complex than English.

This demonstration is most often done with Pidgin negatives. Positive sentences
are presented, and the teachers are asked how to make them negative, and whether
or not alternative constructions 'sound OK'. Some examples are found in Table 1,
using the autonomous 'Odo' orthography (Bickerton & Odo, 1976).

On the basis of examples such as in Table 1, teachers come up with rules for
making negative sentences in Pidgin, such as the following:

> *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*;

Table 1 Negatives in Hawai'i Creole

Da kæt it fish. 'The cat eats fish.'	*Da kæt **no** it fish.* 'The cat doesn't eat fish.'
Da gaiz wrking. 'The guys are working.'	**Da gaiz **no** wrking.* *Da gaiz **nat** wrking.* 'The guys aren't working.'
Dei ste lisining. 'They're listening.'	**Dei **nat** ste lisining.* *Dei **no** ste lisining.* 'They aren't listening.'
Ai gon tel om. 'I'll tell him.'	*Ai **no** gon tel om.* *Ai **nat** gon tel om.* 'I won't tell him.'
Mai sista wan bas jraiva. 'My sister is a bus driver.'	*Mai sista **nat** wan bas jraiva.* 'My sister isn't a bus driver.'
I kæn du twenti pushap. 'I can do twenty pushups.'	*I **no** kæn du twenti pushap.* 'I can't do twenty pushups.'
Da buga braun. 'The guy is brown.'	*Da buga **nat** braun.* 'The guy isn't brown.'
Kærol hæftu wok. 'Carol has to work.'	*Kærol **no** hæftu wok.* 'Carol doesn't have to work.'
Yu sapostu du dæt. 'You're supposed to do that.'	*Yu **nat** sapostu du dæt.* 'You're not supposed to do that.'
Ai wen du om. 'I did it.'	**Ai **no** wen du om.* *Ai **neva** du om.* 'I didn't do it.'
Gat kaukau in da haus. 'There's food in the house.'	****No** gat kaukau in da haus.* ***Nomo** kaukau in da haus.* 'There isn't food in the house.'
Nau wi gat ka. 'Now we have a car.'	**Nau wi **no** gat ka.* *Nau wi **nomo** ka.* 'Now we don't have a car.'

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

Either *nat* or *no* can be used before the tense marker *gon*;

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

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

The teachers are usually quite thrilled to discover these rules, especially when comparisons are made with the much simpler rules in English, where the only sentential negative marker is *not* (or its contracted form *n't*).

In these workshops, the teachers themselves provide a large proportion of

the data and analysis just as students would in lessons using the awareness approach. In this way, the workshops have two functions: informing teachers about the nature of Pidgin and other similar language varieties as well as providing them with a model for awareness activities in their own classrooms.

Finally, through lobbying by members of Da Pidgin Coup, the University of Hawai'i established the Charlene Sato Centre for Pidgin, Creole and Dialect Studies in 2002. The current director, Kent Sakoda, is a native speaker of Pidgin, and teaches a popular course on 'Pidgin and Creole English in Hawai'i' three times a year – each semester and in summer school. The latest development is that a proposal to establish an Undergraduate Certificate in Pidgin and Creole Studies has just been approved by the university.

Conclusion

The use of creoles and minority dialects in instrumental or awareness programmes is one way of starting to overcome the disadvantage faced by speakers of these varieties. But such programmes are still not acceptable to most administrators, teachers and parents because of existing attitudes and prevalent ideologies about the nature of language in general and these varieties in particular. Linguists can do a lot more in the area of applied research, especially in conducting evaluations of the effectiveness of various educational programmes using the language varieties they study. But more importantly, they need to take a proactive approach to informing people about the results of this research as well as about sociolinguistic findings regarding linguistic equality. Since awareness of such research over the past 40 years has not trickled down to the general public, it seems clear that if changes are to take place, they have to come from below rather than from above. For example, rather than writing articles calling once again for more teacher training to include sociolinguistics, linguists and applied linguists need to get the message to teachers themselves – by disseminating information in non-technical terms, running workshops, attending educational conferences and meetings, and publishing articles in journals read by teachers. In other words, for linguistic knowledge to have an effect, it will have to go beyond the current boundaries of both linguistics and applied linguistics.

Correspondence

Professor Jeff Siegel, School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia (jsiegel@une.edu.au).

Notes

1. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Dennis Craig – a pioneer and unparalleled practitioner in the areas of creoles and minority dialects in education. Thanks go to Diana Eades, Vicki Knox, Don Winford and two anonymous reviewers for comments on previous drafts.
2. Simpkins (2002: 173–83) describes three different evaluations of the *Bridge* dialect readers carried out from 1969 to 1975. These studies show that use of the readers led to increased motivation among students and statistically significant improvements in scores on recognised tests of reading in standard English.
3. Mathewson (1973: 115) noted: 'If the children have learned to read in standard

English, then they may lack the skills necessary to decode divergent syntax and phonology'. Nolen (1972: 1095–6) mentioned 'the novelty of the printed vernacular' and wrote that the results could have been different if children had been introduced to reading with 'dialect primers'. Simons and Johnson (1974: 355) also referred to the factor of previous exposure only to standard English texts and concluded (p. 356): 'If subjects had learned to read with dialect texts, they might read them better than standard texts'. Marwit and Neumann (1974: 331) mentioned the factor of subjects' 'distrust of nonstandard English in a setting where it was rarely, if ever, used and almost never rewarded'. (See also Masland, 1979: 42 with regard to Sims, 1972, and other studies.)

4. Two significant factors may have affected the results of this study. First, the content and subject matter for the reading tests were taken from stories written or told by children in the school district under study; therefore, the test items used, unlike reading materials normally found in the classroom, were 'culturally realistic and environmentally relevant to the subjects' (Melmed, 1971: 71). Second, subjects in the study spoke standard English 70% of the time (p. 75).

5. In my own experience, for example, another applied linguist and I applied to a large educational foundation for funds to evaluate the effectiveness of pilot awareness programmes for speakers of Hawai'i Creole and AAE. The proposed project was rejected by the board before it could be sent out to assessors. I was told (off the record) that a major reason was that a member of the board thought the literature review was too unbalanced in that no research results showing the negative effects of using AAE in education were reported. In light of what I've reported in this paper, this seems to be a very uninformed criticism.

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