

SPEECH, PREJUDICE, AND THE SCHOOL IN HAWAII

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For some years there has been strong feeling on the part of a large segment of the population in Hawaii that the English standard schools maintained by the Department of Public Instruction since the middle 1920's, were undemocratic in that they tended to encourage race and class prejudice. This feeling led to much public discussion and finally crystallized in organized pressure for the abolition of the standard schools. Identical resolutions passed in recent conventions of the Hawaii Education Association and the Hawaii Congress of the Parent-Teachers' Association called for the abolition grade by grade over the next twelve years of the English standard system. At the present writing a bill incorporating the recommendation has been passed by the 1947 legislature.

The abolition of the dual standard school system may work in the direction of reducing race and class antagonisms and building community solidarity. That it will not necessarily do this is indicated by observations at the University of Hawaii, where there has been no classification of students, which might be interpreted racially, but where strong racial feelings are known to exist and occasionally come close to the surface.

Data collected by our sociology department¹ bear out the fact that the English standard school has become a symbol to a large segment of the non-Haole population of Haole "snobbishness." While there is every evidence that the policy of maintaining the dual standard system was never deliberately administered in any way to justify this feeling on the part of the non-Haoles and in fact, much evidence to the contrary as witness the fact that the proportion of non-Haoles in the English standard schools was climbing steadily, it is nevertheless true that the feeling of resentment against the standard schools has continued. The doing away with the English standard schools will no doubt relieve one basis for tension, but the public school administration and the public should, nevertheless, be ever watchful lest the new situation generate new tensions.

It is unfortunate that we do not have a larger number of systematic studies on race and class prejudice in schools of various types in Hawaii, the University, the English standard schools at various levels, and in urban and rural districts, the non-standard public schools, Catholic schools, other private schools, such as Punahou and Hanahauoli. Such studies

¹See *What People in Hawaii are Saying and Doing*, War Research Laboratory, University of Hawaii, May 8, 1946, Report No. 9, "The English Standard School."

could be a guide to the Department of Public Instruction at the present time.

Just as our area of ignorance in regard to the relation between different types of school situations and prejudice is still great, so also do we know relatively little about the relation between language behavior and other social behavior. There are in Hawaii a number of dogmatically held opinions which can bear a little sociological scrutiny. Since these opinions, too, may work themselves out in policy,² and since with or without the dual standard school system the problem of spreading the use of standard English is a real one, the question involved should be carefully considered.

Our discussion will center around three common assumptions, namely, that pidgin English is a desecration of the English language, that our aim is to root out pidgin and dialectal English of whatever type, and that bilingualism is a deterrent to the development of emotionally healthy and linguistically adequate adults.

1. Is pidgin English a desecration of standard English?

Reinecke³ has clearly brought out that the English now spoken by large numbers of our younger adults and children has developed into a far richer and more adequate means of communication than the original plantation pidgin English. In this respect, it is like the "Creole" dialects of French, Spanish, and Portuguese which have grown up in the colonies.

By every test local speech should be looked at as a dialect. It is an accepted medium of expression for a large population group. It has developed a body of accepted speech practices relating to pronunciations, sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary, and idiom. The practices are learned by Hawaiian children in the same manner as children all over the world learn their mother tongue.

There may be honest disagreement about the esthetic value of the local dialect. To many malihinis and to many teachers of English it is an unmusical gibberish, a crude jargon. Certainly to others it is at least picturesque and this has been

²The pressure resulting from these doctrinaire views will be one of the continuing sources of tension mentioned above. It is perhaps significant that to many persons coming from the mainland sub-standard English is a symbol. Antagonism to a sub-standard English is sometimes a way of expressing a more fundamental antagonism—to the people who speak this sub-standard English and from "contamination" with whom they want their children to be protected.

On the other hand, the intense concern with speech standards has meant, on the part of some persons a concern with "standards" in general. School authorities seem to be divided in their views on the desirability of grouping children "homogeneously" by interests, abilities, and experience. Unless the new single standard classes are divided, in some such way, these parents, who are found in all racial groups, will no doubt be heard from.

³John F. Reinecke, "Pidgin English in Hawaii: A Local Study in the Sociology of Language," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLIII (1938), pp. 778-789. See also Reinecke and Aiko Tokimasa, "The English Dialect of Hawaii," *American Speech*, IX (1934), pp. 48-58 and 122-130.

effectively capitalized upon by writers of advertisement, song writers, and so on.

The important point, however, is that the local speech is the medium of communication of a large part of our population. It is the language in use in the family circle, over the neighborhood hedge, on the playground, among groups of friends, and in work gangs. It is thus the language for the expression of human warmth and sentiment. The language which a person learns on his mother's knee and with his playmates is precious to him even though it may be ugly to others.

The local dialect has also been criticized as an inadequate mode of communication. For the pursuit of intellectual and scientific interest it is no doubt inadequate. For purposes of travel outside Hawaii and of communication with persons living elsewhere it is also of course inadequate. But for family and neighborly living in Hawaii it is at this time proving adequate for a large segment of the population.

2. Is our aim to root out pidgin and dialectal English of whatever type? We can agree that our major aim is to spread as rapidly as possible the use of standard English. The rooting out of pidgin and dialect may or may not be a means to this end. The central problem is after all, how standard English can be established most effectively. The fact that there have been and still are many different schools of thought about this shows how little we actually know.

The assumption that it is necessary to root out the oral language now so widely in use is not grounded on any evidence. It may be that the aim of establishing standard English can actually be best accomplished by a more complete understanding and appreciation of the local dialect.

Unfortunately the excellent beginning of Reinecke in analysing the structure, vocabulary and idiom, pronunciation, and grammatical rules of the local dialect has not led to further research along the same lines, and few know even about his pioneer work. The speech practices of the children in school have been looked at as "deficiencies" and "pidgin." If, instead, the teachers could recognize the peculiarities of speech as speech "usages," and know something about their nature, their approach to the teaching of standard English might, it is suggested, gain in effectiveness.

Psychologically, their approach would change from one of combating local speech to one of acceptance of, and even respect for it, while teaching standard speech as a skill which local people can and must have in *addition* to the local dialect.

Pedagogically, a systematic knowledge of the local dialect would make possible the development of better techniques

for teaching standard English. In grammar, for instance, the structure of the local dialect can be worked out inductively by the pupils. These pupil discovered rules can then be used to bridge the gap to the structure of standard English. This is the way many of us learn a foreign language when it is efficiently taught.

One or more generations ago, the language problem of Hawaii was more acute than now, for there existed no common means of communication for unifying and integrating the peoples of Hawaii. At that earlier time the foreign languages spoken in the immigrant homes were the subject of continuous vilification. There was constant pressure, on patriotic as well as other grounds, that the foreign languages be rapidly discarded. The poor progress of children with standard English was always attributed to the retarding effect of the foreign languages spoken in the home.

These campaigns in their propaganda overlooked the danger to the unity of the home. They disregarded the lesson of Daudet's famous short story, "La dernière classe," that the persecution of a language only increases the sentimental value of the language to its speakers. Finally they were based on the assumption that bilingualism is always a detriment.

In the process of unification, the present dialect has grown up. It did not grow up because the foreign languages continued to be spoken, but rather because and as these languages were being discarded. It is a notorious fact, for instance, that most second generation Orientals speak a decidedly sub-standard variety not only of English but also of their parental tongue.

But why did not standard English become established then? Reinecke argues that the existence of laborers of many different linguistic backgrounds made necessary the quick development of a common language of command. To this language, which is today the cruder speech of the older people, each of the peoples of Hawaii contributed in greater or less degree, but as major contributors, Reinecke singled out "the American and British foremen who thought to make their language more intelligible by mutilating it when they spoke to foreign workmen."⁴ He believes that the schools are mainly responsible for changing the pidgin to the present dialect, and that this was a remarkable accomplishment in view of the small percentage of native users of standard English at that time living in Hawaii.

But he points out that this dialect is now more firmly established than any of the parental immigrant languages. He predicts the early dying out of plantation pidgin, but the

⁴Reinecke, "The English Dialect of Hawaii," *op. cit.*, p. 51.

retention for some time of the present local dialect. The difficulty of eliminating the local dialect is due to the widespread influence and authority of dialect-speaking parents, from whose homes an increasing number of school children will come. He also stresses the influence of the age contemporaries of the children in ridiculing those children who attempt to speak standard English, and the fact that a non-Haole who grows up in Hawaii cannot at the present time yet expect to find adult companionship and to establish intimate social relations with standard-speaking Haoles.

Hawaii's experience conforms with the findings of linguists. Dialects grow up.

3. Is bilingualism a deterrent to the development of emotionally healthy and linguistically adequate adults?

The assumption that the speaking of an Oriental language while learning English was responsible for the development of pidgin English has already been questioned.

The writer has come across two observations which, while not pursued in research, seem to indicate that the use of a foreign language and the use of standard English are not incompatible. An educator of Hawaiian ancestry told him that formerly the Hawaiians who had gone to public school spoke better English than now. He himself has noticed that some of the present group of children descended from the German labor immigration of the eighteen eighties and nineties speak the local dialect, while their parents speak more standard varieties of both English and German. We see here that bilingualism involved the adequate use of two standard languages. Surely the experience of the smaller nations of Europe, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, suggests the feasibility of multilinguism without sacrificing adequacy of expression and emotional integration.

But the question of the value of maintaining the ancestral languages in Hawaii is becoming increasingly academic, in spite of recent discussions in the community about the advisability of Japanese language broadcasts and the reopening of Chinese language schools.

The question now concerns the bilingualism involved in speaking the local dialect while at the same time speaking standard English, for this too is a form of bilingualism.

Here the most interesting precedents are such European countries as France and Germany, where many widely different local dialects are alive, but where, through the school system, children learn the adequate use of the standard national language. The writer has spoken to persons who normally and naturally speak Low German, but who can easily and readily switch to High German when that is required.

We can perhaps learn from the experience of these European countries.

It must be recognized that a language which a person learns in childhood is more than a tool, but an important part of the culture which is moulding him. The local dialect is not only the language of intimacy between the generations, but also among contemporaries. Because it is more than a tool it would be a serious thing to combat directly. The emotional confusion is likely to be more serious if the intimate social ties are undermined, rather than if the child finds it necessary to use two languages.

Hawaii's experience conforms to the findings of all students of language. Dialects, in contrast to trade jargons, grow up in isolated communities and among isolated classes. Dialect is the problem of the cultural pocket, rather than the cultural frontier. Bilingualism, which is found on linguistic frontiers, is not the cause of a dialect. Rather is the cause to be found in isolation from the persons who speak the standard language. Once developed dialect is normally passed on from generation to generation, and in a sense the very existence of a dialect is a major cause of its survival. The real problem is then the breakdown of barriers to participation in the wider community where standard speech prevails. The real problem is isolation.

There are certain practical applications growing out of this discussion. Appeals to learn standard English in the name of patriotism or for other emotional reasons will not prove effective. Patriotism and standard speech do not necessarily go together, as the boys who "went for broke" demonstrated.

Furthermore, outside specialists in speech when imported to Hawaii have only some of the equipment requisite in the task. They may fail just because they have no understanding of the local dialect and, therefore, of the local people.⁵

Standard English, it was clearly demonstrated to our A J A boys who trained and fought outside of Hawaii, has certain practical advantages. Effective motivation will come when our Island youth are convinced that standard English has practical value for them. The Koreans, being a small group, learned standard English more quickly because it had greater practical value for them.

As regards loyalty and sentiment the value is all on the side of the local dialect. It would, further, be false to argue that the speaking of standard English by local youth would eliminate prejudice against them. Many volunteered for war service in order to overcome the prejudice against them and

⁵The technical problem in teaching certainly involves their special skills, but it also involves the effective motivation of local boys and girls in the acquisition of standard English.

some veterans now feel bitterly about their failure to achieve a sufficient reduction in prejudice. Such disillusionment we must avoid in our attempts to spread the use of standard English.

The writer is, however, by no means convinced that Hawaii will always have to cope with the two varieties of English. His points are, that pidgin of the crude, plantation variety will die quickly, but the local dialect, just because it is a socially established and recognized mode of expression will not so readily die, and that, even while treating it with the respect due any language, we can achieve the successful establishment of spoken standard English.