A Cognitive Study on Hawaii Creole

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Abstract

Language, as a social phenomenon, existing in the human society, changes more or less due to various reasons, be they social or geographical or political. Hawaii creole, or Hawaii pidgin, as a kind of varieties of English, has formed its own distinctive characteristics of linguistic system in phonology, morphology and syntax. This paper briefly introduces the relative history background of Hawaii creole, reviews the recent studies of Hawaii creole at home and abroad, and makes objective evaluations of Hawaii creole.

Keywords

Varieties of language; Hawaii creole; cognitive study.

1. Introduction

The word Creole is derived from the Latin word "creāre" (ie. produce). "Creāre" became "criar" (meaning breed or nurse) after entering Portuguese. Later, the word entered Spanish, referring to the descendants of Europeans (especially Spanish) born in the Spanish colonies, and its spelling form was changed to "criollo". When Louisiana in North America changed from Spanish colonists to French colonies, the French continued to use the word and spelled it as "creole". The word entered English around the seventeenth century, and its spelling retains the French form (Ayto, 1991).

Creole develops from pidgin, both of which are the varieties of language proposed by Labov(1986). For one thing, pidgins are created for practical and immediate purposes of communication between people who otherwise would have no common language whatsoever, and learned by one person from another within the communities concerned as the accepted way of communicating with members of the other community. Since the reason for wanting to communicate with members of the other communities is often trade, a pidgin may be what is called a "trade language", but not all pidgins are restricted to being used as trade languages, nor are all trade language pidgins. On the other hand, another situation in which pidgins are needed is when people from different language backgrounds are thrown together and have to communicate with each other, and with a dominant group, in order to survive. Creole is a mixed language. Children learn a pidgin language as their first language since they were young. At the same time, when the pidgin language became the mother tongue of a community, the pidgin language was converted to a creole language. Thus, a pidgin which has acquired native speakers is called a "creole language" or "creole", and the process whereby a pidgin turns into a creole is called "creolisation"(Hudson, 1996). In general speaking, both male parent and female parent speak different languages, neither of whom is willing to learn the other language, under witch circumstance, comes a pidgin language acquired by their descendants, and then a creole is created.

Hawaii creole, as a kind of creole, whose background and history and some others pertinent issues will be demonstrated in the following part.

2. Literature review

2.1. Background

Hawaii was first visited by Europeans in 1778, and it quickly became an significant stopover for ships involved in whaling and trading with Asia. At this time, some of the expressions from the pidgin English of China and the Pacific were introduced to Hawaii. The first sugarcane plantation was established in1835, and the industry expanded in rapid speed in the last quarter of the century. Thus, Hawaii Pidgin originated on sugarcane plantations in 1835 as a form of communication used between Hawaiian speaking native Hawaiian residents, English speaking residents, and foreign immigrants(Jeff, 2000). It supplanted, and was influenced by, the existing pidgin that native Hawaiians already used on plantations and elsewhere in Hawaii. Because such sugarcane plantations often employed workers from many various countries, a common language was needed in order for the plantation workers to communicate effectively with each other and their supervisors. Hawaii pidgin has been influenced by many different languages, including Portuguese, Hawaiian, American English, and Cantonese. As people of other backgrounds were brought in to work on the plantations, Hawaiian pidgin acquired even more words from languages such as Japanese, Okinawan and Korean.

In the 1870s immigrants families began to arrive and more children were born on the plantations. Children learned their parents' languages and picked up English began to emerge with features from all of these sources. This pidgin became the primary language of many of those who grew up in Hawaii, and children began to acquire it as their first language. This was the beginning of Hawaii Creole English. By the 1920s it was the language of the majority of Hawaii's population.

2.2. Studies at home and abroad

Though the studies of creoles at home are of abundance, yet domestic studies of Hawaii creole are relatively fewer than that of abroad. Lin shengbin (1979) provides a general review of Pidgin and Creole, involving the main genres and distributions of Pidgin and Creole in the world, the linguistic characteristics of Pidgin and Creole, the reasons that Pidgin and Creole appearance, and the linguistic values of the study of Pidgin and Creole. Lin (1979) also briefly reviews the abroad studies of Pidgin and Creole. Jiang Yajun (2001) identifies five consecutive phases in the development of creolistics, which differ according to the scholastic enthusiasm and the quality if literature; Jiang (2001) then goes to discuss the theories of origin, the literature and the spelling problems of pidgins and creoles; finally he argues that creolistic studies have already raised serious questions for linguistic theory in general. Wang Hong (2004) advocates that from the general cognitive process perspective, cross-language comparison contributes to second language learning, and can greatly shorten the traditional learning time, and briefly elaborates and compares several representative language such variants of English as Hawaii creole, and proposes the value of cognitive analysis.

Although some scholars at home have discussed the appearance, development, history, influence and values of Creole, yet they only study Creole from general perspective, but not discuss one specific Creole, nor has Hawaii creole been studied systematically. Compared with the domestic studies of Hawaii creole, the corresponding studies and researches of that are relatively rich and plentiful and comprehensible.

As for the evaluation of Hawaii creole, standard English generally has been evaluated more favorably than Hawaii Creole English. A variety of methods have been used to study perceptions of Hawaii Creole English. Day (1980) studied children's attitudes toward Hawaii Creole English and Standard English. Kindergartners, considered to be Hawaii Creole English-dominant, showed a preference for Hawaii Creole English rather than Standard English. However, this preference changed in the Hawaii Creole English-dominant first graders, who chose Standard

English over Hawaii Creole English. Day hypothesized that the shift in perceptions was due to social conditioning of responses to nonstandard and Standard English during the first 2 years of school. Other studies have investigated teachers' perceptions. Choy and Dodd (1976) found that teachers rated Hawaii Creole English–speaking students lower than Standard English–speaking students on various traits, including academic performance. Yamamoto and Hargrove (1982) surveyed teachers in a group setting and found that teachers themselves spoke Hawaii Creole English and felt that their students should be able to use Hawaii Creole English in the classroom. However, all teachers expressed positive attitudes toward the acquisition of Standard English.

Ohama, Gotay, Carolyn, Pagano, Boles and Craven (2000) randomly assigned 197 university students to rate an audio tape delivered in Hawaii Creole English or Standard English. And the results manifest that Hawaii Creole English was favored on dynamism traits, and listeners' own ethnicity and language ability influenced their ratings on quality, attractiveness, and dynamism. Jeff (2000) demonstrates that some theoretically important features of Hawaii creole have close parallels with corresponding features of the substrate languages that were dominant at the time when a stable and expanded Hawaii creole was emerging. Features of Hawaii creole includes (1) existential and possessive, (2) copula, (3) adjectives as verbs, (4) articles, (5) TMA (tense, modality and aspect) system, and (6) complementation. Hargrove Ermile, Sakoda Kent and Siegel Jeff (2003) have systematically and comprehensively illustrated Hawaii creole form background, vocabulary, sounds and grammar. Mikaela L. Marlow and Howard Giles (2010) do a survey that illustrates the experiences people have had with language criticism, the explanations people offer to make sense of language criticism, the cognitive or emotional and communication responses having taken place during language criticism.

The foreign scholars have made quite comprehensible study on Hawaii creole, involving the characteristics of Hawaii creole in phonology, morphology and grammar, the history of Hawaii creole, the evaluation of Hawaii creole, the relation between Hawaii creole and the Standard American English, etc, which has provided abundant research materials and references for later studies.

3. Manifestations

Hawaii creole is a continuum of dialects ranging from creole to Standard American English. The characteristics of Hawaii creole English are manifested in the vocabulary, sound, and grammar respectively (Ermile, Kent and Jeff, 2003).

3.1. Vocabulary

A large proportion of Hawaii creole words come from English, for English is the lexifier or superstrate or dominant language of Hawaii creole. And yet this two languages are often pronounced in a different way, and even the same words or expressions may convey distinct meaning. Take *beef* as an example, in Hawaii creole, *beef* can mean *fight*. In addition, some combinations of words also contain different meaning, e.g. *stink eye* means *dirty look*, and *children skin* means *goose bumps*.

Besides the borrowing from English vocabulary, Hawaii creole also has absorbed words from many other languages, especially Hawaiian. The following table is the examples.

Table 1 Examples of Hawaii vocabulary

Origin	Word	Meaning
From Hawaiian	pau	finished
	lanai	verandah
	puka	hole
	akamai	clever

	okole	buttocks
	pilau	filthy
From Japanese	obake	ghost
	shi-shi	urinate
From Portuguese	malasada	doughnut without a hole
From Filipino	pancit	Egg noodles

3.2. Sound

Like other creoles, Hawaii creole features its own individual system of phonology. Though a large amount of its consonants, to some extent, share resemblance with those found in varieties of British and American English, yet the vowels are of tremendous difference. Long vowels are not pronounced in Hawaii creole if the speaker is using Hawaiian loanwords. Some key differences include the following:

Th-stopping: /θ/ and /ð/ are pronounced as [t] or [d] respectively, that is, changed from a fricative to a plosive (stop). For instance, *think* /θɪŋk/ becomes [tɪŋk], and *that* /ðæt/ becomes [dæt]. An example is "Broke da mout" (tasted good).

L-vocalization: The end letter *l* /l/ in a word is often pronounced [o] or [ol]. For instance, *mental* /mentəl/ is often pronounced [mento:]; *people* /pi:p(ə)l/ is pronounced [pipo].

Hawaii creole is non-rhotic, that is, *r* after a vowel is often omitted, similar to many dialects, such as Eastern New England, Australian English, and British English variants. For instance, *car* is often pronounced "cah", and *letter* is pronounced "letta". *Parking* is pronounced "pahking"; *scared* is pronounced "sked"; and *for* is pronounced "fo". In some circumstances, the final *r* is changed to another vowel, as in dia (dear) and welfea (welfare). This "r-less" feature is also found in the English spoken in Australia, parts of England, and in the northeastern USA (where the early missionaries to Hawaii came from). The number of Hawaii creole speakers with rhotic English has also been increasing.

For most speakers of Hawaii creole the "ee" sound in *keen* and "i" sound in *kit* are pronounced similarly, somewhere in between the way the two sounds are pronounced in most varieties of British and American English. The sound of the "u" in *put* or "oo" in *good* is pronounced similarly to the sound of the "u" or in *rule* or "oo" in *pool*. Also, Hawaii creole has what are sometimes called "pure" vowels, as found in languages such as Spanish and Hawaiian, whereas English vowels are typically stretched and changed somewhat. For example, the Hawaiian name "Kekoa" is usually pronounced as "Kay-koh-wa" by English speakers.

In certain words, the sound /ts/ assimilates into /s/. Examples include: *what's* [wəts] becoming *wass* [wəs] and *it's* [ɪts] becoming [ɪs]. This feature is also found in African- American Vernacular English (AAVE).

One of the most striking characteristics of Hawaii creole is in the intonation pattern, having falling intonation in questions. In yes/no questions, falling intonation is striking and appears to be a lasting imprint of Hawaiian (this pattern is not found in yes/no question intonation in America English). This particular falling intonation pattern is shared with some other Oceanic languages, including Fijian and Samoan (Murphy, 2013).

Further more, some Hawaii creole words coming from English differ slightly in pronunciation because a different syllable is emphasized most, or stressed. In these examples, the stressed syllable is shown in capital letters: "disshaNEri" (dictionary), "haraKEIN" (hurricane), and "aelkaHOL" (alcohol).

3.3.   Grammar

Hawaii creole has distinct grammatical forms and spelling system. This paper briefly introduces four aspects to illustrate the unique grammatical system of Hawaii creole. The examples here are given in that system and then in English-based spelling.

3.3.1. Basic sentences

Sentences giving a location use the word *ste* (stay).

*Eg. Da kaet **ste** in da haus. (Da cat **stay** in da house.)*

  The cat's in the house.

The word *get* is used for *there is/are*.

   *Eg. **Get** tu mach turis naudeiz. (Get too* much *tourist nowadays.)*

   There are too many tourists nowadays.

Haed (had) is used for *there was/were*.

   *Eg. **Haed** dis ol grin haus. (**Had** dis old* green *house.)*

   There was this *old green house.*

Like in many other languages, some sentences are not required verbs.

   Eg. (1) Nau yu da hed maen. (Now you da head man.)

     Now you're the head man.

(2) Mai sista skini*. (My sister skinny.)*

      My sister's skinny.

3.3.2. Tense and aspect

Generally speaking, the verb is used without endings, but there are words that come before the verb which show when or how something happens. These are called "tense markers or aspect markers".

First, past tense is usually indicated by using *wen* before the verb.

   *Eg. Dey **wen** pein hiz skin. (Dey **wen** paint his skin.)*

   They painted his *skin.*

Second, future events and those that have not yet occurred are marked by *go*, *gon*, or *gona*.

   *Eg. Yu **gon** trn in yaw pepa leit? (You **gon** turn in your paper late?)*

   Are you going *to turn in your paper late?*

Future tense also can be realized by using *goin* (going), derived from the going-to future common in informal varieties of American English.

   *Eg. God **goin** do plenny good kine stuff fo him.*

   God is going to do a lot of good things for him.

Third, events in progress may be indicated in three different ways: by *ste* (stay) before the verb either with or without the *-ing* ending, or just by the verb with *-ing*.

   *Eg. Da kaet **ste** it da fish. (Da cat **stay** eat da fish.)*

   *Da kaet **ste** it**ing** da fish. (Da cat **stay** eat**ing** da fish.)*

   *Da kaet it**ing** da fish. (Da cat eat**ing** da fish.)*

   All of these means: *The cat's eating the fish.*

3.3.3. Negatives

Hawaii creole has four ways of making negatives.

Firstly, *nat* (**not**) is inserted when there is no verb.

   *Eg. (1) Nau yu **nat** da hed maen. (Now you **not** da head man.)*

   Now you are not the *head man.*

*Mai sista **nat** skini. (My sister **not** skinny.)*

   My sister is not skinny.

Secondly, **no** is used before **ste (stay)**, before modals such as **kaen (can)** and before verbs without any ending and without any tense/aspect markers.

   Eg. (1) Da kaet **no** *stei in da haus. (Da cat **no** stay in da house.)*

      The cat is not in the house.

    *(2) Jo **no*** kaen *plei. (Joe **no** can play.)*

      Joe can not *play.*

(3) Da *kaet **no** it fish. (Da cat **no** eat fish.)*

   The cat doesn't eat fish.

Thirdly, **neva (never)** is used before verbs in past tense negatives.

   *Eg. Ai **neva** du om. (I **never** do em.)*

      I didn't do it.

Finally, **nomo** (**no more**) is used for "**there isn't** or **there aren't**".

   *Eg. **Nomo** kaukau in da haus. (**No more** kaukau in da house.)*

      There isn't any food *in the house.*

3.3.4. Verbal complements

Verbal complements are other verbal expressions that come after the main verb, such as in George decided to join the army. In Hawaii creole, these are introduced by **fo** rather than *to.*

   *Eg. (1) Ai chrai **fo** kaech om. (I try **fo** catch em.)*

      I tried to catch it.

    *(2) Eribadi kam **fo** si daet haus. (Everybody come **fo** see da house.)*

      Everybody comes *to see that house.*

Hawaiian creole is written with the standard English alphabet. There is no standardized spelling since it is primarily a spoken and not a written language. In recent years, Hawaiian writers have written poems, short stories, and plays in Hawaiian creole. Among them are well-known Hawaii authors such as Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Lee Tonouchi. Several theater companies in Hawaii produce plays written and performed in creole. The most notable of these companies is Kumu Kahua Theater. The substrate languages may have also had a role in the reinforcement and extension of some processes of grammaticalization that had already begun in the formation of HCE.

4. Evaluation

Hawaii Creole (or Hawaii Creole English) is usually called "Pidgin" in Hawaii, which boats an abundant linguistic history based on the need for a common language among a diverse group of people who spoke different languages. It also has a dark side based on plantation domination and American English hegemony. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Hawaiian pidgin separated from the plantations into urban areas and became the primary means of communication among different ethnic groups. Public school children learned it from their classmates and eventually it became the primary language of most people in Hawaii, replacing their original languages for this reason, linguistics consider Hawaiian pidgin to be a creole language.

Although English and Hawaiian are the two co-official languages of the state of Hawaii, most people raised in Hawaiian can speak and understand Hawaiian creole to some extent. It is widely used by Hawaiian residents in a variety of situations. Many speakers code-switch between standard American English and Hawaiian creole, depending on the situation. Some

speakers, particularly those at the lower social economic levels, speak creole only, whereas the speech of others closely approximates standard American English. Hawaii creole at the lower boundary is generally considered to be substandard, and its use is usually associated with lower socioeconomic and educational status. It is often perceived as an obstacle to success in education and in the workforce. Its role vis-a-vis Standard English in the schools of Hawaii has been a subject of continued debate. Nevertheless, some knowledge of Hawaii creole is thought by many to be an important part of being considered a *kamaaina* local.

Hawaii Creole speakers have mixed feelings about the creole. Hawaii creole has often been denigrated as a sub-standard form of English. But with the efforts of local linguists and writers, people are now beginning to realize that the creole is a language separate from, but similar in appearance to, English.

Ohama, Gotay, Carolyn, Pagano, Boles and Craven (2000) randomly assigned 197 university students to rate an audio tape delivered in Hawaii Creole English or Standard English. Listeners rated Standard English higher on superiority traits and quality of speech. However, Hawaii Creole English was favored on dynamism traits. Furthermore, listeners' own ethnicity and language ability influenced their ratings on quality, attractiveness, and dynamism. Their findings shows that the speaker's language had a significant effect on ratings of superiority, quality, and dynamism. Listeners evaluated the Standard English guise higher on superiority traits (e.g., educated, intelligent, upper class) and quality (e.g., appropriate grammar, reliable) and the Hawaii Creole English guise higher on dynamism traits (e.g., active, confident, talkative). They advocate that concurrent with teaching proficiency in Standard English, public education could offer curricula that explore language differences. Students might gain appreciation for the social and cultural reasons that language differences exist. This would enhance their knowledge of history, music, and literature and would contribute positively to the concepts they develop about nonstandard languages. The inclusion of Standard English instruction in public schools and the positive acceptance of dialects and creoles are not mutually exclusive. These objectives can coexist to provide individuals with a multitude of language capabilities.

Mikaela L. Marlow and Howard Giles (2010) present evidence demonstrating that a majority of those surveyed in Hawaii have experienced language criticism. Coded data suggest that criticism takes place during employment, educational, familial, social and community interactions. Using a non-English language in certain social domains may increase negative stereotyping and socioeconomic or educational disadvantages for speakers. Speech practices profoundly influence access and opportunity across a variety of contexts. The process model of language attitudes proposed by Marlow and Giles (2010) suggests that listeners form attitudes about language variation based upon five factors, including listeners dynamics (mood, attitude, expertise or social group memberships), interpersonal history (familiarity between speakers), conversational outcomes (result of the interaction), social situation (informal or formal) and cultural factors (social norms and behaviors that are preferred and expected).

According to Lambert (1979), negative views about one's own speech or ingroup often promote behavioral shifts away from using one's language style. Moreover, awareness of this shift can lead to low self-esteem, behaving in an inferior manner, or becoming confused about personal identity. Developing negative perceptions of nonstandard languages or abandoning those languages in place of Standard English may not be advantageous. Languages are symbolic representations of cognition. Creoles and dialects denote thought patterns and processes that are unique to the culture using them. Losing a dialect or creole may mean losing the ability to think or view life in a certain way. Adding Standard English to create a repertoire of linguistic capabilities would be more valuable.

Some values brought by Pidgin and Creole deserves mentioned. The study of the Pidgin and Creole languages can enrich the knowledge of historical linguistics. In the process of research, it is inevitable to come into contact with the origin of the Pidgin language and Creole language.

Thus, the emergence and development of Pidgin and Creole are explored, the general knowledge of the origin and evolution of languages are gained as well. It has opened up a new field for the research work of sociolinguistics. Once a Pidgin language is formed, its ability to survive and evolve into a Creole language depends largely on its role in society, and not much on its internal structure. The role a Pidgin language plays in a society is a topic for sociolinguistics to study. What's more, the relationship between Pidgin or Creole language and standard language, the change of social factors that make Pidgin language and Creole language also change, the coexistence of Pidgin language and standard language in a society, the different attitudes of different social strata towards Pidgin language and Creole language, the relation between Creole language and nationalism, etc., are all issues to be studied by sociolinguistics. More significantly, the study of Pidgin and Creole can open up a new field for descriptive linguistics. The principles of descriptive linguistics can be used to describe the phonetics, vocabulary and grammar of Pidgin language and Creole language, so as to summarize the appearance of various Pidgin languages and Creole languages. The result of such description enriches the principles of descriptive linguistics.

Admittedly, besides the social, political, and economic issues, Creole or Pidgin may well bring about numerous values, especially the linguistics and more specifically, sociolinguistics. However, due to historical background or some other reasons, Hawaii Creole has gained somewhat inequality and criticism subjectively or objectively.

5. Conclusion

Hawaii creole can be heard on the playgrounds and in neighborhood conversation. It can also be heard on a few radio programs and in some advertising. On rare occasions, Hawaii creole is heard in more formalized situations, such as on the legislative floor and in the classroom. However, English and Hawaii are official languages of the legislature and standardized English is the official medium of instruction in the school system. It can be argued that Hawaii creole accrues social and political significance, despite its apparent low objective prestige when compared to Standard English. Indeed, many locals in Hawaii have maintained authentic identity and language practices, despite external mandates to adapt to formal communication codes.

The difference between variety and language exists in the possession of country and army, in other words, a variety owns a country; a language owns an army.

Any language existing in the world be it written or spoken is of significance; it has its own linguistic system; it has its own history and background; it has its own native speakers; it has its own appearance and disappearance; it has its own certain society and serves that society in all kinds of aspects: politics, economy, culture, military, education, and so on.

Thus, humanity is advised to treat and evaluate languages with objective attitude, in that one language is not superior or inferior to another one, and vice versa.

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