

# Engaging the Public in Sociolinguistics for Social Justice: Advocating for Pidgin Speakers in Hawai‘i

Christina Higgins

## Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss a decade of my work that has sought to meld social justice frameworks with greater sociolinguistic understanding among the public about Pidgin, the creole language of Hawai‘i. Pidgin emerged on sugar plantations in the nineteenth century as a result of contact among laborers who spoke languages including Cantonese, Japanese, and Portuguese. They were all exposed to Hawaiian, which was still spoken widely in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, and to English, the language of most sugar plantation owners. As a result of their interactions, a pidgin, or initial contact language, emerged so that they could communicate, and it developed further into a creole when the next generations of speakers used this language as their primary means of communication. The creole, which is still called Pidgin by all who speak it, is spoken by a majority of residents in Hawai‘i despite regular efforts to sanction its use in education and rhetoric that denounces its value vis-à-vis English (Eades et al. 2006). While there has been growing recognition of Pidgin as a legitimate language in schools and society, it is still often referred to as “broken” English, a label which reflects a general misconception about its historical and grammatical status as a language separate from English. Furthermore, people often feel free to tolerate Pidgin in informal settings and to state that it is inappropriate in institutional contexts such as workplaces and schools, even though it is widely used in these same educational contexts (Saft 2019).

The public-facing projects that I describe in this chapter have been designed to invite community engagement beyond the ivory tower of academe and to encourage greater dialogue and more appreciation among the general public

about the language rights of Pidgin speakers. These projects were designed with attention to three democratizing and decolonizing principles. First, they adhere to the *principle of linguistic gratuity*, a concept that Walt Wolfram (1993) developed which refers to how linguists make use of the knowledge they have gained from communities for the benefit of those communities. At a minimum, this requires scholars to share their findings with communities. More robust forms of linguistic gratuity involve projects such as those carried out by Wolfram and colleagues on language varieties of North Carolina, which include documentary films, museum exhibits, and research that documents and addresses linguistic discrimination at their own university (Wolfram 2016). Second, the projects have been designed to critically examine language discrimination and language rights with reference to inequities of race and class, in line with recent scholarship on *raciolinguistics* (Rosa and Flores 2017). This framework draws our attention to the necessity of denaturalizing the historical linkage between language and race and seeks to challenge the ways that the languages spoken by minoritized people are targeted as inappropriate, ungrammatical, and of lesser value. Third, the projects aim to promote *critical language awareness* (CLA) (Fairclough 1992; Janks 2009), a framework which connects language and discourse to larger structures of power and inequality and encourages discursive shifts that can lead to sociocultural change. The three projects I discuss that engage with these principles are: 1) the creation of a documentary film by high school students about Pidgin; 2) an exhibit about Pidgin at a plantation museum; and 3) a public conference on Pidgin and education, held at a local high school.

My goal in writing this chapter is to show how I see my responsibility as an applied linguist and sociolinguist in making my scholarly work useful to the communities that I work with. I illustrate these projects in some detail in hopes that they are useful for inspiring other projects elsewhere. I have been encouraged to do this work myself because of examples set by others, including the early contributions of scholars such as William Labov and John Gumperz, two towering figures who have engaged in public-facing work as a part of their scholarly trajectories. They have brought their research on language variation and cross-cultural communication to bear on educational and workplace contexts, in the spirit of social justice. Though many scholars do research that has the potential for real-world impact, publications which demonstrate such kinds of impact are not common in applied linguistics. It is likely that the constraints of time and resources, and the valuing of publications in academic journals over and above evidence of ‘real-world impact’ mean that most do not

pursue these activities. A stellar project of this nature is the Wellington Language in the Workplace project in New Zealand that began in 1996 and serves to study interactions at work and to collaborate with stakeholders by way of workshops, media interviews, and research (Holmes et al. 2011). In addition, the tremendous contributions of Walt Wolfram, Jeffrey Reaser, and collaborators at North Carolina State University (NCSSU) have laid a strong foundation for how to do public scholarship on sociolinguistic topics through fieldwork, educational materials, films, and more (Wolfram 2016; Wolfram et al. 2008).

While there are signs that sociolinguists and applied linguists are doing more engagement with communities, too much of this work is still demoted as mere outreach or service, and therefore is often waitlisted as tasks to be accomplished only after the ‘real’ research has been written up and published for academic audiences to digest. There are seldom studies that were designed from the start to engage the larger public. Very recently though, scholars have written about projects that aim to contribute to social justice through sociolinguistics (Avineri et al. 2019) and to demonstrate how scholars can work with stakeholders outside of academia to address social problems (Lawson and Sayers 2016), and these are promising beginnings for a new orientation to applied linguistics scholarship.

### Why sociolinguistics for social justice?

I am personally invested in sociolinguistics for social justice because I recognize my privileged position as a White American, and I feel an obligation to design my applied linguistics scholarship in ways that engage the public and with the intention that it can lead to positive change. I believe some aspects of my personal history encouraged me to take this view. I grew up in the the 1970s and 1980s on military bases in the US and Germany. In contrast with other places in the US where white flight and institutional segregation has occurred, military bases are more racially and linguistically diverse. Of course, the rank of one’s military parents matters, and there were certainly more highly ranked White officers than officers of color. My own father started off as an officer and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel, and our military housing was always noticeably bigger than the housing of the families headed by enlisted soldiers. Nonetheless, in my childhood, I had a number of classmates, neighbors, and playmates who were not White, and this seemed normal. When I started seventh grade, my family moved off-base, into “civilian life,” to the affluent suburbs of Washington DC, where we suddenly entered the American reality that was much more commonplace—suburban

neighborhoods and schools that were nearly all White. It was jarring for many reasons, including the sudden appearance of wealth. In the suburbs of northern Virginia, pricey brand clothing was suddenly a marker of one's status, and teenagers who attended my school were given new, expensive cars to drive. More than 90 percent of my school was White.

In college, I was lucky enough to take a course on Civil Rights with James Farmer, the founder of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), who shared his own personal experiences in organizing the first Freedom Ride, which eventually led to desegregation in the interstate transportation system in the US. His stories of being persecuted while fighting for equal treatment for Black Americans are unforgettable. He narrated the Civil Rights Movement to my class of 400 people without any notes, as he had been blinded from repeated exposure to tear gas.

In graduate school, I began to focus my interests on the sociolinguistics of East Africa, and particularly, the enduring legacy of English as a colonial language. Looking back, I feel that my decision to research language in Africa was motivated by my education about the civil rights history of the US and my growing understanding of the systemic and widespread impact of European colonization on the world. Race was the common factor that cast the linguistic practices of all Black speakers as inferior, as scholars in the field of Black linguistics have pointed out for a long time (Smitherman 2000; Makoni et al. 2003). In my graduate work, I learned Swahili and wrote a dissertation on the micropolitics of English and Swahili at a newspaper office that aimed to understand whether and to what degree Tanzanians had reappropriated English as their own, in spite of its colonial legacy. My theoretical frameworks were informed by postcolonial theory, and particularly the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who introduced me to the concept of decolonization in language (1986). His work examines the subjugation of the African mind to Western languages, worldviews, and epistemologies, and his writing convinced me of the need to proceed with caution with regard to the idea that colonial languages and knowledge frameworks could be easily appropriated in new contexts.

I was hired as a new professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) in 2005, and my relocation to Hawai'i opened up new avenues to think about race, class, language, and social justice. In 2011, I was appointed co-director of the Charlene Sato Center for Pidgin, Creole and Dialect Studies ([www.hawaii.edu/satocenter](http://www.hawaii.edu/satocenter)), and while this role did not come with any additional resources, it gave me the opportunity to think deeply about how I could contribute to raising the profile of Pidgin in the community. I began to design projects that would engage more with how class, race, place, and cultural capital have more

primacy than language in our world, and I started to develop opportunities to engage with the public and to invite discussions on the linkages between these social categories and language.

## Language and injustice in Hawai‘i

Hawai‘i is a rich site for addressing social injustice on many fronts, including through language. Native Hawaiians were dispossessed of their land and language in the late 1800s, after the US government illegally annexed the islands. Though the Kingdom of Hawai‘i was highly multilingual by the late 1800s and enjoyed widespread literacy in Hawaiian, the language suffered after 1893, when a group of US businessmen deposed Queen Lili‘uokalani, the ruling monarch, at gunpoint with the help of US marines and imprisoned her. Under this illegal occupation, the newly established Republic of Hawai‘i passed a law in 1896 to make English the only official language of public education, thereby banning Hawaiian in this realm. Subsequently, Hawaiians were pressured to adopt English in all domains of life as the islands became a US territory in 1898. By the 1950s, most families did not speak Hawaiian at home due to pressures to Americanize and to strive for educational success in English. As in other colonial contexts, if children spoke Hawaiian at school, they received corporal punishment (Wilson and Kamanā 2006). Inspiringly, and against the odds, Hawai‘i is also the site for success stories in terms of language revitalization through immersion schooling and a growing number of Hawaiian language programs that were begun in the 1980s (Beyer 2018; Wilson 1998). The languages of those who came to work on sugar plantations in the 1800s were largely lost as well due to schooling in English and pressures to Americanize at home. Japanese families experienced language shift from the 1920s, and the language was almost entirely lost among the Japanese diaspora after World War II. Other languages that were spoken by plantation workers suffered a similar fate, including Cantonese, Ilokano, Korean, and Tagalog.

A contributing reason for language shift was that Hawai‘i Creole, which is known more commonly as Pidgin, became the dominant language of these groups. After the Territory of Hawai‘i was established in 1898, more White Americans relocated to Hawai‘i in search of opportunities. Unlike the White families who resided in the islands at the time of the overthrow, these newcomers were not wealthy and could not afford the private schools that restricted admissions to the children of White wealthy landowners and descendants of

Hawaiian royalty. As more White American families arrived, they took notice that, in schools, “their children would be outnumbered by the orientals, who have little in common with them and whose language difficulties impede the progress of all” (Bureau of Education 1920: 217). The families lobbied the Bureau of Education to create public schools for their English-speaking children that would use a language test for admission. Starting in 1924, Pidgin-speaking children were segregated into separate public schools based on a language test, in spite of the fact that all public schools were English-medium, as dictated by a law passed by the new government in 1896. The last class of English Standard school students graduated in 1960. The outcome of this separation was that Pidgin was maintained by the majority of the population. In turn, the schools attended by Pidgin-speaking children became stigmatized in the White gaze of those at the English standard schools.

In the domain of work, people who speak English with “Pidgin accents” have also been discriminated against. In 1987, the lawsuit (*Kahakua et al. v. Hallgren*) was filed by two local men who worked for the National Weather Service. They had sought promotions but were passed over in favor of Caucasians with mainland accents who were less qualified but who were selected because they “sounded better.” At the end of the trial, the judge, who had been brought in from California, told them “to put more effort into improving their speech” (Sato 1993: 135). More recently, it has been reported that Pidgin is seen as acceptable at work, though it is still subject to critique by others and may require defensive strategies, according to survey results from Marlow and Giles (2010). In the context of the home, residents report that one or both of their parents have reprimanded them for speaking Pidgin at home, even when their parents are also Pidgin speakers (Tonouchi 2001). This same story is also part of the legacy of language shift for Hawaiian through the 1970s, and it is also currently in effect in immigrant communities among speakers of languages such as Ilokano. Still, others identify as proud speakers of Pidgin, using the language for an advantage in the realms of local politics, advertising, and identifying as local within the community (Hiramoto 2011; Saft et al. 2018).

## Engaging the public

Next, I turn to three projects that I have facilitated which have sought to engage the public in critical examinations of the nexus between Pidgin and discrimination. All of these projects were the result of collaborative efforts of

members of Da Pidgin Coup, a language advocacy group comprised of UHM students, faculty, and community members that was formed in 1999 in a response to negative statements about Pidgin by the chairperson of Hawai‘i’s Board of Education, Mitsugi Nakashima, who publicly blamed Pidgin for low test scores. Da Pidgin Coup invited the superintendent of the public schools to meet to discuss Pidgin in education, and the result was that Da Pidgin Coup agreed to offer voluntary workshops about Pidgin for educators to help dispel misconceptions about the language (Da Pidgin Coup 1999). For more than twenty years, the group has met regularly to discuss all aspects of Pidgin, including how to advocate for Pidgin speakers’ language rights and to work together on projects that challenge linguistic discrimination.

### **Project 1: *Ha Kam Wi Tawk Pidgin Yet?* student documentary film**

In 2008, members of Da Pidgin Coup discussed how to embark on a project that would engage the community while also inviting Pidgin speakers to lead the way. We contemplated ways to avoid a project that would be centered at the university. We were inspired by the work of scholars involved in the North Carolina Language and Life Project at NCSU, who had produced a number of documentary films on language varieties, including *Voices of North Carolina* (Hutcheson 2005), a film that showcased language variation from the Ocracoke “brogue” to the “mountain talk” of Appalachia. Film is of course an effective way of telling stories about language diversity that engage audiences far beyond the university crowd, and we brainstormed how we could produce a film about Pidgin in the same vein while noting our own lack of filmmaking expertise. Through our networks, we found a way to work with Searider Productions, an award-winning media program at Wai‘anae High School, a school which is otherwise largely dismissed as low-achieving, and is located on the west side of O‘ahu, which is one of the places that is strongly associated with Pidgin speakers and a relatively high percentage of Native Hawaiian residents. It was probably easier to gain access to a media classroom than a conventional language arts or social studies classroom to make a film about Pidgin due to the focus on filmmaking rather than school-based curricular content, which normally excludes Pidgin as a topic.

Our university-based team was comprised of three faculty members, including Kent Sakoda, who is from Kaua‘i and speaks Pidgin, and one UHM graduate student, Gavin Furukawa, who is a Pidgin speaker from O‘ahu, where UHM is located. The other university faculty members were myself and Richard Nettell, a White, British-born professor of English. Darrell Lum, a writer, editor,



and scholar from O‘ahu who speaks and writes in Pidgin, also joined the project as a mentor and guide. It was crucial for local scholars to be team members, as their knowledge of Pidgin language and local culture guided the conversations with the high school student filmmakers as they made suggestions for film content and unpacked what it means to speak Pidgin. Our team members from Hawai‘i were personally aware of the stigma that some Pidgin speakers may feel when being filmed while speaking Pidgin, and they offered advice to the student filmmakers when they expressed frustration in getting some people to agree to be on camera. We visited the high school regularly from December 2008 through May of 2009, and we researched the project as the students went about filmmaking by carrying out pre and post interviews. We were interested in tracking any changes in their perceptions of Pidgin as they went, and we did find that they became more reflective of the value of Pidgin in Hawai‘i (for more, see Higgins et al. 2012). Though we were knowledgeable about Pidgin from a linguistic and historical point of view, we were determined to take a hands-off approach toward the film project itself, preferring to provide the student filmmakers only minimal guidance. We held back from giving our own opinions, although it was clear that our very request for a film on Pidgin indicated our stance toward the value of Pidgin to some extent. All of the approximately twenty student filmmakers had receptive abilities in Pidgin, and most of them identified as speakers of Pidgin in addition to English and languages such as Hawaiian, Samoan, and Ilokano. We were lucky to work with the director of the video production program, John Allen, who was also local and a Pidgin speaker, and who was highly skilled at encouraging the students to work creatively and autonomously.

The final version of *Ha Kam Wi Tawk Pidgin Yet?* (“Why do we still speak Pidgin?”) runs for a total of 21 minutes and is available for viewing, both with and without subtitles, online (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bgP2ic38gA>).<sup>1</sup> The documentary begins with a monologue by one of the filmmakers who tells a story about “da worse day of ma life,” a feature that recurs three more times as the filmmakers tell brief personal stories directly to the camera in Pidgin. In between these monologues, Pidgin is featured as a part of family life, as spoken by a grandmother to her granddaughter; as the language used by a family who is raising puppies in their yard; and as the language used by two men who are preparing a car for a new paint job. Younger students from the nearby intermediate school are also featured in snippets explaining their favorite Pidgin words, citing examples like *da kine* (“whatchamacallit”), *braddah* (“friend, pal, guy”), and *eh* (vocative particle). A segment filmed in a social studies class at the high school features the teacher explaining how Pidgin helps him communicate with his



students better and shows him interacting in the classroom. The film ends with a “day in the life” segment featuring Michael, one of the filmmakers, as he goes about his usual day at school. Expressing his own raciolinguistic understanding, Michael says, “That’s our Ebonics. That’s our ethnic background, that’s where we came from. That’s how we communicate with each other and that’s how others can communicate with us.” He points out how local people understand each other even though the language seems opaque, giving a particularly challenging example featuring *da kine*, a term for a reference that is known by one’s interlocutors. Michael says, “Kay, go home talk to my fadda and be like ‘eh dad, da kine was da kine and da kine eh li’dat’ he know exactly what I was talking about. He know dat I trying to say that the transmission on the truck wen broke li’dat (‘broke like that’).” Michael later points to the universal nature of Pidgin, claiming “It’s Hawai‘i’s own unique way of communicating with each odda. If you ask da governa, da maya, the state representative, you ask him ‘what’s up cuz’ you tell him ‘howzit cuz’ see he gon tell you ‘wassup braddah.’”

When the film was finished in April 2009, we organized two screenings and invited the students and their film teacher to sit on a panel and respond to audience questions and comments after each showing. We also asked a panel of local writers, playwrights, and linguists to offer their responses to the film at the same events. The first screening was held in the community where the students live, and the second was at UHM, in Honolulu. At the university, the students were guests on the university radio show and took a brief tour of the university’s filmmaking facilities. After the screening, they took questions from the audience, often from people who were newcomers to Hawai‘i and were seeking advice about how to learn Pidgin, or how to learn more about local culture. The film was later posted to YouTube, and we eventually added a version with titled transcriptions in Pidgin to benefit viewers who are not Pidgin speakers.

The film continues to be viewed online, and with more than 140,000 views across all versions, it has more “reads” than all of the academic articles and books that I will ever publish. Beyond the number of views, it is a promising example of decolonizing scholarship in that the film itself was produced by members of the linguistic community for the wider community that speaks Pidgin or who interacts with Pidgin speakers in Hawai‘i. To encourage educators to use the film in ways that could benefit their own students, Da Pidgin Coup later worked with high school teachers at Wai‘anae High to create lessons for high school teachers of language arts and social studies that would engage with the film’s content (<http://www.sls.hawaii.edu/Pidgin>), as well as other documentary and narrative films featuring Pidgin. Our work is a much smaller scale version of Reaser and

Wolfram's (2007) curriculum developed in reference to the documentary *Voices of North Carolina*, which they used for eighth grade social studies students. We provided interactive grammar quizzes that invite people to show off their knowledge of Pidgin and which underscore the grammatical differences between Pidgin and English. We also created standards-based lessons that allow teachers to use Pidgin as the focal point in discussions of civil rights, a key topic covered in ninth grade social studies classes. While most of the curriculum centers on issues related to the fight for equality on the US continent, featuring figures such as Martin Luther King, the materials around Pidgin invite teachers and students to consider how the rights of people in Hawai'i have also been infringed upon, and to more deeply consider the links between language discrimination and racial discrimination. While we do not have the technological resources to track the use of these materials, we have received appreciative emails from time to time from educators who have used them in their teaching.

### **Project 2: *Pidgin: How was . . . How Stay* museum installation**

I first began to imagine creating a museum installation when I learned about the museum exhibits that the North Carolina Language and Life Project mention in their publications in reference to the principle of linguistic gratuity. For example, they designed an exhibit titled *Freedom's Voice: Celebrating the Black Experience on the Outer Banks* in 2006, which featured images, documentary footage, linguistic interviews, and artifacts to explain African Americans' contributions to Roanoke Island, a place best known for a 1585 settlement that mysteriously disappeared, known as the Lost Colony. In 2010, I reached out to the Hawai'i Plantation Village Museum to see whether they would be interested in an exhibit about Pidgin. This was the most relevant site for the exhibit, as it is the main museum in Hawai'i that presents visitors with an understanding of plantation life. The plantation village is located in Waipahu, in a part of O'ahu that was remade for sugar plantations in the middle of the nineteenth century. The O'ahu Sugar Company was established in 1897 in Waipahu, and it produced sugar until 1995. It is a destination for approximately 100,000 children a year who visit on a field trip as part of their studies for Hawai'i history, which is a focus in both fourth and ninth grade social studies. The museum is also on the beaten path of many tourists who are interested in learning more about the plantation chapter of Hawai'i's history, and visitors from O'ahu and the neighbor islands are also regular visitors. I consulted with the director, who amiably agreed to allow a small team of us from UHM to update the exhibit. I managed the project and

was supported by Andrew Choy, a graduate student who is from O‘ahu and speaks Pidgin. By way of a small grant,<sup>2</sup> the team also included a Hawai‘i historian at UHM, John Rosa, and a filmmaker, Marlene Booth, who had recently made a documentary film about Pidgin called *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawai‘i* (2009). Our team was particularly welcomed at the museum, which was itself lacking resources. We were given two walls that provided approximately 25 feet of horizontal space to work with. The museum had an existing display about Pidgin that was limited to a list of vocabulary words and lyrics from work songs that were sung during sugarcane harvesting. On the walls of the main building of the museum, these Pidgin words decorated sepia-toned images that depicted the plantation life at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Since museums often connote the past, rather than the present, we made a particular effort to design an exhibit that would present Pidgin as a language that developed in the 1800s but which would also frame the language from a contemporary lens. We settled on a timeline approach and eventually named the exhibit *Pidgin: How come . . . how stay* (“Pidgin: How did it develop . . . How is it now?”) One way that we depicted this timeline was in the sign for the exhibit, which features the title with a visual and lexical display of the early days of Pidgin (Figure 1). On the left side, the older forms appear near an image of plantation workers and feature *hapai ko* (“carry (sugar)cane”), *habut* (“pout”), *gasa gasa* (“busy”), *tantaran* (“arrogant”), *bambucha* (“big”), and *kaukau* (“food”). While these words are derived from Hawaiian, Japanese, Filipino, and Portuguese, the words on the right, which reflect contemporary Pidgin, are all English-lexified. Here, we see the popular spellings of *lataz* (“bye”), *garanz* (“guaranteed, for certain”), *rajah dat* (“roger that, gotcha”), *choke* (“a lot”), *grinds* (“food”), and *shoots* (“yes, alright”) surrounding a *shaka*, the ubiquitous local gesture that gets used for a range of functions, including greeting, thanking, leave-taking, confirming understanding, and more.<sup>3</sup> While the older terms are still in circulation, younger speakers are primarily using English-derived terms, though they have some receptive competence in the non-English forms as well.

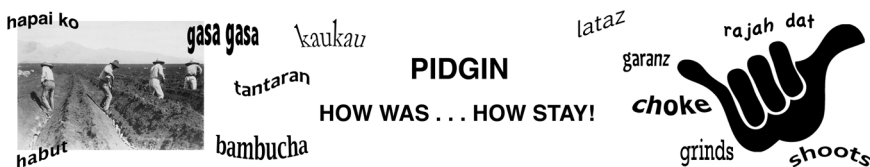


Figure 1.1 Museum exhibit wall for *Pidgin: How was . . . How Stay!* (image courtesy of C. Higgins)

Most aspects of present-day Hawai'i are historically interwoven with the marginalization of Native Hawaiians and Pidgin-speaking laborers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The exhibit thus features key periods and events that examine this marginalization by using archival images and an informational sign that first summarizes the event in Pidgin, followed by more details in English, though presented in smaller font. Placing Pidgin first prioritizes the language for museum-goers and attempts to frame the presentation from a Pidgin voice.

Figure 1.2 demonstrates the enthusiasm of McKinley High School in promoting “Better English Week,” in 1926 in an effort to encourage students to speak English rather than Pidgin. The student body put on a play in which they



In honor of “Better English Week,” McKinley High School students conducted a wedding ceremony in which McKinley High School was married to English (top left photo). As part of the festivities, Pidgin was also killed after being found guilty of murdering good English in a trial (bottom right photo). McKinley Yearbook, 1926.

**Figure 1.2** Museum exhibit panel on Pidgin in the 1920s featuring Better English Week (this image is in the public domain)

anthropomorphized Pidgin and put it on trial for killing good English. Pidgin was found guilty and sentenced to death. The bottom right image shows the students carrying a black coffin with white letters that state “Pidgin English.” According to the yearbook, they buried Pidgin in the ground of the high school campus before moving on to other ceremonies, including the marriage of McKinley High to good English. All of the children in the photos are undoubtedly Pidgin speakers. I can only imagine how they felt about speaking their language after burying it in the ground that day.

The exhibit includes a touchscreen computer loaded with audio clips of Pidgin so that people can listen to the language as it has changed over time (Figure 1.3). In the process of finding audio clips, I learned that no known recordings of Pidgin exist in any archives prior to the 1970s, except in music recordings of songs with stylized Pidgin. This was an astonishing discovery, given that Pidgin was spoken since the turn of the century. I found recordings from oral history interviews carried out in the 1970s with elders who were born at the time when creolization was taking place, and I used excerpts from speakers such as Samuel Mock-Chew, a resident of Waipi‘o who narrated the process of making kalua pork in an imu, or underground oven. The touchscreen also featured clips of two students shown in the (2009) *Ha Kam Wi Tawk Pidgin Yet?* film discussed above who represented the younger generation’s Pidgin. Visitors can also use the touchscreen computer to view images of Pidgin in the linguistic landscape of Hawai‘i. The presence of Pidgin in written form on signs in itself invites critical language awareness, as it raises the question of how a language that is described as having little value is used to buy, sell, and speak to local sensibilities.

The exhibit also showcases Pidgin as it is used to express local pride and local identity. A number of works in Pidgin are displayed, including novels by writers such as Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Lee Tonouchi, CD and DVD covers of local, well-loved comedians, and a copy of *Da Jesus Book*, a Pidgin-medium New Testament (Grimes and Grimes 2000). Local T-shirts with Pidgin sentiments are also on display, as these are a key way that local identity is marked in Hawai‘i (Figure 1.4). In the bottom center is a T-shirt stating “Engalish Standard School Rejeck,” which references the rejection of Pidgin speakers in English standard schools, discussed earlier. While the T-shirt can be interpreted as mocking those who did not get admitted to English standard schools (in the illustration, the student is even holding the book upside down), it is also often interpreted as a statement about the unfairness of English standard schools.

The museum exhibit opened in May of 2011, and we held a public program on opening day that included a talk by historian and team member John Rosa





**Figure 1.3** Touchscreen computer featuring oral and visual Pidgin at the exhibit (photo courtesy of C. Higgins)



**Figure 1.4** Pidgin T-shirts on display (photo courtesy of C. Higgins)

about the power of Pidgin as a common language that sugar plantation laborers used to organize and demand higher wages, and as a language that expresses commonality in present-day Hawai'i. We also designed activities for people in the museum, including taking Pidgin grammar quizzes, sketching linguistic family trees to see where Pidgin entered families generationally, using Pidgin magnets to compose sentences, and watching documentary films about Pidgin, in addition to viewing the exhibit itself. As Douglas (2016) notes, it is important for museum exhibits to do more than present information to communities, and our opening day strived to engage the attendees and also learn from them about how Pidgin functioned in their own lives. We had a full house for the event and were pleased to receive nothing but positive responses from an evaluation that we gave for the opening day event. We provided handouts to the public, including pamphlets about the grammatical and lexical differences between Pidgin and English and suggestions for educators in how to talk about Pidgin in schools. Both Pidgin speakers and non-Pidgin speakers expressed interest in our materials. I particularly recall sharing a "survival Pidgin" DVD that we produced with a high school digital arts class with a man who had recently moved from the US continent and who came to the event in search of ways to learn more Pidgin. While our human and technology resources are too constrained to provide an ongoing system for collecting community members' stories and histories about Pidgin, we hope to be able to continue this work in other avenues, including podcasts or through new content on the Sato Center website, where we plan to feature brief interviews with individuals in a feature titled *Pidgin Profiles*.

### **Project 3: *Get Pidgin?: Summit on Pidgin and Education***

Pidgin speakers have always been stigmatized in educational contexts. It is clear that Pidgin has also long been indexical of people of color and of the lower working class in Hawai'i. Even though Hawai'i is a "minority-majority" state in the US, Pidgin has been cast as deficient to English by Americans from the US continent. The result is that there is a naturalization of Pidgin as a language of the underclass, which is made up of non-White people, just as there is a naturalization of English as the language of the upper classes, which have been historically overrepresented by White people in Hawai'i. After the US government seized Hawai'i in the 1890s, the value of English became tied explicitly to power, and while it was always ideologically linked to Whiteness by way of the *haole* ("White") businessmen and government leaders who took over Hawai'i, its associations with Whiteness increased because of the English standard school



movement. To this day, speaking English is still often referred to as “speaking *haole*.” Even though many White residents identify as Pidgin speakers, Whiteness is also indexical of Pidgin ineptitude. Private school education is also indexical of a lack of Pidgin ability, as it marks the higher socioeconomic class status required to pay for tuition, along with separation from public schools, where Pidgin is still ideologically located from English standard school days (Tamura 1996).

Beyond language itself, racialized perspectives that privilege Whiteness can be found in every part of the educational system in Hawai‘i, as in the US as a whole. Though there has been improvement in recent decades, Native Hawaiian stories, histories, literature, art, and science are largely missing in the curriculum in spite of a state constitution mandate to teach Hawaiian language, culture, and history (Benham and Heck 1998). Public schools teach students some of this content through “Hawaiiana” classes, but these tend to be rather superficial. As in most school districts, the curriculum is shaped by the US continent’s mainstream history, literature, art, science, and cultural norms for learning, with little room for local knowledge. While some teachers do incorporate local authors who write in Pidgin into their language arts classes, or introduce their students to Hawaiian ecological systems of land use, such efforts are idiosyncratic (Chappel 2018; Kawakami 1999).

To push back against discourse that positions Pidgin speakers in negative ways in schooling and to draw attention to the ways that Pidgin is a resource for teaching and learning in schools, we organized a conference in 2017 which featured educators who were all pro-Pidgin. The conference had a bilingual name: “*Get Pidgin?*: Summit on Pidgin and Education” that intended to highlight the multiple Pidgin readings of “get Pidgin,” which can include “is there Pidgin?,” and “do you speak Pidgin?,” and from an English lens, “do you understand Pidgin?” Recordings of the conference and the conference program are available on the Sato Center website (<http://www.hawaii.edu/satocenter/?p=1348>). In planning the conference, my goal was to provide a platform for teachers to share their stories and their experience with other teachers and community members who wonder about the value of Pidgin. This was similar to the approach taken at a conference for the public at the University of Arizona, where graduate students organized the Language Diversity Conference in 2010 in response to a draconian state-approved educational policy that sought to remove teachers with “ungrammatical” English and who had “heavy accents” (Anya et al. 2010). *Get Pidgin?* was held at a public high school not far from the university, but also far enough to make sure that the conference would not be seen as a “UHM event”

that might be off-putting to some attendees who often view the university as a site for ivory tower thinking. Of the 200 people who came, approximately seventy-five were affiliated with UHM as faculty or students. The remainder included teachers, writers, and community members. It was meaningful that a cohort of five staff from the Office of Instructional Services in the state Department of Education also accepted the invitation to attend.

To encourage interest in the conference, I invited Augie T, a locally well-known comedian who speaks Pidgin, to welcome the audience. He is an alumnus of the high school where the event was held and was able to share his own personal stories of being mistreated as a Pidgin-speaking student with his characteristic humor. The conference was divided into three parts over the course of the day (see the program at <https://goo.gl/D7q4b1>). First, in the segment titled “*Get Pidgin?*” we used Kahoot, a mobile app that allows for audiences to take part in quizzes, to ask people about Pidgin grammar, history, and vocabulary, and the winning team received a door prize. The second part of the day was titled “Talking Story about Pidgin” and featured a panel of local writers and educators who explained how they valued Pidgin as a vehicle for conveying characterization, place, and experience more powerfully than English. This segment featured award-winning writers Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Darrell Lum, Lee Tonouchi, and Scott Ka‘ele, a doctoral student at UHM who embraced Pidgin in the composition classes he taught. After lunch, the main conference schedule began, with two tracks of breakout sessions for teacher presentations. One of the tracks featured K-12 teachers who taught ESL, language arts, and social studies, and the other track hosted the post-secondary instructors who taught community college composition, Hawaiian language at UHM, statistics in the College of Education at UHM, and a group of UHM graduate students and faculty who ran an afterschool linguistics program at a middle school, based in part on the SKILLS program at the University of California Santa Barbara (Bucholtz et al. 2014). The presenters included two high school language arts teachers who came from the island of Hawai‘i and who had contacted the Sato Center several years before to inquire about resources for teaching Pidgin literature.

While the day provided the live audience with the chance to meet the presenters, learn about their pedagogical activities around Pidgin, and have conversations, we also posted video recordings of the presentations on the Sato Center website. We do not currently have the resources to track who views these videos or to collect information about how they might use them, but we are pleased that they are available to the general public.

In preparation for the conference, I reached out to news media to let them know about the event in hopes of getting free publicity, and this led to new forms of public engagement with Pidgin. I was interviewed on a public radio talk show prior to the event, and one local television news crew and one journalist working for a major newspaper attended the event for most of the day. The television station reported on the event on their nightly broadcast and on their website (KITV 2017), and the newspaper published a full-length feature on the summit (Lee 2017). The KITV television report's title misrepresented the intention of the conference, which was not that "Pidgin English could be used someday in the classroom," as their title stated, but rather to showcase how teachers are making use of Pidgin as an additional resource for learning and teaching. It is notable that this same misinterpretation was made in the 1997 Ebonics "controversy," when it was proposed that school teachers in Oakland CA receive information about African American English (AAE) so that they could be better informed as teachers of students who speak AAE. Despite this faulty coverage, the comment thread on the news article revealed that some people are able to challenge negative responses to Pidgin in schooling. One person's post noted the discrimination inherent in devaluing Pidgin as lazy, and then pointed out how speaking Pidgin is not a barrier to success, citing many cases of how Pidgin is important for communication and professional profit.

Yes, Pidgin is a language. Have you considered the discrimination you're communicating when you say it's a "lazy language?" Would you say that about French? Why is Pidgin different? Have you ever learned another language? There is nothing lazy about it. Bilinguals, such as Pidgin and English speakers, benefit cognitively in many ways. My doctor, governor, favorite actor, and many highly successful people in Hawai'i are bilingual English and Pidgin speakers who can use these linguistic resources whenever needed. These bilingual skills are extremely useful for employees in many sectors in Hawai'i, such as hospitals, the court system, managers, hospitality, police and more. Pidgin speakers are laughing all the way to the bank, just ask Augie T (posted by Celebrate our bilinguals).

## Future directions

As a malihini, or non-native to Hawai'i, I feel it is my responsibility to consider how my presence in Hawai'i can contribute to positive change. My scholarly contributions are embedded in a history of colonial settlerhood that has not given sufficient attention to local and indigenous people and their languages.

As a university researcher, I am in a position to address this problem. One outcome of doing more public scholarship is that I have felt more enthusiastic about academia than ever. I think this is primarily because it is for the community, including those who speak Pidgin and those who do not, and I see this work as an opportunity to engage with people who often judge Pidgin speakers negatively, whether consciously or not. As I hope to have shown through discussing these projects, sociolinguistics can play a central role in encouraging people to consider how they think about speakers of particular languages and why they have devalued languages such as Pidgin vis-à-vis languages like English. Knowing the history of this discrimination is a necessary step in (re)examining one's language ideologies. Listening to the stories of Pidgin speakers is another crucial way to disrupt discourses of deficiency and to build lines of communication, empathy, and appreciation.

In the future, I plan to invite Pidgin speakers to develop more public-facing resources by using web-based platforms that allow for a citizen sociolinguistics approach (Rymes and Leone 2014). I am in the early stages of building a website that will invite people to upload photos that they take of Pidgin in public spaces and to crowdsource a linguistic landscape database of Pidgin that the community can create, browse, enjoy, and even analyze for a sociolinguistics project of their own. Such work has the potential to democratize the process of both data collection and analysis regarding Pidgin by inviting Pidgin speakers to identify various aspects of contemporary Pidgin. Through web-based citizen science projects, Pidgin speakers could address questions that often arise, including how Pidgin has changed over the generations and whether the English-influenced Pidgin of the younger generations is a sign that Pidgin will no longer be spoken in the near future. Another topic that is often discussed is how much Pidgin varies across the islands. A citizen sociolinguistics approach could lead to more robust data in a shorter period of time than it takes for conventional academic research, and by encouraging residents of Hawai'i to engage in the research process more conversations about Pidgin would surely take place that address language ideologies, language inequalities, and the relationship between language and identity in today's world.

## Notes

- 1 The student documentary project and the website that followed were funded by small grants from the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities. The website is available at <http://www.sls.hawaii.edu/Pidgin/>.

- 2 The museum installation was funded in part by a grant by the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities.
- 3 There are many legends about the origin of the shaka, but it is most often associated with surf culture. Native Hawaiians have long been expert surfers. The gesture is also associated with the concept of "hang loose," which is thought to have originated in Hawai'i but is now more strongly associated with California surf culture.

## References

- Anya, U., N. Avineri, L. Carris, and V. Valencia (2010), "Languages, Identities, and Accents: Perspectives from the 2010 Linguistic Diversity Conference," *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 18(2): 157–69.
- Avineri, N., L. R. Graham, E. J. Johnson, R. C. Riner, and J. Rosa (eds.) (2019), *Language and Social Justice in Practice*, New York: Routledge.
- Benham, M. K. P. A., and R. H. Heck (1998), *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawaii: The Silencing of Native Voices*, New York: Routledge.
- Beyer, C. K. (2018), "Counter-hegemony in Hawai'i: The Success of the Hawaiian Language Immersion Movement," *American Educational History Journal*, 45(1/2): 55–71.
- Bucholtz, M., A. Lopez, A. Mojarro, E. Skapoulli, C. VanderStouwe, and S. Warner-Garcia (2014), "Sociolinguistic Justice in the Schools: Student Researchers as Linguistic Experts," *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 8(4): 144–57.
- Bureau of Education (1920), *A Survey of Education in Hawaii*, Bulletin, No. 16. Department of the Interior, Washington DC: Government Printing Office.
- Chappel, J. (2018), "Engendering Cosmopolitanism on the Ground through Place-Based and Culturally Relevant Curriculum: The Experiences of Four teachers of World Literature in Hawai'i," *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(6): 805–19.
- Da Pidgin Coup (1999), "Pidgin and Education: A Position Paper," *Educational Perspectives*, 41: 31–9.
- Douglas, F. (2016), "Sociolinguistics in the Museum: Enrichment, Engagement, and Education," in R. Lawson and D. Sayers (eds.), *Sociolinguistic Research: Application and Impact*, pp. 66–86, London: Routledge.
- Eades, D., S. Jacobs, E. Hargrove, and T. Menacker (2006), "Pidgin, Local Identity and Schooling in Hawai'i," in S. Nero (ed.), *Dialects, Englishes, Creoles, and Education*, pp. 149–63, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fairclough, N. (1992), *Discourse and Social change*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grimes, J., and B. Grimes (2000), *Da Jesus Book: Hawai'i Pidgin New Testament*, Orlando: Wycliffe Bible Translators.
- Higgins, C., R. Nettel, G. Furukawa, and K. Sakoda (2012), "Beyond Contrastive Analysis and Codeswitching: Student Documentary Filmmaking as a Challenge to Linguicism in Hawai'i," *Linguistics and Education*, 23(1): 49–61.

- Hiramoto, M. (2011), "Consuming the Consumers: Semiotics of Hawai'i Creole in Advertisements," *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 26(2): 247–75.
- Holmes, J., M. Marra, and B. Vine (2011), *Leadership, discourse, and ethnicity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Voices of North Carolina* (2005). [Documentary film] Dir. Neil Hutcheson. USA: Language and Life Project, North Carolina State University.
- Janks, H. (2009), *Literacy and Power*, London: Routledge.
- Kawakami, A. J. (1999), "Sense of Place, Community, and Identity: Bridging the Gap between Home and School for Hawaiian students," *Education and Urban Society*, 32(1): 18–40.
- KITV (2017), "Pidgin English Could be Used Someday in the Classroom," *KITV News* (October 11). Available online: <https://www.kitv.com/story/36576417/pidgin-english-could-be-used-someday-in-the-classroom>.
- Lawson, R., and D. Sayers (eds.) (2016), *Sociolinguistic Research: Application and Impact*, London: Routledge.
- Lee, S. (2017), "Educators: Pidgin Belongs in Hawai'i Schools," *Civil Beat* (October 12). Available online: <https://www.civilbeat.org/2017/10/pidgin-belongs-in-hawaii-schools-educators-say/>.
- Makoni, S., G. Smitherman, A. Spears, and A. Ball (eds.) (2003), *Black Linguistics: The Social, Linguistic and Political Problems of Languages in Africa and the Americas*, New York: Routledge.
- Marlow, M. L., and H. Giles (2010), "'We Won't Get Ahead Speaking Like That!': Expressing and Managing Language Criticism in Hawai'i," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 31(3): 237–51.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: J. Currey.
- Reaser, J., and W. Wolfram (2007), *Voices of North Carolina: Language and Life from the Atlantic to the Appalachians*, Raleigh: North Carolina Language and Life Project. Available online: <http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/dialectcurriculum.php>.
- Rosa, J., and N. Flores (2017), "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective," *Language in Society*, 46(5): 621–47.
- Rymes, B., and A. R. Leone (2014), "Citizen Sociolinguistics: A New Media Methodology for Understanding Language and Social Life," *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 29(2): 25–43.
- Saft, S. (2019), *Exploring Multilingual Hawai'i: Language Use and Language Ideologies in a Diverse Society*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Saft, S., G. Tebow, and R. Santos (2018), "Hawai'i Creole in the Public Domain," *Pragmatics*, 28(3): 417–38.
- Sato, C. J. (1993), "Language Change in a Creole Continuum: Decreolization," in K. Hyltenstam and A. Viberg (eds.), *Progression and Regression in Language: Sociocultural, Neuropsychological, and Linguistic Perspectives*, pp. 122–43, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Smitherman, G. (2000), *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Tamura, E. H. (1996), "Power, Status, and Hawai'i Creole English: An Example of linguistic Intolerance in American History," *Pacific Historical Review*, 65(3): 431–54.
- Tonouchi, L. A. (2001), *Da Word*, Honolulu: Bamboo Ridge Press.
- UNESCO (2003), *Promoting the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Paris: UNESCO.
- Wilson, W. H. (1998), "The Sociopolitical Context of Establishing Hawaiian-medium Education," *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 11(3): 325–38.
- Wilson, W. H., and K. Kamanā (2006), "For the Interest of the Hawaiians Themselves: Reclaiming the Benefits of Hawaiian-Medium Education," *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being*, 3(1): 153–81.
- Wolfram, W. (1993), "Ethical Considerations in Language Awareness Programmes," *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 4(2): 225–55.
- Wolfram, W. (2017), "Public Sociolinguistic Education in the United States: A Proactive, Comprehensive Program," in R. Lawson and D. Sayers (eds.), *Sociolinguistic Research*, pp. 107–28, London: Routledge.
- Wolfram, W., J. Reaser, and C. Vaughn (2008), "Operationalizing Linguistic Gratitude: From Principle to Practice," *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(6): 1109–34.