

The Hawaiian Language: Ho'i Ana I Ke Kuma (Back To The Source)

“Language shift is promoted or inhibited not by properties of the languages themselves, but rather by a number of social factors, such as the size and economic status of the minority language population and the relative prestige of the two languages. Language shift is characteristic of low-prestige languages... speakers abandon the minority language for the dominant language, either involuntarily, through political coercion from the state, or voluntarily, to improve their economic prospects.”
-James A Walker-

Introduction

This paper will pursue the rise and fall of the Hawaiian language brought about by varying socio-historical, economic, geographical, and institutional support. It will explore the forces and circumstances on the Hawaiian language shift to English as a first language, and its subsequent status or prestige diminishing to a second language, and after that becoming an endangered one. Lastly, this paper will trace the recent revival of the Hawaiian language, as well as its current statewide maintenance as shared first language with English.

The Hawaiian Language Shift

Hawaii is the 50th as well as the last state to join the United States of America in 1959. It is an archipelago located in the North Pacific Ocean. The Hawaiian language derives its name from its largest island, Hawaii. Originally a Polynesian language of presumed Marquesan or Tahitian derivation, it is technically a member of the Austronesian language family of the South Pacific. One of the State's seven islands (but also still privately owned island by the descendants of a Scottish family), Ni'ihau, Hawaiian is still spoken as a first language and remains much as it was when the residents first experienced European contact. English lingers behind as its second language, and this may be due to its isolated status that permits only relatives, government officials, and US Navy personnel to visit residents.

According to the 2008 US Census and the current Ethnologue website, the Hawaiian language has around 2,000 indigenous speakers or less than 0.1% of its entire population. Worldwide in 1993 around 8,000 people were able to speak and understand it, whereas in 1900 there were 37,000 L1 speakers. In 1995 there remained comparatively few older adult L1 speakers in their 70s or 80s (1995 L. Wong) and whose numbers hovered around 500. In 1997 younger people, 2-15 years old were taught Hawaiian as L2 speakers, this age group numbered around 1,000. Conversely, the 15-25 year olds numbered 350.

A number of socio-historical factors led to the fall and rise of Hawaiian as a first language, beginning in 1778 when their first English language contact took place by British explorer and captain of the Royal Navy, James Cook and his crew. This language shift towards English grew even more prominent in 1887 when Hawaii's King was forced by wealthy, white plantation owners to sign a Constitution of the Kingdom of Hawaii, which stripped him of most all of his authority. Then the richer white landowners made the right to vote contingent on owning property, thus disenfranchising the poorer indigenous Hawaiians, immigrant laborers and Asian residents. Later in 1893 European and American business owners and occupants formed a Committee of Safety to finally remove all remaining powers from the standing Queen of the Hawaiian Kingdom. At the

same time they advocated for the annexation of Hawaii as a US territory, which the US enforced by the landing of their Marines on the chain of islands. Furthermore in 1896, the US enacted a territorial law, which demanded English "be the only medium and basis of instruction in all public and private schools," and perhaps just as importantly this law also prevented Hawaiian being taught, even as a second language. Thus the maintenance of Hawaiian as a first language declined on six of its seven islands, as it was neither supported by the commanding legal or educational institutions, nor seen as holding a 'prestige' status, thus were pushed aside as a powerless demographic entity.

One should note here the unique and distinct case of L1 speakers in the family owned island of Ni'ihau (1864). Although since 1959 it has been one of the seven islands that make up the state of Hawaii, it is the only one of the seven island chain that have maintained their Hawaiian dialect as a first language. In 1875 Ni'ihau had 350 L1 indigenous people, but now has only around 130 residents. They live primarily in the main Pu'iwai settlement. However, because of their geographic and chosen isolation, the island has had little language contact with English speakers. As a result, there has been little language shift, and the indigenous population has held high language maintenance of their own particular Hawaiian dialect. Moreover, the inhabitants maintain a rural living consisting of fishing and farming, as well as a low technological lifestyle- with no power lines, TV, radio, telephones, nor automotive vehicles- all have further separated the islanders from the English speaking world. Furthermore they have no hotels or general stores to accommodate outsiders. Thus overall there has been little linguistic consequence imposed on Ni'ihau's L1 speakers.

The long-lived American institutional enforcement in the law and education (1896-1978) of Hawaiians on the rest of the six islands greatly hindered the "ethnolinguistic vitality" (1977, Giles, et al) of the indigenous people. This may be seen more clearly 80 years later in the 2000 US Census, as it documented around 73 % of residents age 5 and older spoke 'only English' at home. Moreover, a later American Community Survey in 2008, or 90 years after the 1978 L1 Hawaiian language law was put in place, found that this same age group, under the same circumstances, and spoke English at rate of almost 75%. The remaining percentages were multilingual, primarily through immigration. So clearly the 'linguistic consequences' of the US mandating English be used as a first language gradually displaced the L1 Hawaiian language, domain by domain, and over a long period of time. Its 'monostylism' took hold as the more politically, economically, and demographically disadvantaged indigenous people were legally bound to shift their first language to English. Thus the more powerful, legally authorized, and prestigious English language was instituted and displaced the Hawaiian language by lowering the latter's socio-linguistic status to a low-prestige level.

The Hawaiian Ethnolinguistic Re-vitalization and Preservation

"... the major factor in preventing language death seems to be the degree to which the dying language is emblematic of a social identity that people wish to preserve."

- James A Walker-

Swept up by the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the anti-colonial stance fighting for social justice by indigenous peoples worldwide, native Hawaiian youth rose

up as well. The 1960s and 70s brought global tourism to the islands and alongside the visitors came an economic expansion and a building explosion in Hawaii. The indigenous youth began to protest the widespread land development and usage of their native islands. Then in 1993, on the 100th anniversary of the final toppling of their Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893 by the Committee of Safety, and thousands of indigenous Hawaiians and supporters held an observance for four long days. This eventually led to the 1993 Apology Resolution by the US government, which admitted to its collusion in the final ousting of the Hawaiian Monarchy.

Institutional Support for Indigenous Hawaiian Language

In 1978, the passage of the Hawaii Constitution made the Hawaiian language mandatory and co-official with English. At the same time a trust called the Office of Hawaiian Association (OHA) was set up with the mission to help improve the situations of the indigenous people as well as the larger community. Later both began to gain influence over the State, thus helping to begin a ‘Hawaiian Renaissance’ in 1979. Organizations began to form so as to maintain the local culture, such as the Hawaiian Businessmen's Association, the Hawaiian Music Foundation, the Polynesian Voyaging Society, and so on. The naming and signage of Hawaiian streets, parks, educational and governmental organizations were written in the Hawaiian language by various charter amendments and statues. Continuing to gain momentum in 1989, a private non-for-profit corporation, F. Olelo Hawaii Community Media, established itself in order for the public to access and create their own TV programming. Their facilities made TV resources and services readily available, as well as providing a media outlet for local citizens to voice and communicate their opinions widely. As a result and over time, locals reached a wider audience created thousands of hours of broadcasting.

Education

In 1978, the University of Hawaii at Manoa opened up a Language Department, which later offered Master's degrees (2002), then PhDs (2006) in the Hawaiian Language. It was the first US University to offer higher degrees in an indigenous language, thus breaking new and global ground for scholars to pursue the revival of their own native languages. Also the Hawaiian language (L2) was offered for private pre-school children, 2 years old and up to high school. In 1984 equivalent public schools followed suit. As a result of these immersion schools, many students have now graduated from college and are fluent in the language. In addition, statewide public elementary schools established a core and complete Hawaiian cultural curriculum where such subjects as language vocabulary, ancient arts, hula, lifestyle and geography are taught. Furthermore, elder students in intermediate and high school are required to take Hawaiian history in order to graduate. And returning to the Ni'ihau Island, in kindergarten through early elementary school their Hawaiian dialect is spoken, and then English and Hawaiian are spoken all the way through grade 12. Special attention is devoted to teaching the youth how to live off the land to retain and sustain their island's livelihood of fishing and farming, as well as learning computer literacy. In all instances, the Hawaii Department of Education runs the programs. Additionally the schools work to cultivate their Hawaiian culture, values, and spirituality. Also in order to teach, maintain, and preserve the

customary Ni'ihau and Hawaiian culture, the schools are provided with a digital video recording systems.

Beyond the educational realm, the Hawaiian Language also maintains its own dictionary, grammar references, as well the Bible (1868-2012). It also publishes in new and social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Wordpress blogs, and so on. Overall, the Hawaiian Language has risen in status, awareness, and encouragement because of varying socio-historical, economic, geographical, and institutional support factors i.e. post 1978. Thus, it has not only survived, but clearly has been revived in its 'ethnolinguistic vitality,' and will most likely continue as an indigenous language.

Michael Tsai, a Hawaiian newspaper journalist and college teacher, in 2009 summarized what he saw going on in this way, " [The Hawaiian Renaissance] has reversed years of cultural decline; it has created a new kind of Hawaiian consciousness; it has inspired greater pride in being Hawaiian; it has led to bold and imaginative ways of reasserting our identity; it has led to a new political awareness; and it has had and will continue to have a positive impact on the economic and social uplifting of the Hawaiian community. [...] It also includes a revival of interest in the past, in the pursuit of knowledge or learning and in the future. In short, it deals with the revitalization of the human spirit in all aspects of endeavor. And when we look very carefully at what is occurring among Hawaiians today economically, artistically, politically, socially, culturally, it is impossible to ignore the spirit of rebirth.

Further preservation efforts

"Each language is a unique repository of facts and knowledge about the world that we can ill afford to lose, or, at the least, facts and knowledge about some history and people that have their place in the understanding of mankind. Every language is a treasury of human experience." Michael Krauss

An important footnote should be added here- as far as remembering and preserving Hawaii's history on a long-term basis, the former chief of the Asian Division in the Library of Congress', Frank Odo, realized the Library held only limited collections. He stated, "The Library of Congress, like the Smithsonian, has the responsibility as a national, federally funded institution to preserve our heritage. And if we do this, future generations will be grateful." Thus in 1997, the Hawaiian born Japanese American founded the Asian Pacific Division in the Library of Congress to build up its collection. "It's really important to have folks really paying attention to this at places like the National Archives or the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress... we have lots of catching up to do." Retired in 2010, ironically Odo is working on a book that documents the Hawaiian sugarcane folksongs that field hands sang while laboring on the Euro-American owned plantations. He knows, "...documents [such as these] almost disappeared because this form of expression from common people was not valued and the next generation may be unable to determine its importance or to read the original language." Still with people like Odo having risen to a position of national influence and power status, one can only hold out hope that other Hawaiians will also rise up to leadership roles and carry on the Hawaiian language, culture and traditions worldwide.

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). It set "an important standard for the treatment of indigenous peoples... [and created] a significant tool towards eliminating human rights violations against the planet's 370 million indigenous people and assisting them in combating discrimination and marginalization." The Declaration also sought to establish these people's rights to their own language, identity, culture, education, employment, health, etc. Though under international law, it does not legally bind any nation, it does reflect the endorsement of 144 nations in the world that would like to embrace the Declaration's ideals. In 2009 an unintended consequence of UNDRIP was that Native Hawaiians began pressure its State Legislature to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, they called for President Obama, a former resident of Hawaii, to have the USA as a nation adopt the Declaration.

CONCLUSION

"language death is a tragedy not only because every language is a unique and valuable communicative system, but also because language is so often correlated with sociocultural and ethnic identity. ...success stories (relatively speaking) have been aided by a combination of political and educational provisions, the major factor in preventing language death seems to be the degree to which the dying language is emblematic of a social identity that people wish to preserve." -Michael Krauss-

The Hawaiian language usage has been weakened and then strengthened throughout its almost 150 year English written history (1868 Bible). Yet the indigenous people have managed to maintain their relationship between their culture, thought and language, thus sustaining their ability to communicate in their own- unique attitudinal, emotional and symbolic- cultural meanings. Additionally the revival of their language has cultivated a feeling of identity, membership, as well as a sense of belongingness. This reinvigoration has renewed indigenous interests, occupations, and ideas, which now bind the Hawaiian culture closer together as community. Also since the 1978 State Constitution was instituted i.e. legally mandating that the Hawaiian language be acknowledged as equally important as English, this new socio-linguistic balance has made possible for social networks to be created and form fresh as well as innovative purposes of interaction. Thus the ties between language and cultural meaning have been renewed, allowing the Hawaiians to once again fortify the symbolic content of their social messages and own their patterns of discourse. As a result indigenous Hawaiians are able to once again align events and cultural assumptions together vis-a-vis their own worldview through the wider spread reinstatement of their language. Ultimately their major language shift, maintenance and preservation have undergone substantial changes in legal, educational, and cultural status. However, all these events in the end did not let these outside pressures deter nor dissuade them, through their ongoing perseverance the indigenous Hawaiians only strengthened their language and their culture.