

2014

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Recommended Citation

Greiner-Shelton, Anna, "Successes and Problems of the Hawaiian Language Revitalization Movement" (2014). *2014 Symposium*. 47.
https://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2014/47

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Successes & Problems Of the Hawaiian Language Revitalization Movement

Anna Greiner-Shelton



Factors in the Decline of the Hawaiian Language



- The massive reduction of native Hawaiians due to contact with Western diseases
 - In 1778, the native Hawaiian population was estimated to be 800,000
 - In 1878, only 47,500 native Hawaiians remained
 - 94% of the native population had been wiped out
- Erosion of the major institutions of Hawaiian life
 - Resulted in English becoming the dominant language
- The replacement of Hawaiian with English
 - Occurred because of Hawaiian's perceived low and inferior status in relation to English
 - In 1840, Hawaiian was the primary language used in the government
 - 30 years later, all official government documents were written in English and then translated into Hawaiian



- The displacement of Hawaiian with Hawaii Creole English
 - A pidgin Hawaiian was created due to the large influx of immigrants from different linguistic backgrounds attempting to communicate
 - A pidgin English soon replaced the pidgin Hawaiian
- The ban of speaking Hawaiian in schools
 - In 1896, speaking the Hawaiian language was outlawed in schools and
 - Rapidly decreased the number of people who could speak Hawaiian



Beginnings of the Movement

- 1960s- Native Hawaiians' renewed interest in dancing the *hula* and singing traditional songs
- 1970s- Elementary Hawaiian 101 classes were being taught at University of Hawaii
- In 1978, the Hawaiian language was designated as one of two official languages of Hawaii
 - When this law passed, there were about 2,000 native speakers of Hawaiian
 - By 2001, this number was around 6,000
- Other laws that mandated the state to promote Hawaiian history, culture, and language



Successes



A Large Independent Movement

- Formed the core of the language revitalization movement and provided the basis for Hawaiian language schools
- In 1982, a handful of educators and community members created “language nests”
 - These were called Punana Leos
 - Hawaiian was in critical danger of dying out as a spoken language
 - There were only two tiny communities of native first language Hawaiian speakers left
- 11 Punana Leos and 1 infant language immersion center



Favorable Government Policies

- The government started the Kula Kaiapuni, or Hawaiian Immersion Schools
- Realized that the small numbers of children coming into the Hawaiian school system would not be able to maintain their Hawaiian language ability
- . The program was expanded from the grades of K-2 up to the 12th grade
- Currently, there are 19 schools
- Demand for spots in the program outnumber available openings



Successful Adaptation & Use of the Internet and Other Multimedia Sources

- Leoki, or Powerful Voice, is a bulletin board system believed to be the first in the world to operate entirely in an indigenous language.
 - Its purpose is to provide online support for Hawaiian language use
 - Compose a Song program
 - Emphasizes the Hawaiian tradition of “talking story”
- Specialized computer programs have been created in Hawaiian
- Primary software that allows the addition of diacritical marks
 - This has allowed the immersion schools to operate their computers solely in Hawaiian and means students aren’t technologically hindered



Problems



Authenticity of the Version of the Hawaiian Language Being Taught

- Currently a rift in the revitalization movement
 - The language should be kept as traditional and authentic as possible
 - The whole scale expansion of the Hawaiian vocabulary
 - both are attempting to claim authority over the direction the movement should take
- Hawaiian's small phoneme inventory
 - Rather low priority of the need to disambiguate
 - Reflected in the Hawaiian worldview
- The Ke Komike Hua'olelo Hou is trying to disambiguate Hawaiian terms and modernize the language
- Critics argue they are changing the Hawaiian worldview at a level much more profound just incorporating new vocabulary
 - Would change the ways speakers interact with each other
 - Would be divergent with the Hawaiian worldview

Government Policies that weren't Conducive to the Retention & Continued Revitalization of Hawaiian

- Only hiring people with a teaching certificate
 - Older Hawaiians who spoke the language fluently weren't hired since they didn't possess teaching certificates
- Hired teachers who couldn't speak Hawaiian
- Only opening Hawaiian Language Immersion Programs in public schools only after pressure has been applied
- Kula Kaiapuna programs where there is a mix of children who have learned Hawaiian and children who speak only English
 - The Hawaiian speaking children's needs are often put on hold



The Non-Beneficial Involvement of Nonindigenous People

- “Some non-Hawaiian language educators and academics in the revitalization movement that have and that are actively engaged in promoting ideologies through political rhetoric and discourse that serve to legitimize, justify, and empower their own voices not only to speak and decide for Hawaiians but also to silence those less empowered voices”
 - Believe a new identity and nation for Hawaiians should be created
 - Sole requirement to be identified as Hawaiian would be based on the ability to speak the language, not based on ethnicity
 - Excludes the majority of ethnic Hawaiians who couldn't speak the language
 - Seek to divorce the language from its original speakers
 - Appropriate it as their own, denying native Hawaiians their voice
 - Want to save it because it is an endangered and a beautiful language, not because it is culturally important and part of Hawaiian heritage and identity

Outcomes

- Has been successful in the short term
- However, the long term future of the movement is uncertain if the problems within the movement are not addressed and resolved



Citations

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