

# *Pidgins and Creoles in Education (PACE)* **NEWSLETTER**

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## FROM THE EDITOR

This issue contains the usual information about theses, new publications and conferences dealing with the use of pidgins, creoles and minority dialects in education. It also has an article about observations of one very successful program. But unfortunately, the number of reports about other on-going programs and other issues has reached an all time low.

To celebrate the 10th anniversary issue of the newsletter next year, I would like to make a special appeal for each subscriber to send in a report (any length will do) about their interests, about programs they're involved in or about any other issues.

We'll try to spruce up the format of the newsletter as well, so any photos or illustrations would be most welcome.

I'll be back in Australia, so please send your contributions to:

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## REPORTS

### *Australia*

from: Paul Bubb  
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“The NTDE operates 21 formal bilingual programs in 20 schools. One of the programs runs a formal Kriol program (Barunga School) and one other program offers a traditional language (Nunggubuyu) but the lingua franca (Kriol) is used to assist student learning in both Nunggubuyu and English. We also have senior high school programs teaching Australian indigenous languages as LOTEs [Languages Other Than English]. Kriol is one of the languages being utilised.

“I am the Principal Education Officer for Aboriginal Languages and Bilingual Education with policy over-sight for these programs.”

from: Joyce Hudson  
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“The FELIKS approach, developed by the Catholic Education Office in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, has been described in the publication *Making the jump: A resource book for teachers of Aboriginal students* which won the Australian Award for Excellence in Educational Publishing — Primary teacher reference section for 1998. FELIKS stands for Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools and this approach has been trialled in schools around the Kimberley for the last few years. With the publication of the resource book, it is now

able to be shared further afield. In June, authors Rosalind Berry and Joyce Hudson were invited to run FELIKS Approach seminars in Queensland. These were held on Thursday Island and Cairns and participants came from schools across the state.

“Although the FELIKS approach focusses on the Kriol language (spoken across the Northern Territory and Kimberley) and Aboriginal English, it was shown to be just as relevant in Queensland where many students speak Torres Strait Creole. Teachers who attended were most enthusiastic about the strategies they were given for teaching Standard English and at the end there was talk of running more similar seminars in 1999.”

from: Bruce Rigsby  
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“I do research and work in communities on Cape York Peninsula where creole and Aboriginal English varieties are the vernacular. While this no doubt influences children’s performance in school, people are most concerned about indigenous language loss and how to address it. There is little or no interest in developing P/C or Aboriginal English programs for school, but teachers and educators would do well to learn more about their students’ vernacular varieties.”

### **France**

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“I have finished a paper (written in Portuguese, 69 page ms) on missionary grammars written by Jesuits in Brazil in the 16th and

17th centuries. I focused on four works, seen as instruments for the teaching of a second language: Anchieta (1595) and Figueira (1621?), both on *Lingua Geral*; Dias (1697), on *Kimbundo*, intended as a help for those priests who had to wait for the slave ships from Africa; and Mamiani (1699), on *Kiriri*, or *Kariri* (Kariri family, now disappeared).”

### **THESIS**

Commentary on the dynamics of “The Question of Creole in Primary Schools in Guadeloupe”, a thesis by Paulette Durizot Jno-Baptiste (CERC, Campus Universitaire de Fouillole, 97159 Pointe-à-Pitre Cedex, Guadeloupe, F.W.I.)

commentary written by Bertene Juminer, Rector, Université des Antilles et de la Guyane

The question of Creole in schools in Guadeloupe rests to a great extent on the cultural manifestations and social values of languages in contact: Creole and French. The historical evolution of their contact modifies behavior and ideological references making necessary the reformulation of the linguistic and cultural question in the school milieu.

Indeed, the method of learning of the present life leads parents to educate their children through a hybrid language, a language of linguistic interbreeding (*métissage*).

What cultural message does Guadeloupe send to persons in search of authentic identity, through the statement of their new maternal language?

In choosing to write a thesis on ‘The question of Creole in primary schools in Guadeloupe: historical and current manifestations of a language and culture’, Madame Paulette Durizot Jno-Baptiste has indicated with *maestria* (mastery) the road to follow. The author does not get you involved without having deeply reflected on the strategy which she recommends.

### **DISSERTATION IN PROGRESS**

from: Siobhan K. Casson  
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I am studying for an MA in Applied Linguistics at the University of Durham in the UK.

For my MA dissertation I am hoping to broadly cover some of the issues surrounding creole in education and creole literacy. Since I am based in the Northeast of England, I am unable to carry out a research project or collect primary data. However, I was employ-ed by the Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation (DAC) in Katherine in the Northern Territory of Australia between 1995 and 1996. With input from Denise Angelo, Jen Munro and the moral support of the Committee of DAC I am hoping to use the experience I gained there to present more than a review of literature in my paper. The provisional title is "Creole literacy: issues and possibilities from an educational perspective".

My aim for the dissertation is to bring together several strands of creole studies – theoretical, sociolinguistic and pedagogical. By examining both the linguistic and societal perceptions of creoles, I will establish reasons for accepting their status as languages. I shall also look at the importance of Language, Culture and Identity and how the long-time denigration of creoles has muddied the water in this area.

From this base I will discuss the broader issues of creole in education and language rights. I will then focus on studies which have specifically looked at the effects of using creole in education. Additionally, since one of my major interests is in literacy and its functions, I intend to examine the perceived notion that creole literacy serves no economic or societal need – something which an official or dominant language is imagined to serve and which is often a reason for not acknowledging the language of creole-speaking children within education.

Some of the questions I might ask are: Can creole literacy work positively against prejudices against the language? Do creole speaking communities regard development of a creole orthography as a positive step towards literacy, or is it a means of undermining a culture? If literacy in creole languages is engendered, will the communities have control over it or will it be owned, by the wider society because of its use in education? What would be the best way to promote or use creole in education?

I am still two months away from completing my dissertation, so I cannot say what sort of conclusions I will arrive at – however, I do hope to develop a framework which may be a pointer to future research. I am hoping to conduct further study into the effects of introducing first languages into

education undertaken in another language as a means to both maintain home languages and promote literacy in both. As I may stay in Durham to do this, any longitudinal study would probably be undertaken with children from Asian or Arabic backgrounds. However, I am hoping that any sort of study in this area will have some application to creole situations and I hope to get funding to make a couple of field-trips overseas to establish this!

I would be grateful for any sort of input – either on my dissertation or my thoughts for future study.

## ARTICLE

by: Terri Menecker  
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### A Visit to CAP

Last April I had the pleasure of spending a day at Evanston Township High School in Illinois at the Caribbean Academic Program (CAP). Coming from Hawai'i, where there are still many struggles in the schools resulting from negative attitudes towards the local language variety (Hawai'i Creole English), it was heartening to see the kind of program some of us envision carrying out here being successfully implemented for speakers of Caribbean English.

I had read about the program while in Hawai'i (Fischer 1992a, 1992b) and was excited to find it doing well twelve years after its inception. Kathy Fischer (founder of the program) graciously agreed to my visit and I was able to observe classes and talk with her, other CAP teachers and CAP students.

The student body of Evanston Township High School consists of students from a wide range of socio-economic, cultural and racial backgrounds. There are speakers of a variety of immigrant languages as well as African American English and Standard Midwestern English. Ten to fifteen percent of the students are speakers of Caribbean English Creole (CEC), who are mostly from Jamaica, but include some from Belize and Barbados.

CAP uses a language awareness approach (cf. Siegel 1997) to promote positive student attitudes towards CEC while making salient the differences between CEC and Standard English (SE). Students learn about the histories of both CEC and SE with attention to relevant issues of language and power. They use a contrastive analysis approach

(focusing on pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar) to promote separation of CEC and SE within the students' verbal repertoires. Readings in CEC are incorporated into the curriculum and students engage in translation activities from CEC to SE and visa-versa. CEC is also used in oral discussion by students and CEC-speaking instructors.

Students spend part of the day in their CAP classes and the rest in regular content courses. In addition to attention to language issues, CAP serves as a cross-cultural bridge for students and a place to get advising and other types of support. CAP staff also offer training sessions to inform the rest of the schools' teachers about CEC and effective strategies for helping CEC-speaking students.

When Kathy Fischer first arrived at the school, a disproportionate number of the CEC speaking students were dropping or flunking out of school or being placed in special education classes. At that time, attitudes at the school toward CEC were negative, with many students denying that they were CEC speakers.

What I saw at the school in 1998 was a much different picture. Attitudes towards CEC seemed quite positive. The numbers of CEC-speaking dropouts and students in special education had reduced dramatically with many students moving on to honors classes and going on to college.

During one of the classes, I watched a student video presentation in which CAP students had interviewed other students at the school about their knowledge of CEC and their attitudes towards it. The CAP students' pride in and understanding of their language came through clearly in the video and in the subsequent discussion. CAP students seemed to be well aware of the type of misunderstandings about language that were common in the general population and took pride in their own grasp of the issues.

Evidence of the increased status of CEC was apparent in the video-taped interviews mentioned above. For example, one of the interviewees was a white student wearing dreadlocks who proudly demonstrated his knowledge of CEC and was rewarded by the female CEC-speaking interviewer with the comment that he was cute. The CAP program is surely an important contributor to this turnaround in attitude. Other factors which may have played a part are the higher status of CEC brought about by the popularity of the music of its speakers and the kinds of social and sociolinguistic processes which Rampton

describes in his 1995 book.

My visit to the school was brief but all indications were that something quite positive was happening. Some of the discussions I participated in with the CAP students about sociolinguistic issues were at a level at least as sophisticated as those that take place in university-level linguistics courses.

Since returning to Hawai'i, I have thought often about the CAP program and the possibilities for a similar program here. Ironically, we may face more barriers here towards acceptance of the stigmatized local speech variety (HCE) than of CEC. The CAP program has been able to avoid controversies such as those surrounding Ebonics, HCE or other indigenous varieties of English, by classifying itself as a program for speakers of an immigrant language rather than a variety of English. For example, there are no programs similar to CAP for the many African American English speakers at the school, nor for that matter are there CAP-type programs in Jamaica (though they would likely prove quite helpful).

No doubt part of what has made the CAP program so successful is the quality of the teaching staff who not only have an in-depth knowledge of the relevant linguistic issues but also themselves possess high levels of bilingualism and biculturalism. This would be another challenge to reproducing such a program here in Hawai'i or elsewhere.

I have tried to relate as accurately as possible what I have learned about CAP through my visit and other sources but my perspective is obviously limited. For those wishing to find out more about the program, I suggest reading Kathy Fischer's articles or contacting her or the school directly. Perhaps like me, you will find it a motivating example of what is possible for pidgins and creoles in education.

## References

- Fischer, Katherine. 1992a. Educating speakers of Caribbean English in the United States. In Jeff Siegel, ed. *Pidgins, creoles and nonstandard dialects in education*. Melbourne: Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (Occasional Paper no. 12), 99-123.
- . 1992b. [Report]. *Pidgins and Creoles in Education (PACE) Newsletter* 3, 1.
- Rampton, Ben. 1995. *Crossing: Language and ethnicity among adolescents*. New York: Longman.
- Siegel, Jeff. 1997. Using a pidgin language in formal education: help or hindrance? *Applied Linguistics* 18, 86-100.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### *General*

An accessible and comprehensive introduction to pidgins, creoles and other contact languages is Mark Sebba's new textbook, *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles* (MacMillan, Basingstoke Hampshire, and St Martin's Press, New York, 1997). The book is full of interesting case studies and examples of various pidgins and creoles, and has useful exercises for students.

Chapter 8, "Issues for Development", talks about pidgins and creoles as standard, written languages and their use as official and educational languages. The section on Pidgins and Creoles in Education (pp.252-58) refers to arguments for the use of the native language or mother tongue in education. This of course would include creoles. This section then presents some of the debate on the question of using pidgins, which are not anyone's mother tongue, in education. The last part of the section discusses the use of creoles in education in the Caribbean and Britain.

### *PACE in Australia*

*Making the Jump: A Resource Book for Teachers of Aboriginal Students* by Rosalind Berry, Rosalind and Joyce Hudson (Catholic Education Office, Kimberley Region, Broome, Australia, 1997) is a very important book for anyone working with students who speak Australian Kriol or Aboriginal English. It has already won *The Australian* newspaper Award for Excellence in Educational Publishing in the Primary Teacher Reference category.

The book builds on concepts introduced to teachers during in-service courses using the FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools) designed by the same authors (described in earlier issues of the *PACE Newsletter*). It also suggests practical ways of using and extending these concepts in the classroom. According to the Foreword:

*Making the Jump* ...encourages two way learning by teaching the English language and culture while retaining and validating students' home language and culture. It promotes code-switching between the students' home language and Standard Australian English and shows teachers how to pinpoint their students' linguistic needs and plan appropriate programs to increase competency in English.

The introductory chapters cover topics such as language and power and cultural differences in areas including world view and learning styles. They also provide information on traditional and new Aboriginal languages. Pedagogical chapters show teachers how to help students control both the home and school languages through activities promoting awareness, separation and code-switching. The longest chapters, "Discovering the Differences" and "Games" give background information about the phonological, grammatical and semantic differences between Aboriginal varieties and Standard Australian English, and provide teachers with means of assessing students' knowledge. Both chapters present useful games and other activities for helping students become aware of the differences and add a more standard variety to their repertoires.

Another recent publication relevant to Aboriginal English in education is *Aboriginality and English: Report to the Australian Research Council, November 1997* by Ian G. Malcolm and Marek M. Kosciielecki (Centre for Applied Language Research, Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley, WA). This is a report of a socio-historical research project to find out more about the origins and use of the kind of Aboriginal English which is the home dialect of most urban Aboriginal students.

The introduction states:

...if the educational needs of Aboriginal students are to be adequately met through the school system, more needs to be learned about the "submerged" dialect of which their school communication gives little more than a hint. More needs to be known about the meanings carried by English as a bidialectal system of communication for Aboriginal people. More needs to be known about how, and why, Aboriginal Australians have, since almost the time of initial European settlement, developed and maintained English as a means of "two-way" communication which enables Aboriginal identity and values to be preserved while intercourse is also carried on, to a greater or lesser extent, with the wider society.

The report describes the historical development of Aboriginal English and gives some information on the current varieties spoken in two areas of the country. The final chapter, "Aboriginality and English in Education", discusses the relevance of the findings to "two-way bilingual education", as described in the last issue of the *PACE Newsletter* (issue 8, p.14).

### ***PACE in North America***

An estimated 300,000 Cape Verdeans live in North America, most concentrated in the state of Massachusetts, where several bilingual programs in the Capeverdean (Portuguese creole) language are in place. The development of these programs is described in a chapter by Georgette E. Gonsalves, "Language policy and reform: The case of Cape Verdean", pp. 31-36 in *Education Reform and Social Change: Multicultural Voices, Struggles, and Visions* edited by Catherine E. Walsh (Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, 1996). In 1973, the Massachusetts House of Representatives recognized Capeverdean as a Modern Language, making it eligible for bilingual programs. Currently, the Boston school system is the only one in North America and Cape Verde itself which is offering comprehensive bilingual programs for Capeverdean-speaking students running from kindergarten through Grade 12.

However, despite the successes of the programs over the last 20 years, the author reports that there were only 13 in 1996, involving only 700 out of the approximately 10,000 bilingual Capeverdean students in Boston. Problems have been encountered in a lack of curricula and teaching materials, and in the unsupportive attitudes of some teachers and administrators. But things should improve now that there has been agreement on a writing system in Cape Verde itself.

*Cimboa* is a journal of letters, arts and studies in both English and Portuguese focussing on the Cape Verdean community in the USA. In an editorial in issue no.4 (1997), Georgette Gonsalves notes that "children in Boston, Brockton, Rotterdam and interestingly, in some schools in Lisbon, are benefiting from schooling where their language and culture are valued and are integral parts of their instruction" (p.2).

In an article titled "Capeverdean (under)-representation in bilingual education at stake" in the first issue of *Cimboa* (no.1, 1996, pp.23-25), Marlyse Baptista reacts to a biased negative report broadcast on National Public Radio in 1995 about a Capeverdean bilingual education program. She corrects several misleading statements made in the broadcast, including one saying that Capeverdean has "no recognized rules of grammar"!

Marlyse Baptista also has an article in the

following issue of *Cimboa* (no.2, 1997, pp.17-20): "From orality to the written word: A linguistic rite of passage". This article gives a history of the development of Capeverdean from an exclusively oral language into a written language. It describes the use of Capeverdean in the struggle for independence from Portugal in the 1950s and 60s and in literature. Then it goes into some of the complex issues surrounding the implementation of a standard orthography for the language.

*Cimboa* is published by Consulado Geral de Cabo Verde, 607 Boylston St, Boston, MA 02116, USA.  
Email: cimboa@aol.com

Two chapters on creoles in North America are found in *The Multilingual Apple: Languages in New York City* edited by Ofelia García and Joshua A. Fishman (Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1997). In "Haitian Creole in New York" (pp.281-99), Carole M. Berotte Joseph gives an account of Haitian arrival and settlement in the USA and describes settlements in New York City. Then she describes the sociolinguistic situation in Haiti, including attempts to standardize Haitian Creole and introduce it into the school curriculum. The author goes on to show that negative attitudes towards Haitian Creole exist in New York but some positive changes are taking place. The language is being widely used in publications and radio and TV broadcasting in both Haiti and New York.

With regard to education, public schools in three boroughs offer bilingual Haitian Creole/English classes, but there are no full bilingual programs. Since 1988, *Anmwe* (or the Haitian Educators League for Progress) has been promoting bilingual education in Haitian Creole. The state-funded Haitian Bilingual/ESL Technical Assistance Center (HABETAC), located at The City College of New York, organizes services, activities and programs and produces resource materials and other publications in Haitian Creole and English.

In "Caribbean English Creole in New York" (pp.301-37), Lise Winer and Lona Jack start off by discussing language in the English-speaking Caribbean – the common features among different varieties of Caribbean English Creole (CEC), the typical creole continuum and the development of more positive attitudes towards CEC, although still far short of acceptance as a language that can

be used in formal contexts. The authors then give details about migration from the Caribbean to the USA and population figures for New York City. In a section about the Caribbean community, the authors describe the importance of language to group identity and the use of CEC in the media and other situations. The next section illustrates some of the problems of inter-community communication in the health care system and in police/legal services,

Regarding education, the authors show the lack of any clear policy for the placement of CEC speaking immigrants in schools -- some being put into mainstream English classes and others, quite inappropriately, into English as a Second Language or speech therapy classes. However, the most devastating effect on Caribbean students is the result of lack of understanding and the disrespect shown to their language and culture by North American teachers.

The authors expand on the problems of low self-esteem and frustration in the school system faced by CEC-speaking students. These problems are exacerbated because teachers don't understand their origins and because there is no policy to address the specific language needs of the students. However, there is at least "a growing recognition of the need to move towards overt consideration of language issues with a vast majority of Caribbean school-age immigrants" (p.329). Some specific initiatives are mentioned, such as Project Omega. The authors make it clear that:

Any approach to the teaching of students whose first language is Creole, recognized or not, must include overt knowledge about and acceptance of the language and its culture, contrasted specifically with English language and culture varieties. Without the basic recognition of the validity of creoles and an understanding of their relationship with English, the students' progress will be continually short-circuited. (p.330)

The chapter concludes by giving some ideas about appropriate classroom resources -- bringing in native creole speakers, using audio and video recordings and discussing pictures with content familiar to students. A useful Appendix contains a brief description of phonological, grammatical and lexical features of CEC.

"English Is My Native Language... or So I Believe" by Shondel J. Nero (*TESOL Quarterly* 31/3, 1997, pp.585-92) is a brief report about a study that examined the spoken

and written language of four tertiary students in New York who migrated from the Caribbean -- two from Jamaica and two from Guyana. All are speakers of varieties of Creole but consider themselves native speakers of English. They varied in their abilities to speak standard varieties and in their awareness of the differences between their home variety and what one called "straight English" -- i.e., more standard English. The four students' spoken and written English also reflected interaction with Creole in varying degrees.

### *PACE in Africa*

*Nigerian Pidgin: Background and Prospects* by Ben Ohi Elugbe and Augusta Phil Omamor (Heinemann, Ibadan, 1991) gives a detailed account of the origins, structure, current use and attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin (NP). Chapter 6, "The Scope of NP", includes a discussion of the use of NP in education. Although the educational language of Nigeria is English, the authors note that in some areas of the country NP is commonly used by teachers to communicate with their students in the classroom. Although linguists have advocated the official use of NP or other Nigerian languages in the first three years of primary school and in adult literacy campaigns, this does not occur except in some experimental projects. However, this may change with the new national policy on the language of education.

The authors disagree with those who oppose the use of NP as a written medium in the classroom because it will interfere with the learning of standard English. They argue that for the majority of Nigerians, wider communication will occur within the country rather than outside it: "Therefore, the international case for English need not be overstretched" (p.137). Furthermore, most young people leave school with very little literacy in any language, so the question of interference is not relevant. One of the strongest arguments for literacy in NP is that being the most widely spoken language, it would provide more communication and aid national development. However, because of negative attitudes towards NP, especially among the educated policy makers, NP is not used as a written medium in any classroom in Nigeria.

Moving on to Sierra Leone, Rebekka Ehret discusses "Language development and the

role of English in Krio" (*English World-Wide* 18/2, 1997, pp.171-89). Most of the article is about the historical development of the Krio language and the Krio-speaking community. However, it ends with a description of the new educational system, implemented in 1993, which aims at literacy in English and/or French and in one of the four national languages, including Krio. Although English remains the official language of instruction, Krio is often used orally in the classroom. Krio is also being used more frequently to disseminate information on things such as agriculture, health education and civic participation. Some religious services are also done in Krio. However, even though negative attitudes towards Krio have diminished, there is still a more positive attitude towards English as the language of instruction because of its value on the professional market.

## PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENT

### New Belize Kriol Books

The Belize Kriol Project would like to announce the publication of two new books. The first, entitled "Rabbit Play Trik pahn Hanaasi", is an Anancy story written entirely in Belize Kriol. It is in a large format with many illustrations which makes it useful for children and classroom use. The second book, entitled "Bileez Kriol Glassary an Spellin Gide" is a 4000 word glossary with Kriol to English and English to Kriol sections. There is also a section describing the spelling system being promoted by the Belize Kriol Project.

The price for international sales, including shipping, is:

US\$10.00 for "Rabbit Play Trik pahn Hanaasi"

US\$15.00 for "Bileez Kriol Glassary/Spellin Gide"

The books can be ordered from:

Belize Kriol Project  
PO Box 2286  
Belize City, BELIZE

The profit from the sales will be used to fund further publication of more books in Kriol.

The Belize Kriol Project has been undertaken to focus the efforts of many individual Creoles and organizations in Belize towards the overall development of Kriol into a literary language.

For more information contact Ken Decker: email <ken\_decker@sil.org> or at the above address.

## PUBLISHED REPORTS

Melody Actouka & Morris Lai. 1989. *Project Holopono, Evaluation report, 1987-1988*. Honolulu: Curriculum Research and Development Group, College of Education, University of Hawai'i.

Project Holopono ['success'] was carried out in Hawai'i from 1984 to 1988. It involved approximately 300 students of limited English proficiency in grades 4 to 6 in 8 schools, half of them speakers of Hawai'i Creole English (HCE). The program consisted of 150 hours per week of instruction time, including some awareness activities, such as contrasting features of HCE and standard English and emphasizing appropriate contexts for each. An evaluation of the final year of the project showed an increase in oral English proficiency among 84% of the students, but no significant gains in reading proficiency (despite teachers' claims to the contrary).

Lorna B. Afaga and Morris K. Lai. 1994. *Project Akamai, Evaluation report, 1992-93, Year Four*. Honolulu: Curriculum Research and Development Group, College of Education, University of Hawai'i.

Also in Hawai'i, Project Akamai ['smart'] ran from 1989 to 1993. This program was aimed at more than 600 HCE speakers in grades 9 and 10 in 11 schools. It involved some contrastive awareness activities as well as the use of local literature containing HCE. An evaluation of the final year of the project showed increases of between 35% and 40% on tests of standard English use and oral language skills.

Northern Territory Department of Education. 1997. *Annual Reports from specialist staff in bilingual programs in Northern Territory schools, 1995*. Darwin: Northern Territory Department of Education.

A report on the Kriol/English bilingual program at the Barunga Community Education Centre appears on pp.16-18. It includes sections on curriculum development, teaching of literacy, staff and school development, and literature (and video) production.

## REVIEW

by Jeff Siegel

Jean-Michel Charpentier. 1997. Literacy in a pidgin vernacular. In Andrée Tabouret-Keller, Robert B. LePage, Penelope Gardner-Chloros and Gabrielle Varro, eds. *Vernacular literacy. A re-evaluation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 222-45.

Melanesia is one of the few areas of the world where an English-lexified pidgin/creole, Melanesian Pidgin, is widely used for reading and writing. However, in this recent publication, Jean-Michel Charpentier (1997) claims that this literacy is something imposed on indigenous people by Europeans. He also asserts that because of the nature of pidgins and creoles, they are not suitable for literacy and use in formal education. In this review, I would like to examine these claims.

### 1. Literacy imposed by outsiders?

Referring to efforts in vernacular literacy in Vanuatu, especially involving Bislama, the local dialect of Melanesian Pidgin, Charpentier (p.228) comments: "No initiative of this sort has ever come from a Melanesian intellectual... Literacy, a European concept, seems only to succeed in Melanesia where European thinking has totally submerged and erased local cultures". He also says that "the strongest partisans for teaching Pidgin are expatriate Anglophones" who are "insensitive to the difficulties of having to learn standard English along with an English pidgin" (p.328).

However, there is much evidence to contradict these statements. For example, Thomas (1990) outlines developments with regard to the proposed use of Bislama as the language in education. He reports (p.244):

During a debate on the question of Bislama in schools, in April 1982, a majority of members of parliament [all indigenous people from Vanuatu] favoured introduction of Bislama as either a medium of instruction or as a subject. Support for the teaching of Bislama in schools came from government and opposition members alike.

He also reports a similar point of view from participants at the 1981 Vanuatu Language Planning Conference and from the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs (p.245):

The final resolution which the Language Planning Conference adopted showed strong support for the use of Bislama. It recommended that Bislama should be taught at least as a subject in the first four years of primary school and used as the medium of instruction for classes five and six.

Although nothing came of these recommendations, Bislama has had an unofficial role in the non-formal education system – for example, in the largest adult literacy project in the country which was initiated and is run by indigenous Melanesians. This project depends on community

support, as described below (World Vision Australia 1995:39):

Ni-Vanuatu village literacy teachers are supported for the time of their services to the community, by the community. They receive gifts of food and labour from their classes, and these classes, often with the assistance of the communities from which they come, or from the democratically-run Village Committees, conduct fund-raising activities such as the production and marketing of vegetables. Thus established, village based literacy programs, serving the interests and needs of all in the community, can continue for as long as the communities wish, and are as sustainable as those communities choose...

With regard to the standardization of Bislama orthography, Charpentier writes (p.232):

...the emergence of a norm accepted by practically everybody has been...the work of missionaries. In Vanuatu, the Council of Christian Churches established a norm for the writing of religious texts for correspondence between churches. This semi-official norm is by far the best known in the Archipelago and hardly needs fear the orthography proposed by the 'Komiti bilong Bislama' made up of mainly Pidgin-speaking civil servants.

However, recent events do not support these statements. (See Crowley 1996 for details.) In 1993, the Literacy Association of Vanuatu (LAV) was established, with members mostly being Vanuatu citizens from organizations doing literacy work in the country. In 1995, a subcommittee of LAV met to unify the spelling system, taking into account the orthographic proposals earlier made by the *Komiti bilong Bislama* ('Bislama Committee') and later incorporated into Crowley's (1990) Bislama dictionary. It was agreed that whatever orthographic decisions that were made by the LAV subcommittee, these would be followed in the forthcoming new Bislama translation of the Bible and the new edition of the Bislama dictionary (Crowley 1995). As adviser to the *Komiti bilong Bislama* during most of its existence (1986-87), I can attest that all orthographic decisions were made by the local Vanuatu membership. The adoption of these and other decisions were then made by the Vanuatu members of the LAV subcommittee. Thus, the current norm is not the work of missionaries.

### 2. Suitability for use in formal education

One reason that Bislama has not had a role in the formal education system of Vanuatu, despite the recommendations of the 1981 Vanuatu Language Planning Conference

(mentioned above), is described by Thomas (1990:245):

One of the most common fears concerning the introduction of Bislama as a language of education is that, owing to lexical similarities, negative transfer occurs when pupils subsequently learn English. This fear was also expressed at the conference, when it was claimed that when children learn Bislama at an early age 'it tends to interfere with their learning of English'.

This point of view is reiterated and reinforced by Charpentier (1997). In a section entitled "The Problems of Teaching in Pidgin", he depicts hostility towards teaching in Bislama among the whole teaching establishment in Vanuatu. The reasons he gives for this hostility and "for the failure of pidgin as a school subject and medium of instruction" have to do with learners confusing Bislama and English (p.236):

The combination of English and Pidgin (or source language X and lexically X-based pidgin) seems to lead to a social, psychological, and pedagogical blockage, seriously compromising any passage to literacy. The children in particular cannot seem to figure out the respective roles and characteristics of the two codes.

The author continues (p.237):

From a practical point of view, (eventual) literacy in Pidgin and using Pidgin and English as media of instruction in Vanuatu would, according to the teachers, create nearly insurmountable problems at the semantic and graphic levels.

In support of this point of view, he then gives some examples of potential confusion at the semantic and morpho-syntactic levels.

From my experience in Vanuatu I am well aware of such a point of view prevailing among educators (see Siegel 1993), and certainly there is evidence of interference from Bislama in the English of some students. The question, however, is whether this interference would be exacerbated by using Bislama in the schools, and Charpentier does not refer to any research which would support this conclusion.

On the other hand, there is research which suggests that learning literacy in a pidgin or creole does not have any detrimental effect on the acquisition of literacy in the standard form of its lexifier language, and may even help it. Examples are the work of Murtagh (1982) on Australian Kriol, Kephart (1985,1992) on Carriacou Creole in the Caribbean, and Siegel (1992,1997) on Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea. (All this research has been described

in previous issues of the *PACE Newsletter*.)

Many communities in Melanesia have discovered for themselves that acquiring literacy in their pidgin/creole lingua franca is useful in many ways, including its being an aid to acquiring the more economically important lexifier language, English. It is unfortunate that others are still being discouraged from doing so by unsubstantiated claims, such as those of Charpentier, about the two languages being confused if they are both used in education.

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## CONFERENCES

### *Past*

A Symposium on **Pidgin and Creole Linguistics in the 21st Century** was held as part of the conference of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics, held in conjunction with the meeting of the Linguistics Society of America in New York City, 9-11 January 1998. One of the papers in the symposium was "Applied Creolistics in the 21st Century" by Jeff Siegel. Here is a summary of the paper:

Many speakers of pidgins, creoles and minority dialects remain disadvantaged in education, employment and dealings with the law. Yet despite periodic calls for creolists to do more to help speakers of the languages they study, very little has been happening. This paper is a call for a greater role for "applied creolistics" in the 21st century.

The paper starts off by outlining some of the modest efforts that have taken place in various parts of the world in applied areas such as legal contexts, translating and interpreting, and education.

With regard to education, the paper describes three types of programs which use individual pidgins, creoles or minority dialects: instrumental, accommodation and awareness. Research on the effectiveness of such programs is then presented.

The paper goes on to suggest a plan of action and research agenda for applied creolistics in the 21st century. Three steps are described: documentation, establishment of pilot programs and systematic evaluation of these programs. The importance of promotion, publicity and public awareness is also discussed.

In conclusion, the paper calls on creolists to get involved in the community, to make contacts with other professionals, such as educationists, associated with speakers of pidgins, creoles or minority dialects, to give papers at conferences and publish in journals other than those for linguists, and to campaign for language awareness (or basic sociolinguistics) to be a component of training for teachers and a part of the general language arts curriculum, starting in primary school. It is also suggested that two new websites be created, aimed at the general public, including primary and high school students: one on creoles in general and one on African American English. Finally, it is recommended that there be a special session at SPCL conferences devoted to applied issues and that an applied creolistics committee be established to coordinate activities in the area.

An invitational **Conference on Language Diversity and Academic Achievement in the Education of African American Students** was held in New York City on 11-12 January, 1998. Here is the press release about it:

### Researchers and Educators Advocate Wider Understanding of Language Diversity

A group of nationally recognized leaders in education, linguistics, communication, and speech pathology called upon public school officials to take seriously the systematic differences among varieties of spoken and written English common in this country.

Language differences play a critical role in instructional effectiveness, student learning, and educational assessment, according to Donna Christian, President of the Center for Applied Linguistics.

These conclusions were reached at a Conference on Language Diversity and Academic Achievement in the Education of African American Students in New York City on January 11 and 12, 1998. The conference was sponsored by national professional and research organizations.

"The classroom is a communicative environment and most instruction and assessment involves the use of language," says Orlando Taylor, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Howard University. "A disregard for language diversity can inhibit effective instruction and student learning and can result in inappropriate evaluation of student achievement," he continues.

For example, those attending the conference agreed that contrasts between Standard English and some of the varieties of English spoken by African American students frequently lead to ineffective classroom instruction and mistakes in identifying predictable differences between language varieties as deficiencies in reading, writing, and speaking. This lack of understanding pairs with negative attitudes to foster low expectations that often impede academic achievement for the students involved.

Researchers urged teacher education programs to give the nation's teachers accurate and practical information about language and dialect diversity to enhance their ability to teach students that come from a variety of language communities. They also described successful programs for training teachers and their students about how English varies in different geographical regions and social groups.

Attending the conference were teachers, school administrators, educational researchers, linguists, speech pathologists, communication scholars, professors, university deans, and representatives of the sponsoring organizations.

The conference was sponsored by the American Association for Applied Linguistics, the American Dialect Society, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Council of the Great City Schools, Howard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Linguistic Society of America, the National Alliance of Black School Educators, the

National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing, the National Communication Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the US Department of Education, and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Contacts: Dr Orlando Taylor, Howard University, (202) 806-6800; or Dr Donna Christian, Center for Applied Linguistics (202) 429-9292.

The **Fourth International Creole Language Workshop** was held at Florida International University in North Miami 19-21 March 1998, organized by Tometro Hopkins and helpers from the Linguistics Program and African-New World Studies. The theme of this year's workshop was "Standardizing the Creole: Orthography, Vocabulary and Structure". The following papers were presented:

Pidgins and creoles in education: An overview (Jeff Siegel)

Hu laik no hau fo rait pijin (Suzanne Romaine)

Some pedagogical problems in acquiring and using vocabulary in Caribbean French and Caribbean Spanish (Jeanette Allsopp)

Standardization and native language proficiency (Peter Roberts)

Lessons learned from orthography development for Belize Kriol (Ken Decker, read by Ron Morrens)

Perspectives on Haitian Creole and African American English in the context of multicultural education (Flore Zéphir)

Awareness and contrast: Standard English and teacher preparation in the United States (Glenn Gilbert and Sharon Gilbert)

A Creole English reading experiment (Ronald Kephart)

Kreol Morisyen and Seselwa in education (Dany Adone)

*Aftaa yu laan dem fi riid an rait dem Kriiyol, den wa muo?* Creole and the teaching of the lexifier language (Dennis Craig)

Cat – Puss or What the leaves hear (Ian Robertson)

How can you standardize in a continuum? (Derek Bickerton)

"Standards" for a continuum: A contradiction in terms? (Loreto Todd)

Haitian school children: An asset in the standardization of Haitian Creole (Marie Jocelyn Levy)

Identifying the standards for Haitian Creole: Reducing the gap between oral and written standard (Yves Dejean)

Problems and strategies in the administration of a Frierian approach to adult literacy in Mauritian Creole (Laura Hills)

Using a creole to teach literacy (Vincent Cooper)

Issues in the promotion of a Creole orthography (Kathryn Shields-Brodber)

An automated approach to Haitian Creole orthography conversion (Marilyn Mason)

Standard, orthography, and the classroom teacher (Velma Pollard)

Wence Haitian Creole grammar? (Michel DeGraff)

How is Haitian Creole spoken in formal situations? (Hugues St Fort)

### *Upcoming*

The **Society for Pidgin and Creole Languages** (SPCL) will meet (in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America) on 8-9 January 1999 at the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles. For the first time, there will be a special section on **Applied Creolistics**.

SPCL will also meet in conjunction with **Le 9e Colloque International des Etudes Créoles** in Aix-en-Provence, France, 24-29 June 1999.

For more information on either of these conferences, see the CreoList Calendar: <http://www.ling.su.se/creole/calendar/>