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Da Kine Spoken in Hawaii

While the official state co-languages of Hawaii are English and Hawaiian, many islanders have casual conversations in a language known locally as Pidgin. A pidgin language is a simplified kind that develops over a brief period of time through simplification and mixing of other languages (“Pidgin,” n.d.). Once a pidgin dialect has a generation that learns it as their native tongue, it becomes a creole language. The origins of Pidgin (also known as Hawaiian Pidgin English, Hawaiian Creole English, and Hawaii Creole) are similar to that of many creole languages: a melting pot of diverse people with different backgrounds/languages were brought together and needed to find a common ground for communication. While it may appear to some as a bastardized version of the English spoken in the continental United States, Hawaii Creole is actually the result of generations of language contact.

The 19th century was a time of migration and development for the islands of Hawaii. Thousands of laborers were brought from Asian and European countries along trade routes between Eurasia and the Americas after the first sugarcane plantation was established in 1835 (“Hawai’i Creole,” n.d.). Hawaii was a crucial stopover point on these long journeys, so the trade between all of these countries led to a very diverse group arriving on what would eventually become known as the Paradise of the Pacific. Workers arrived from countries like China, Japan, Portugal, Spain, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and many others shown in Figure 1. The children of these workers learned their parents’ languages as well as English, but the English that they learned was influenced heavily by Hawaiian as well as their own first languages. This led to the birth of Hawaiian Creole English, and by the beginning of the 20th century it was the language of a large part of Hawaii’s population (“Hawai’i Creole,” n.d.).

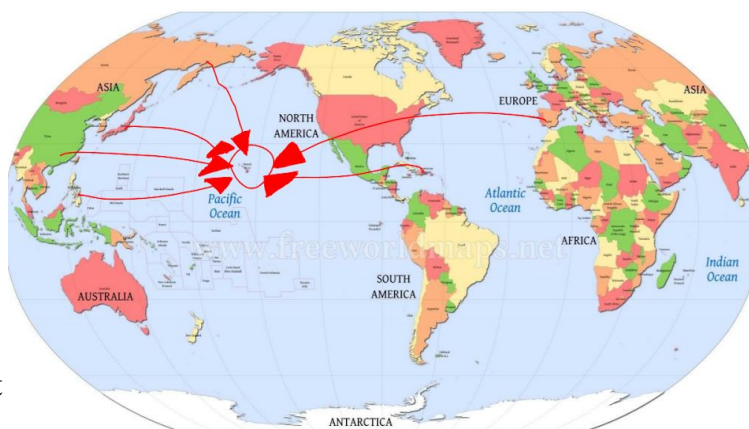


Figure 1. Immigration to Hawaii from countries around the globe (Freeworldmaps.net, 2019)

Hawaii Creole has an important place in the heart of Hawaiian culture. It is spoken by thousands in casual conversations, and has even been used in more formalized settings such as the classroom or legislative floor (Velupillai, 2013). As is normal in casual conversation between bilinguals, code-switching between Pidgin and English is also very typical among Hawaiians. Because English is the main lexifier for Hawaii Creole, it is often difficult to discern which language is being spoken when code-switching occurs. Although it used to have the label of a sub-standard form of English, people are starting to realize that Hawaii Creole is its own language that is separate, but similar to, English. It is both a spoken and written language, with one of the more popular pieces of Hawaii Creole literature being Da Jesus Book, which is the New Testament of the Bible translated into Pidgin.

An essential linguistic feature of Hawaiian Pidgin English is the large assortment of words that it has borrowed from the languages and places that influenced it. Figure 2 shows the

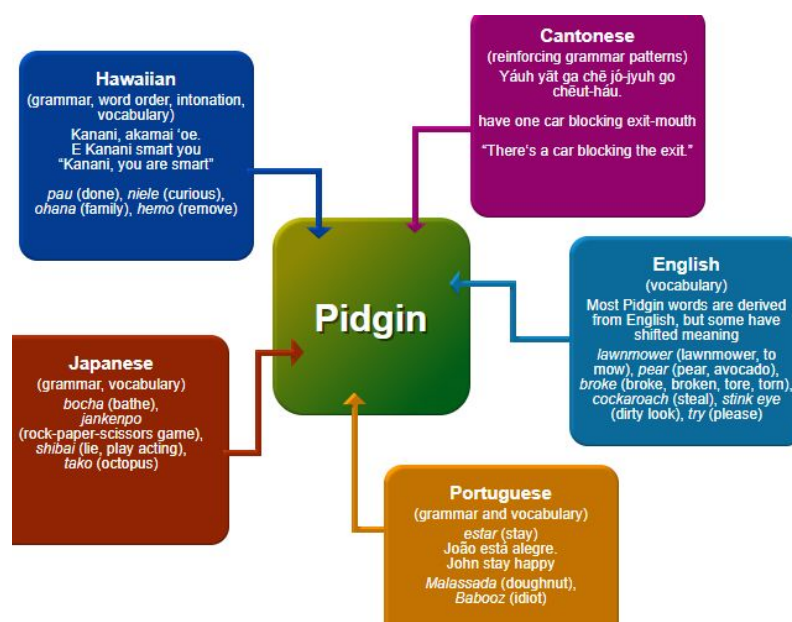


Figure 2. Languages that influenced the development of Pidgin ("What is Pidgin", n.d.)

different kinds of influences that various languages had on the development of Pidgin, but a few great examples of these loanwords come from the Japanese language. One used amongst local children in both Japan and Hawaii is the phrase "jan ken po" that refers to the game Rock-Paper-Scissors (Simonson, 1981). As a result of the language contact that helped develop Hawaii Creole, groups of children in Japan and Hawaii are able to play a game and grow up calling it the same exact thing, despite the 4000 miles of Pacific water that separates them.

Another feature of Hawaii Creole is its integral usage of a certain vague expression - a word or phrase that has a lot of different meanings. The phrase "da kine" can act as a verb, adjective, or adverb in Pidgin and is very commonly used for just about anything. While its

origin isn't easy to track, its vague/simple usage leads to the common belief that it came from "the kind" or "the thing", phrases in English that are used when the speaker can't think of the proper name of an action or object (Simonson, 1981). These kinds of catch-all words exist in other languages as well: Whatchamacallit, doohickey, thingamabob are all examples that are commonly substituted in the aforementioned context. The phrase has had such a cultural impact that there is even a popular, Hawaii-based outdoor clothing company named after it (Dakine). Table 1 contains a few examples of how the locals use "da kine" in everyday Hawaiian Pidgin English.

Table 1. Examples of Da Kine in Conversation	
Can you hand me da kine?	Can you hand me the food?
I saw da kine today	I saw her today

Pidgin is by no means the only language of its kind, even within the United States. Hawaii Creole shares a lot of characteristics with other creole languages, especially some of those under the same geographic umbrella. Hawaii Creole and Louisiana Creole were molded by the influence of several languages (Japanese, Portugese, and Hawaiian for the former, and English, Spanish, and French for the latter) and had a similar basis for development. Like Hawaii Pidgin English, Louisiana Creole was developed on plantations where workers spoke languages that were/are not mutually intelligible, so a new language was born to facilitate communication. While Pidgin's main lexifier is English and it borrows words from Japanese, Louisiana Creole's main lexifier is French and it has many loanwords from west and central African languages such as Bambara, Wolof, and Fon (Albert, 1997). While both languages are technically creole, an interesting observation can be made from the Google Trends data shown in Figure 3.

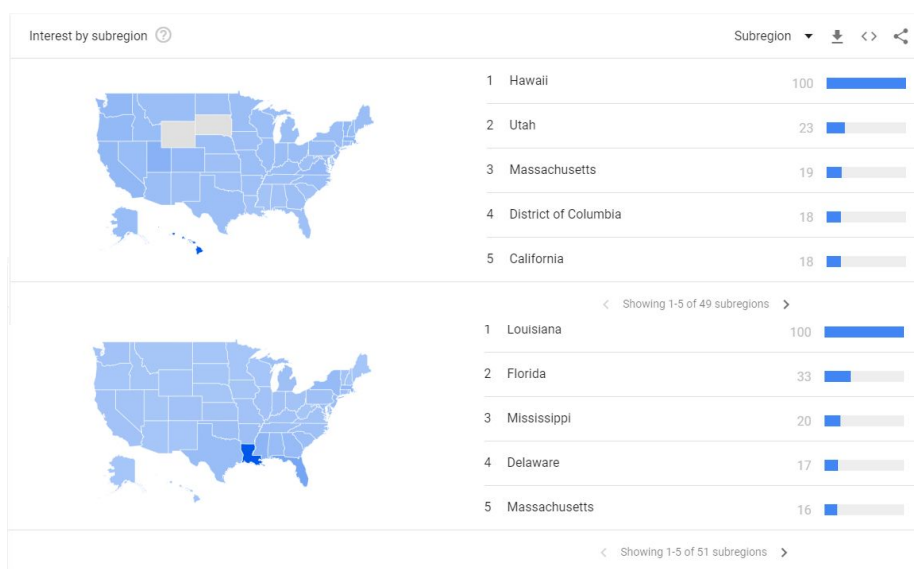


Figure 3. Google Trends data on the search terms “pidgin” (top) and “creole” (bottom)

The top section shows that people in the United States typically associate the word “pidgin” with Hawaii. This makes sense because Pidgin is a common way of referring to the language of Hawaiian Creole English. On the other hand, “creole” has such a central focus on the southern United States because it is a large part of the culture in Louisiana. In addition to being a type of language, creole is used as a cultural and social identity as well as a culinary term.

Hawaii Creole English is a textbook example of a language born pidgin, turned creole, and successfully embedded into the culture of its geographic setting. Molded by the influence of Asian, European, and North American countries, Pidgin is truly a diverse and unique language with a large speech community. Whether one is considering going to holo holo around the islands or spend some time by da mauka, it’s clear to see that the influence Pidgin has had on the culture of Hawaii is anything but scosh, bradda.

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