

Kim: Aloha, this is Kim Ae, and I'm a Fiscal Specialist on He Paepae Aloha, a Native Hawaiian grant at the University of Hawai'i West O'ahu. I'm also a student here, majoring in English.

Reese: Howzit!¹ My name is Reese Bonilla and I'm currently a senior at UHWO (I'm also majoring in English). I was born and raised in Hawai'i. When I'm not doing schoolwork, I am a writing tutor at the No'eu Center on the UHWO campus.

Bethany: And I'm Bethany Gallarde, aloha. I'm currently the equivalent of a junior student at UH West Oahu, with a major in Humanities with English. While I don't work for UH West, I am an AVID² tutor for a middle school

Kim: We're "Talk Story", a little discussion circle where we talk about Pidgin, its impact on our lives, its everyday use and how it can be used in primary and secondary education to advance our lāhui³. So, Hawai'i Creole English⁴, or Pidgin as it is more affectionately known to us locals, is part of the identity of being native to the land. This beloved language is filled with words and phrases that grew out of the necessity for our Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, and Hawaiian ancestors to communicate with each other when working in the sugar cane fields and living on plantations brought them together. We, their descendants, continue to use Pidgin in our everyday lives to communicate with our families and friends and express ourselves in unique and diverse ways integral to the development of modern Hawai'i. I grew up in Ewa Beach and the area was predominantly Pidgin and English speaking. I didn't hear much Hawaiian except if it was at family gatherings or when people would use phrases or words here and there, but it wasn't anything that any of us spoke fluently. I would say it was predominantly Pidgin and English. What about you, Reese?

Reese: So, I was raised in Ewa Beach mostly, but I would go to Mililani or Wahiawa on the weekends when I was really young. In all three of those places, depending on who I was around, it was mostly Pidgin OR "Standard English"⁵ that was spoken. There was also broken English, but not a lot of Hawaiian. I think around that time, the Hawaiian language wasn't spoken as often in those places, although it seemed like it was spoken everywhere else on the island. What about you Bethany?

Bethany: So I actually grew up in Aiea with occasional visits to Wahiawa on the weekends. And in Aiea, Pidgin was spoken but more with the older people, but overall it was just more broken English. It wasn't Standardized English, but not quite Pidgin. It was just more we would pick and choose English and Pidgin words and make a sentence from there. The only time we really spoke Hawaiian was in school and that was just because it was a requirement for Hawaiian Studies.

Kim: That makes sense. I mean, I went to elementary school during the late 70s and early 80s in Ewa Beach and there wasn't a lot of pidgin spoken in the classroom during that time, but on the playground with our friend groups and everything, of course there was a lot of Pidgin. It came out of us naturally. If they heard us, the teachers would discourage us from speaking Pidgin and some correction would be given if spoken in the classroom. We learned some Hawaiian words and phrases during Hawaiian culture studies each year, but other than that, English was recommended and our schoolwork was evaluated and graded with that in mind. That was prior to the Teach for America program which was founded in 1989, so we didn't get a lot of educators coming from the continent. You know what Teach for America reminds me of? The first missionaries coming to our islands in 1820 to teach Western ways and Christian doctrine. Can you tell us about your experiences, Bethany?

Bethany: So depending on the year, I would have different experiences. In elementary, teachers didn't really care if kids spoke Pidgin or not cause we had Hawaiian Studies, so they try to be very "this is your culture, this is your history, respect it, nourish it." And as I got older, Pidgin was still heard. And I remember, for some reason, a lot of the history teachers were very heavy on saying "speak Pidgin, speak Pidgin". However, in high school, there was this little bit of a shift, which I think made everyone get thrown off because a lot of teachers were from the Mainland and they also tried to very "speak Pidgin, cause this is plantation area we know you speak it", but they would also speak Pidgin very... cringey. And it would just sound very unnatural and we would be like we wouldn't know what to do at that point. *giggles* What about you Reese? How was Pidgin in your school?

Reese: I feel like my relationship with Pidgin in school was similar to both of yours. "Standard English" was spoken the most in the classroom. In elementary school, educators were very lenient when it came to Pidgin because they would say "you're just getting used to school, you're getting used to being around other people that are your age" so maybe this was the educators' way of integrating some sort of familiarity into school for those who were coming from Pidgin speaking households. At least, that's what I hope it was. In high school, they were very adamant about leaning towards "Standard English" and not Pidgin. They wouldn't let us write in Pidgin, they wouldn't let us speak Pidgin in the classroom. Most students spoke Pidgin during recess and lunch, but other than that, it was "Standard English" all the way. I feel like that's the language that was spoken the most. We also had a lot of educators from the mainland, but most of the ones who were already teaching were Filipino locals, so they spoke a lot of broken English, especially substitute teachers. Despite this, we were still expected to use "Standard English" in the classrooms. It really felt like "Standard English" was the

preferred language for educators even though most of the students that went to my school (which was Campbell in Ewa Beach) spoke Pidgin. I guess it depends on the school and the area as well. Like I was saying for elementary school, Pidgin was spoken a little more just because they wanted us to interact with other students, and maybe other students didn't understand "Standard English" yet. I guess that's the same in my home. In Ewa Beach, even though everybody else was speaking Pidgin or broken English, most of the members of my family spoke "Standard English," except for my grandpa. *Everybody else* spoke "Standard English." And then when I would go to visit my family in Wahiawa or Mililani on the weekends, it was mostly Pidgin. Pidgin was spoken a lot with that side of the family, and then on the other side of my family, a lot of "Standard English." What about you guys?

Kim: At home, we mostly spoke standard English because my mom didn't like it when we spoke Pidgin. Which is unusual because my dad and my grandpa that lived with us spoke broken English. Japanese was their first language, but it's weird because I never really thought that broken English was Pidgin. We heard it and we could understand them, but we never spoke it, not even back to them. We just understood each other. I have three siblings, but each one of us and our relationship with Pidgin was a little bit different. My older brother would speak it more often because he played sports in the community, most of his friends that he hung around with spoke Pidgin. We both actually went to Kamehameha for middle and high school and Pidgin was discouraged in the classroom there as well.

Bethany: So for me, I was mostly by myself at home most of the time as a kid. Pretty much the only one home was my Papa and he only really just preferred to be by himself, so I would like to say most of the time was Standard English the entire time. Like they spoke Pidgin but at the time I thought it was normal English cause the most I could understand was mostly just "Howzit" or "da kine"⁶ and that pretty much was the extent that I would hear. Most of the time it was "how was your day? Was it good" and it was very nice and clean English. So I never really realized there was a difference until I became an adult and I noticed that like the way I talk versus... So I work with kids in Waianae and they all, like most of them, speak Pidgin. And I noticed just "wow, I can't understand half of what they're saying!" And I mean, I got used to it, but the culture shock from moving from Aiea to Waianae cause it was more into town then moved further West. And in Waianae we have a lot of Polynesians and so, a lot of them preferred Pidgin over English, so I was just "that's so interesting". And I think the only time I spoke Pidgin like actual Pidgin Pidgin was when I got emotional but I think that might've been the fact that usually the time I would hear Pidgin was when someone was having road rage or something.

Kim: I feel like things are different now than when we were kids and of course for me growing up in a different time than the both of you I feel like there's definitely differences in that alone. Right now, I'm finishing my bachelor's degree and there's not as much negativity associated with speaking Pidgin as there was in my early educational experiences and as we're learning in this particular class that we're taking, it's actually encouraged. Like you were both saying earlier, it's part of our culture and it should be something that we bring out and forward for future generations. I mean, it permeates the culture, which is a great thing. We've seen local entertainers use it to share our culture with the world and the easiest way to express themselves is by using Pidgin. Have either of you experienced the differences of growing up using Pidgin to what you're currently experiencing in college?

Reese: Yeah, definitely! There are actually a lot of differences that I thought of while you were talking. The transition between elementary to high school was pretty much the time when Pidgin went from being "okay" in school to being "humbug"⁷ or not as accepted just because most educators couldn't really understand it. This was usually the case if they weren't Pidgin speakers or if they weren't from here or things like that. There really was a difference and it was clear, especially when I got to college. Being at West O'ahu, on campus, around all the Pidgin speakers where you're allowed to speak Pidgin and where you're allowed to write in Pidgin and all these other things, it's really different, especially where I work. I mentioned earlier that I work in the No'eau Center on campus, and working there has changed the way I view Pidgin in an educational setting. It's also really interesting to see the differences between the people that come into the center. You have traditional students who are students that are coming directly from high school. Most of them are coming from schools in Hawai'i, so they're kind of used to the idea of Pidgin. Since Pidgin is an acceptable and acknowledged language at UH West Oahu, they are able to write in Pidgin sometimes, which can make assignments easier for them. They're like "I know this. I understand this." So they usually utilize Pidgin a lot more than non-traditional students. I think maybe that's a generational thing and it wasn't as accepted before, so maybe they're using "Standard English" because that's the only language that they know is accepted everywhere. Non-traditional students: a lot of them are from here, but we also get the ones that are retired veterans. We have all kinds of students, but we also have the ones that are transferring from the mainland. It's really interesting to see the kind of relationships they have with language, especially the Pidgin language, and how that works into their education and the way that they see the school itself. I feel like that's pretty much the difference. When I was younger, it was okay to speak it (in a social setting, not in an educational one), but I never really spoke it unless I was around certain people. Now, I try to bring it out as much as I can because I *can* and I know it's accepted (I know it doesn't matter if it's accepted or not, I'm still going to use it). I feel like a lot more people

understand the value of Pidgin and because of this, I am able to connect and interact with a lot more people. That's really fun to see, especially from where I'm standing now. Bethany, did you have any thoughts about that kind of thing?

Bethany: It was actually really crazy as you were talking... It's so weird cause I remember my first English class in college, and I remember the teacher specifically saying "Oh if you want to write in Pidgin you can" and it just shook me to my core. Cause I was thinking, "Whoa we never did that in high school!" Cause as kids we know we can speak Pidgin because it's a part of our culture, it was pretty much drilled into our head like from a very young age. But I also feel like we were taught the contrast in other classes. Like you do have to be professional in certain settings like papers and like interviews and resumes. And be careful when it slips out and so I guess a lot of us took that to heart so we would be like "yeah we speak it" and in our speeches it was okay, but in papers it wasn't okay. So I feel like when they told me that it was like "whoa that's so freaky like I can do that?". And I remember in other classes too and it was like "wow this is crazy! We can actually write in them". And it kinda breaks my heart when I'm working with middle schoolers because I see them write in Pidgin in their assignments and I can understand it, but as a tutor and because I'm getting paid for it, sadly well not sadly, *laughs* you know what I mean, I do have to correct them and mark them wrong because it's not Standard English, because it's not the way I'm supposed to be teaching them, but on one-on-one I'm feel the need to say "hey I know this feels natural, but you do have to retranslate" and they get so sad and upset because "why I gotta retranslate it? I know what I'm saying, you know what I'm saying" and I'm like "I know what you're saying. I do, but for the sake of the class you have to use Standardized English and they get so mad and it makes me upset because I can't outright say "oh don't worry about it cause if you go to certain colleges they won't care they'll encourage it, speaking Pidgin". But I can't say that because it's sort of a weird stereotype that you have to make it seem like college, or high school is extremely hard so they work hard right now so they work hard later. But I'm like ehhhh, but it's kinda stupid. Like it's whatever. But I tell them don't be afraid to keep doing you, don't be afraid to be who you are. But just for now, go with how the teacher says it but in the future you'll realize it doesn't really matter. Also on a semi related note, I work at Taco Bell with a lot of high school students and I remember one of my bosses asked, she encouraged a really heavy Pidgin speaker to go become a cashier and take orders because that actually might bring in customers that speak Pidgin. And I thought, "That's actually a really smart idea!"

Kim: That is a smart idea! In my work experiences, I've always strived to genuinely connect with the other person I'm talking to, whether on the phone or in person. We don't always know what another persons' experiences are or what they are presently going through. Being able to speak Pidgin to someone who is speaking to me in Pidgin

has made a difference in how they ask their questions and how they can get their information or get their questions answered, first of all. I think that makes people comfortable when they can, well obviously if they can speak the language that they're most familiar with and so here in Hawai'i, we find that a lot of people, majority of people who grew up here are very comfortable speaking Pidgin and that's the best way for them to get their questions answered. I have code-switched⁷ in order to accommodate anyone I'm talking to. For example, I used to work for a health care system and when a local person speaking Pidgin calls in and they hear someone speaking standard English, already they're intimidated assuming I won't know what they're asking and it's medical stuff so you wanna be able to ask the right questions and get the right answers. I think it has been helpful to speak pidgin in these situations and it has definitely bridged a gap. I think that's something Pidgin is capable of doing, bridging gaps between people and whether it's in school or in our everyday lives at the store trying to get something that you need, something that you want. That's why I feel it's important for us to be able to speak Pidgin, especially in our education system.

Reese: Right. I feel like right now, it is still a major issue, especially what you were saying about working for a healthcare facility and people calling and asking things in Pidgin and them thinking "this person is not going to understand me because I'm speaking Pidgin and they're speaking "Standard English" and I don't understand them" and all of that stuff. Especially if it's the elderly, they don't really understand. They might not really understand that there is a language barrier, and even what you were saying, Bethany, about the middle schoolers and how they're having such a difficult time rewording everything they said back into "Standard English" just so that the teachers can understand and that it's acceptable in school. I feel like it's still a major issue in education, in the workplace, everywhere that Pidgin is not the acceptable language to speak because people think it makes you sound unprofessional. That is not the case. People in Hawai'i know that that is not the case. A lot of Pidgin speakers are professionals in what they do. They know what they're talking about and sometimes they're very involved in the government, sometimes they're involved in news stations and all these other things. Pidgin speakers are everywhere and I feel like it's such a major issue that there are so many solutions that people don't see, especially when you talk about education. There are ways that teachers can integrate Pidgin into their coursework and into trying to explain things to students. Maybe they could do it one-on-one if one student is more into Pidgin than others. That's a possibility. In the workplace, allowing employees to code switch and turn it on and off. I feel like that can really help everyone reach such a wide range of people and I think it's a great way to get solutions. Does anybody have any ideas about possible solutions in those areas?

Bethany: I have some, so I know I keep mentioning my tutor job but I keep meeting new kids in different subjects and actually just recently I went to help a class specifically just helping a class speak and read English. And it was sooo, well for one the teacher was really strict about English but she had that nice elementary teacher vibe so it was kind offputting, but I spent some time with some kids trying to explain some stuff and the thing is they are really smart it just that they get frustrated when it comes to English. And the best way I've learned with from trying to learn other languages and this kind of another thing like that, it's just try to find ways to try and just bridge them together like there's a kid that was trying to do science and she was explaining it to me in Pidgin and I went "oh okay, so you mean this" and she's like "yeah! That's what I meant" and the teacher was kind of like "huh" and was like looking at me weirdly, so I'm like "whoops maybe I shouldn't have done that". But I feel like kids do know English and understand it they just need time to process the information. You can't exactly force the process or rush it. I feel that's with every language you can't rush the process of learning something at the flip of a coin, so I think the main solution would be to ease into it like don't stop it like a big "do not cross" sign or a huge blockade, but more just let the kids learn things and view how they process it. Just make them slowly learn from that, just let the process just happen. I feel that would be the best way, but does anyone else have any other solutions?

Kim: I like what you both said about just being able to speak it for those who are more comfortable with it is definitely a solution and it's awareness too. I think if we have a lot of teachers that come in from the continent who come and teach with programs like Teach for America maybe that's something that should be part of their orientation to the islands. It's impossible to learn how to interpret Pidgin in just one, short Teach America stint, but just the sensitivity to it should be emphasized. They need to understand that Pidgin is something allowed in our public schools and of course that's something the DOE has to get on board with. There have been many attempts in the Department of Education here in Hawai'i to start Pidgin programs. Pidgin speaking students should be allowed to test in Pidgin and be evaluated based on that. I truly believe that if they were able to test in Pidgin they would do way better than what they're doing right now. So, that's definitely a solution. And I think being able to speak in any environment where there's better understanding if the person is able to speak Pidgin, especially if you're a patient, like in a medical scenario for instance, everything, even ordering food, making sure you get the right thing, going to the pharmacy, trying to order, talking to someone online because you have to fix an appliance. All of that is going to come into focus because we have to be able to communicate. And so I think that's another solution: let it be spoken where it needs to be spoken.

Do either of you have any final comments about Pidgin and how we use it in education or what other Pidgin experiences you've had?

Reese: Sure. I just want to say that I think it's really important that we address the issues with Pidgin and actually share that Pidgin is a valuable language, that it should be used and it should be accepted, especially in the educational system. I think just finding a way to incorporate Pidgin into our everyday lives could help it flourish, so I'm glad that we're addressing this.

Bethany: I also wanted to add that despite, as we said, we lived in different areas and experienced different scenarios I feel like that despite all our experiences the common denominator was actually Pidgin and that's how cool it is that's just how important Pidgin is to us. And it's just the way to communicate with each other from our grandparents, our parents, to even our younger siblings that are finally trying to understand the world and I feel like Pidgin is the great glue to hold us all together. And I think we should embrace that, especially in education.

Reese: Well said!

Kim: Well, right on! Mahalo pleny for hanging wit us today on our Talk Story. Hope you wen like what we sed and feel moved to defend Pidgin in and out of the classrooms. Have one awesome day!

Reese: Tanks ah!

Bethany: Kay den, tanks for listen'.

Glossary

1. **Howzit:** Pidgin of "How is it" usually means "How is it going"
2. **AVID:** Advancement Via Individual Determination, a in-school program to prepare for college
3. **Lāhui:** Nation, race, tribe, people, nationality; great company of people; species, as of animal or fish, breed; national, racial.
4. **Creole English:** A creole is a language that evolves from a pidgin (or multiple languages meshed together), and is spoken by the children of the pidgin speakers as a first/home language. When we say Creole English, we mean that the creole is heavily influenced by English words; we do not mean that it is another variety of English.

5. **Standard English:** The form of English that is most academically and grammatically correct.
6. **Da Kine:** A universal word for “this thing”, “that thing”, or other variations of it.
7. **Humbug:** Trouble
8. **Code-Switching:** When the speaker switches between two or more languages in a single conversation.