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KAMEHAMEHA SCHOOLS

Aia ke Ola i ka 'Ōlelo Hawai'i: Revival of the Hawaiian Language

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I ka 'ōlelo nō ke ola, i ka 'ōlelo nō ka make
In language there is life, in language there is death (Pukui 2001, 129, #1191)

Introduction

After decades of decline and marginalization, 'ōlelo Hawai'i, the language of the Hawaiian people, is experiencing renewal. The work of a small number of dedicated families to revive a language once threatened with extinction is spreading to the greater community. Today, 'ōlelo Hawai'i is heard among students in preschools to the university system, and the public has access to Hawaiian language content through the Internet, radio, and TV programming.

This initial brief of a two-brief series provides an annotated history of 'ōlelo Hawai'i spanning from its origin as an oral language to its transition to palapala, a written word. It continues with a discussion of critical milestones of Hawaiian language revival. Finally, it concludes with an examination of current data sources indicating the number of 'ōlelo Hawai'i speakers in Hawai'i. A second brief will examine enrollment numbers of 'ōlelo Hawai'i students from preschool to graduate-level courses in Hawai'i.

Framing the sociopolitical history of Hawaiian language provides a necessary context for understanding revitalization efforts. However, in light of the wealth of information, perspectives and controversies related to Hawaiian language studies, this brief does not provide an exhaustive account of 'ōlelo Hawai'i. Instead, references are provided for further examination.

Key Findings

1. Following the arrival of American missionaries, 'ōlelo Hawai'i transitioned from an oral tradition to a written language. After the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani, Hawaiian was displaced by English as the medium of instruction in public schools in the late 1800s.
2. By reclaiming space within the education sector, Hawaiian immersion programs and Hawaiian-focused charter schools are contributing directly to the revival of 'ōlelo Hawai'i.
3. Given the nature of current data sources, it is difficult to identify the number of 'ōlelo Hawai'i speakers. National data do not account for degrees of fluency, and the sample sizes of local data usually prevent generalizable results.

He 'Umeke Kā'eo: An Overflowing Bowl of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i

Prior to Captain Cook's arrival in Hawai'i in 1778, Hawaiians lived in the islands for centuries, crafting a unique and rich culture. Their society was built on kapu (strict regulations) and ruled by ali'i (chiefs), whose authority was tied to genealogy (Kamakau 1992; Valeri 1985). Prior to western contact, 'ōlelo Hawai'i embodied a cultural history that linked Hawaiians to their past, present, and future. As evidence of the richness of Hawaiian oral tradition, kāhuna (priests) could recite from memory the Kumulipo (an origin chant), which contains over 2,000 lines of text (Beckwith 1972; Mitchell 1992). The composition of countless mo'olelo (stories), ka'ao (epic legends), mele (songs) and pule (prayers) were vehicles for conveying values, teachings, and histories to the people (Kamakau 1991).

Mass changes took place in Hawai'i beginning in the nineteenth century. In particular, the arrival of American missionaries in 1820 had a profound effect on 'ōlelo Hawai'i. Early missionaries believed education was the key to converting Hawaiians to Christianity. According to Benham and Heck (1998) and Judd (as cited by Nogelmeier 2003), Hawaiians learned not only English but also Latin and French. The per capita literacy rates in Hawai'i, 91 percent in the late 1800s, were exceeded only by New England and Scotland (Housman 2007). By the end of the nineteenth century, Hawaiian literacy was the norm (Nogelmeier 2003).

A primary tool that enabled the missionaries to progress in educating and proselytizing to Hawaiians was the printing press. Such technology allowed books and newspapers written in 'ōlelo Hawai'i to circulate throughout the islands. One of the first printed works was the Bible, which set the stage for a narrow scope of published subjects. In subsequent decades, the number of Hawaiian writers, editors, and publishers increased. However, western views on religion, education, and politics flourished along with Christianity and formal schooling among the populace. It was not until 1861 with the establishment of an independent native press through *Ka Hoku o Ka Pakipika* and *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa* that the printed discourse began to widen (Nogelmeier 2003; Chapin 1996).

He 'Umeke Pala 'Ole: The Decline of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i

Changing times encouraged Hawaiians to embrace new knowledge and ways of learning. Yet, great strain was placed on the native government and society due to foreign encroachment. Initially, the missionaries created two schools: one for the children of ali'i and another for the children of commoners. The ali'i schools supported a broad curriculum, and the medium for learning was English. In contrast, the common schools taught rudimentary skills in 'ōlelo Hawai'i and were considered inferior by missionary teachers (Richards 1941). Ultimately, both school systems served to undermine Hawaiian political autonomy as they often privileged western epistemology and professionalism (Benham and Heck 1998).

In the late 1800s, foreign influence in the islands continued to grow. Political unrest culminated in the illegal overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893 and the establishment of a provisional government, which sought immediate American annexation (Silva 2004). When the United States failed to annex Hawai'i, the Republic of Hawai'i was established by haole (foreign or white) businessmen and missionary descendants. The new government quickly identified 'ōlelo Hawai'i as a political threat, and in June 1896, Act 57 was passed, which mandated that English be the only language to be used for teaching in schools. The Act states:

The English language shall be the medium and basis of instruction at all public and private schools, provided that where it is desired that another language shall be taught in addition to the English language, such instruction may be authorized by the Department...

Any schools that shall not conform to the provisions of this Section shall not be recognized by the Department. (Benham and Heck 1998)¹

The territorial period (1898–1959) saw 'ōlelo Hawai'i limited largely to the entertainment sector while English steadily became entrenched as the dominant language of education, business, and government. The absence of 'ōlelo Hawai'i in public and private schools meant children educated at the end of the nineteenth century were the last generation to speak Hawaiian as a native language outside of a small isolated community on the island of Ni'ihau (Kawai'ae'a, Housman, and Alencastre 2007). The calabash that was once full had become largely depleted as the number of manāleo (native speakers of Hawaiian) dwindled to the point of extinction (Wilson, Kamanā, and Rawlins 2006).

He 'Umeke Ho'opiha: Replenishing the 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Bowl

Despite its displacement by English, 'ōlelo Hawai'i was preserved for future generations by a handful of dedicated individuals, many of whom were pioneers in the Hawaiian immersion movement. Their efforts helped to reverse a century's worth of policies marginalizing 'ōlelo Hawai'i and opened new spaces for Hawaiian language in education. It is now possible to receive a P–20 education in Hawaiian immersion. More generally, the public now has greater access to Hawaiian language content through the multiple media sources, such as the Internet, television programs such as 'Ōiwi TV and 'Āha'i 'Ōlelo Ola, books, music, and websites (e.g., www.wehewehe.org).

The following abridged timeline adapted from Kawai'ae'a, Housman, and Alencastre (2007) describes the major milestones of 'ōlelo Hawai'i from 1841 to 2008.

¹ Scholars such as Wilson and Kamanā (2006) argue that although Act 57 does not single out the Hawaiian language for exclusion it nevertheless represents a de facto ban given its prominence in society at the time.

- 1841 – ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is the medium for public education in Hawai‘i.
- 1893 – The Hawaiian monarchy of Queen Lili‘uokalani is illegally overthrown.
- 1896 – Act 57 mandates English only schools (public and private).
- 1922 – ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is taught as a foreign language at the University of Hawai‘i.
- 1972 – Ka Leo O Hawai‘i, a Hawaiian language radio show, begins broadcasting.
- 1977 – ‘Ahahui ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, a committee of Hawaiian language speakers, is created.
- 1978 – ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is re-established as Hawai‘i’s official language.
- 1984 – ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, Hawaiian immersion language preschools, begins.
- 1987 – Kula Kaiapuni, a Hawaiian immersion program in the Hawai‘i Department of Education, begins.
- 1999 – First graduating class of K–12 Hawaiian language immersion.
- 2006 – First dissertation written in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.
- 2007 – 20th anniversary of Kula Kaiapuni.
- 2008 – 25th anniversary of the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo.

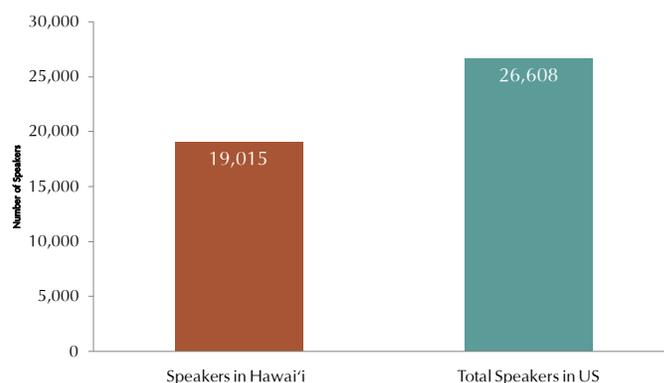
Scholars argue that refilling the ‘umeke of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i is necessary for ensuring that a native identity persists (Wong 1999). When an indigenous people, such as the Hawaiians, lose their language, it is not only their voice that gets lost but also a part of them that is irreplaceable (Kawai‘ae‘a, Housman, and Alencastre 2007). The work of ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and Kula Kaiapuni has been critical because it draws upon ‘ohana (family) and community resources to create intergenerational learning opportunities. As a result, generations of former students are now teaching in these systems. According to the Department of Education, the Kula Kaiapuni program has expanded from two sites in 1987 to 19 sites in 2008 and now boasts a student population of about 1,500 in grades K–12 on five islands (see <http://www.k12.hi.us/~kaiapuni/>).

‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Data Sources

How many ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers are there according to the U.S. Census Bureau?

Census data do not differentiate between Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers but have the advantage of revealing the number of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers nationwide. Figure 1 shows census 2000 estimates of Hawaiian language speakers in the state of Hawai‘i and the entire United States.

Figure 1. U.S. Census 2000 data on the number of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers



According to American Community Survey (2006-2008) 24.8 percent (+/- 1.0) of the Hawai‘i population speaks a language other than English at home. Of this group, 6.1 percent (+/- 1.1) are ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers. Table 1 shows that Hawaiian language ranks sixth out of the top 10 in terms of the number of non-English language speakers in Hawai‘i.

Table 1. Top 10 Non-English Languages Spoken at Home

Language	Percent	Margin of Error
Tagalog	17.7%	+/- 1.7
Japanese	16.7%	+/- 1.7
Ilocano	15.0%	+/- 1.6
Chinese	9.5%	+/- 1.3
Spanish	8.4%	+/- 1.3
Hawaiian	6.1%	+/- 1.1
Korean	6.0%	+/- 1.1
Other Pacific Island Languages	4.2%	+/- .9
Samoan	3.6%	+/- .8
Vietnamese	2.3%	+/- .7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey Public Microdata Sample (PUMS); calculations by the Hawaii State Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism as cited in Hawaii State Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism Data Report 2011

However, these figures may be inflated owing to the failure of these data sources to gauge fluency in non-English language. As a result, a person who speaks a few ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i phrases and someone who is highly fluent are both able to answer that they “speak Hawaiian” on these questionnaires.

