

## Early Hawaiian Pidgin and Origins Hypotheses

Because of its relatively recent development, Hawaiian Pidgin English (HPE) has served as a data source for claims about creolization (e.g., Bickerton 1981). Those claims are based on relatively recent, and therefore late, stages of HPE creolization. In this paper, we describe a new source of historical data for HPE that requires us to nuance these claims: the unpublished memoirs of the late Scott Fleming Nicoll. Nicoll grew up on a farm in Maui between 1902 and 1920 and describes himself as fluent in the “old time language” of that time period.

The memoirs, written in the early 1980s, include some 33 typescript pages describing a language situation in which “Pidgin” is spoken only as a second language in inter-group contexts. The nine pages of glossary feature 141 examples of Pidgin, ranging from single sentences or expressions (e.g., *Let ago your blouse* ‘celebrate’) to extended stories.

The pre-1920 Pidgin Nicoll describes is one with strong substrate influences from Japanese and Hawaiian phonology and some lexicon, and occasional influences from Portuguese, Filipino, and even Spanish. Particular features were still associated with different ethnic groups. For instance, he attributes the absence of tense marking and copulas in part to Hawaiian, and alternation between [p] and [f] to Filipino speakers. Preverbal *bin* (in examples like *I bin go*) “nails the speaker down as Portuguese,” while future *bambai* is “Japanese-modified English.”

As with any historical folk-linguistic report, we must interpret the material with some caution (especially given the time elapsed between participation and documentation). However, Nicoll’s linguistic credibility is reinforced by the many similarities between his observations and those of others (see Roberts 2004), both historical and contemporary, and by the accuracy of his observations of other languages (e.g., Japanese devoiced high vowels between voiceless consonants).