Before annexation to the USA, the Kingdom of Hawaii was a unified state inhabited by a native majority and under the control of native rulers. Moreover, from 1850 it was a parliamentary monarchy with all the features of modern democratic societies, including separation of powers, an elected legislature, a liberal franchise and universal compulsory education. However, during the same period laws were enacted that privileged English, the language of a minority of foreign settlers, over the language of the native electorate.

The case of Hawaii is unique because, unlike other cases of English language spread in the 19th century, it was not a colony where a foreign elite monopolized the political control of the state and could unilaterally enforce language policies. Thus, it may be compared with the promotion of English in our times, and specifically in the "Expanding Circle of English" (Kachru, 1985, 1986), given that the hegemony of English was not the legacy of a previous colonial period as is the case in the "Outer Circle of English".

This uniqueness opens a new venue to empirically test theories on linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). This study, which adopts a historical-structural approach (Tollefson, 1991), innovates by querying not just the causes of language policies but also their long-term political and economic effects. It assumes that language policies and practices don’t merely reflect political and/or economic inequalities, but may be independent or even cause those inequalities.

This poster includes a timeline of language policies in the Kingdom of Hawaii that relates them to other historical events, and a textual analysis of some legislation. It also presents preliminary conclusions in a specific case of interaction between linguistic and material inequalities. Finally, it applies the findings to theory by proposing a revision of a popular concept in our field: linguicism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

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