

Understanding English Grammar Linguistic Problem of the Month, June 2011: Hawaiian

*Problem by V. Belikov. English adaptation by Valentin Vydrin and Thomas Payne.
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Hawaiian is a Polynesian language, closely related to Tahitian, Samoan and Maori. Forty years ago, Hawaiian was nearly extinct even though there were 250,700 ethnic Hawaiians in Hawaii, and 150,000 on the USA Mainland. Hawaiians had simply forgotten how to speak their language because of the dominance of English. Today there are about 2,000 fluent speakers in Hawaii, and 8,000 more can speak and understand it to some extent. This resurgence of interest in Hawaiian is due at least partly to special bilingual schools that offer Hawaiian immersion programs.

The following Hawaiian sentences, with their English translations, are about a girl named Mele and a boy named Keone:

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| 1. He has seven elder brothers. | Ehiku ona kaikuaana. |
| 2. Mele has one brother. | Ekahi o Mele kaikunane. |
| 3. Keone has one younger brother. | Ekahi o Keone kaikaina. |
| 4. Mele has no elder sisters. | Aohe o Mele kaikuaana. |
| 5. Keone has no sisters. | Aohe o Keone kaikuahine. |
| 6. I have one canoe. | Ekahi ou waa. |
| 7. Mele has no younger sisters. | Aohe o Mele kaikaina. |

A: There are two possible English translations for the following Hawaiian sentence. Give the two translations, and explain why this is true:

Aohe ou kaikuaana.

B: Translate the following sentence into English and indicate who is speaking, Mele or Keone:

Aohe ou kaikuahine.

C. The following English sentences would be difficult to translate literally into Hawaiian. Explain why this is true.

Keone has one brother.

Mele has one younger brother.