

Hawaiians and Double Entendre—with Elijah Hew Len

In the English language, a form of irony is a double entendre, sometimes called *sexual innuendo*. A **double entendre** is a *purposefully placed sexual meaning on non-sexual words or phrases*. The use of double entendre can be found in many different forms of writing in the English language – plays, poetry and rap among others. Similarly, in the Hawaiian language often times double entendre are used to conceal sexual references in seemingly non-sexual songs.

*‘O‘opu nui, tewetewe
Ta‘a mai ana, tewetewe
Pā i ka lani, tewetewe
Tōheoheo, tewe tewe.*

*Big Fish, move back and forth
Move to satisfy, move back and forth
Touch the sky, move back and forth
Tumble down, move back and forth.*

This song entitled “Tewe Tewe” on the surface seems to be about the ‘o‘opu fish, which moves back and forth between salt and fresh water. However, like many other Hawaiian songs, “Tewe Tewe” is about having sex and, don’t mind my language, moving back and forth “to satisfy.”

Another example of double entendre can be found in the song “Noho Paipai” or “rocking chair.”

*Inā‘o you me a‘u
Kau pono i ka noho paipai.*

*If you were here with me
We would rock together on a rocking chair.*

This song seems to be about two friends; however, when these friends rock together on a rocking chair, this indeed is a reference to *doing the deed*. In the Hawaiian tune by Na Hoa, “The Carburetor Song,” the lyrics make reference to parts of a car breaking down:

*Will you love me when my carburetor is busted?
Will you love me when I cannot shift my gears?*

This song, although in English, exemplifies a bridge between Hawaiian language song-writing and the English language. Of course, like the vast majority of the songs in the Hawaiian language, this song refers to a lover asking his partner if she’d love him even as they grow old and certain parts of his body don’t work like they used to before. As you can see, saying the true meaning of these songs is very explicit, which is why in the Hawaiian language we utilize double entendre to mask the meaning.