

The development of English varieties in Micronesia

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Introduction

Micronesia has had a turbulent history, with different colonisers (Spain, Germany, Japan, Britain, Australia, and the United States) arriving at different points in time. Past contact situations have shaped the contact situations of today – including the social, political and linguistic frameworks.

In this poster, we focus on **Guam, Saipan, Nauru, Kosrae, and Kiribati**.

The contents of the following boxes describe 1) relevant aspects of contact of each individual island and 2) how they exert influence on the linguistic level.

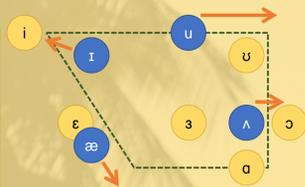
Guam • Unincorporated and organized territory of the United States • Large monolingual English-speaking community

Guam has (almost) continuously been governed by the United States since 1898. As a result, an island **community of largely monolingual English speakers** has emerged. Moreover, this relatively close contact to the US is observable in the islanders' cultural habits as well as in the features of their English dialect.

Vowel production across age groups:

Since American influence has increased over the years, younger speakers have **moved to a vowel system that is closely resembling American English**, while older speakers still show a large influence of the indigenous language, as is apparent from the following charts showing the production of General American vowels by young and old speakers.

Vowel	Young speakers	Old speakers
KIT	KIT [ɪ]	raised: FLEECE [i]
GOOSE	fronted	non-fronted
CLOTH	CLOTH [ʌ]	rounded: THOUGHT [ɔ]
TRAP	lowered, rounded	lowered, rounded



Saipan • One of the 14 islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands • In a Commonwealth with the US since 1978 • Diverse and multicultural community

Saipan is highly exposed to language contact situations due to **globalization**. Some of the influential factors are:

- A high number of **immigrants/contract workers** (73% of the whole population)
- A high number of **tourists** each year (about 10 times more than the existing population in Saipan which is 48'220)
- Many people go off-island for an **extended stay on the US mainland**
- **Exposure to technology and English:** Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Netflix, etc.

Linguistic development of Saipan's multicultural and multilingual community:

Globalization has a strong impact on the language situation: which direction the different languages will take is uncertain, however, it can be observed that **Saipanese English is gradually shifting from L2 to L1 status**.



Nauru • Independent republic (since 1968) • Very little emigration • Approx. 10'000 inhabitants, 700 refugees • No tourism

During the 20th century, Nauru was administered by Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain. Phosphate was mined and large numbers of **indentured labourers** were imported from other Pacific islands and China. Today, mining is minimal, agriculture impossible in the mined out wasteland, and tourism inexistent. Financial aid comes from Australia in exchange for hosting **asylum seekers** from African and Middle Eastern countries. There are **many different ethnolinguistic groups** on Nauru and **English serves as the lingua franca**. However, the groups remain relatively separate from one another.

Language use and attitudes:

Nauruans rarely leave their island home. They have a strong sense of belonging and close-knit networks. Similarly, their own language is of high social and cultural value, while **English remains an L2** and is learned for instrumental reasons (jobs, international communication, etc.).

Nauruan (95%)	English (66%)
spoken	written
informal contexts	formal contexts
no standard	only 2% use at home

- code-switching
- code-mixing
- borrowings

Kosrae • The smallest of four island states in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) • Compact of Free Association with US • Considerable outward mobility

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is suffering low financial and job growth and relies heavily on US economic assistance. Many islanders leave in search of opportunity. The primary language contact force in Kosrae is **mobility**.

Through a **Compact of Free Association with the US since 1986**, FSM inhabitants are free to move to the US.

- Approximately 1 in 3 nationals currently live off island, mainly in the US
- Kosraeans leave for third-level education, medical care, employment, family support and to join the US military

Language use and attitudes:

- **English** has become the language of **opportunity** and signifies **education, ambition and modernity**
- Public speeches, language policies and casual discourses suggest a **fear of loss of traditions, values and language** with the emergence of English on the small fishing of ca. 6'000 inhabitants
- **Standard American phonological and lexical features** are increasingly found in Kosraean English, especially in the younger speakers

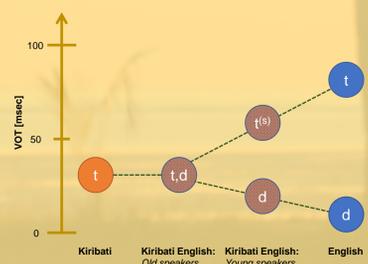


Kiribati • Under British rule from 1892 until 1979 • 103'058 inhabitants • 33 islands (810.5 km²), 21 inhabited • Virtually no foreigners

Kiribati is ethnically almost homogenous. There are hardly any foreign residents or tourists and, consequently, there is **very little contact between I-Kiribati (locals) and I-Matang (foreigners)**. English is a very foreign language, albeit an official one. However, in light of massive climate change threats, there are **new instrumental motivations** towards learning it: with its policy 'Migration with Dignity', the government is actively preparing Kiribati for staged migration. The improvement of educational standards, including English proficiency levels, is central to this policy. Such factors have observable linguistic consequences.

Kiribati English – A linguistic observation:

- Diachronic change in progress:
 - Older speakers: /t, d/ not differentiated
 - Younger speakers: /t, d/ differentiated
- Evidence: /t, d/ differentiation can be measured in terms of VOT (voice onset time)
- Targets: long VOT for Eng. /t/; short VOT for Eng. /d/
- Extra: /t/ is often coarticulated with audible degree of affrication: /t/ → [tʰ].



Conclusion

The five island nations presented here have dissimilar histories and provide their populations with dissimilar contact possibilities:

- **Guam and Saipan:** politically affiliated with the US, ethnically diverse, a lot of migration and tourism from the US and Asian countries respectively
- **Nauru:** politically independent, complicated ties to Australia, inward migration
- **Kosrae:** complicated ties to the US, frequent outward migration but little inward migration
- **Kiribati:** independent, outward orientation and emigration promoted but little on-site contact

As a consequence, the respective English varieties are shaped in varying degrees by the local cultures and substrate languages, as well as other ethnicities and their respective languages. The investigation of these and other factors allow us to fulfill our goal to provide holistic socio-linguistic descriptions.

Si Yu'os Ma'āse' Chamorro • Olomwaai Saipan Carolinian • Tubwa korr Nauruan • Osun Kosraean • Kam rabwa Kiribati

(Thank You)

