

Spreading Roots?

Variation Patterns of the Future Tense in Saipanese English

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates the future tense in a newly emerging contact variety of English. The assimilation of Saipanese English towards L1 varieties, and the extent to which local factors can account for variation are examined.

Historical background

Saipan is the largest island in the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands in the north-western Pacific Ocean (see Figure 1). English emerged in Saipan when the US began to administer the territory post-WWII, after Spain, Germany and Japan. Due to the linguistic diversity and heterogeneity of the community (the two indigenous communities, the Chamorros (22%) and Saipan Carolinians (5%) each have their own language, and there are many foreign contract workers (73%) especially from Asia (51%), the status of Saipanese English is gradually shifting from L2 to L1.

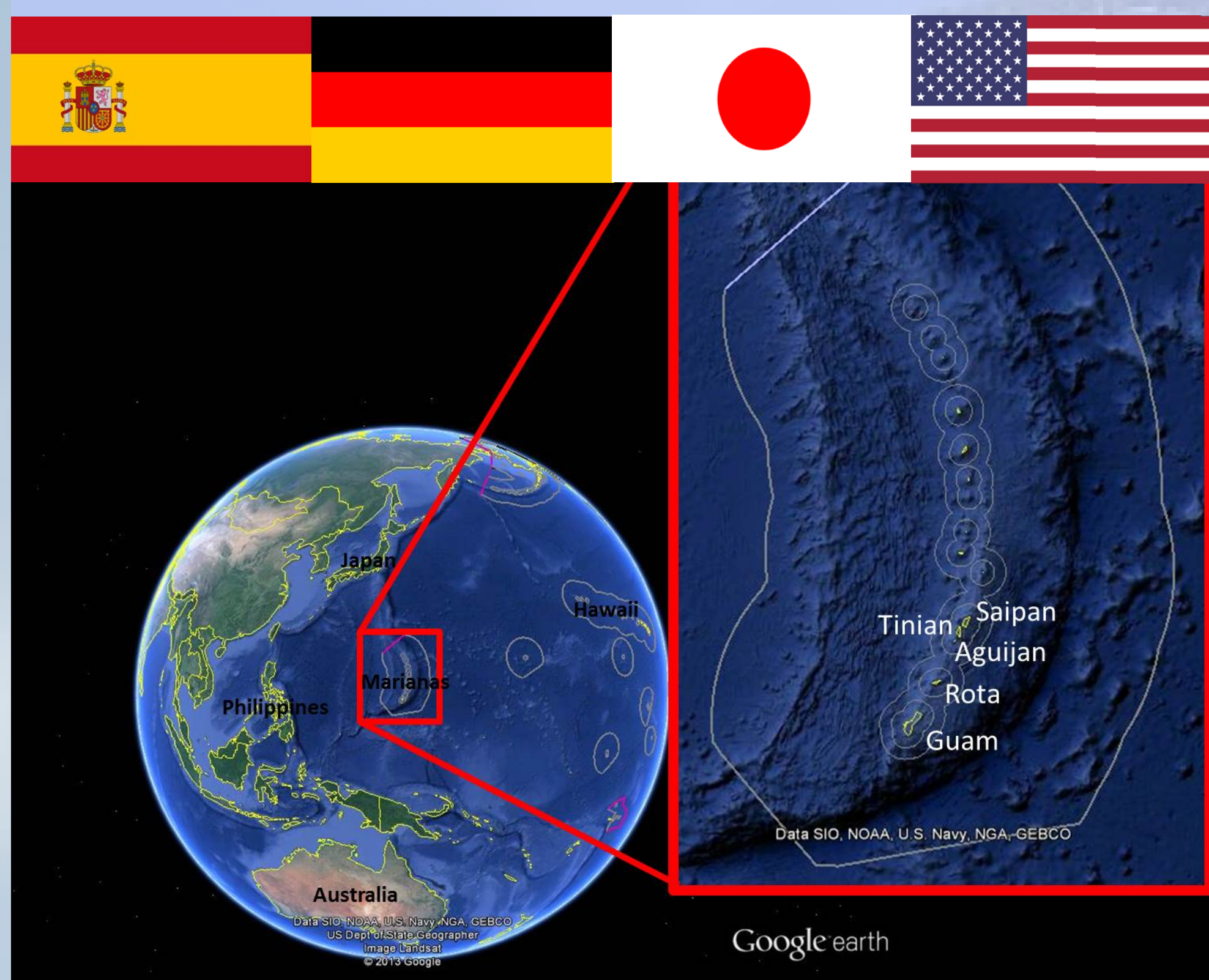


Figure 1: Map of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

2. Previous research on the future tense

African American diaspora varieties, British-origin rural and mainstream varieties in Canada (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1999), Toronto (Tagliamonte, 2006), Quebec (Cacoullos & Walker, 2009) and communities across the United Kingdom (Tagliamonte, Durham, & Smith, 2014) have been researched on their use of the future tense forms. According to these studies,

- the use of **be going to** is **increasing** overall and
- is **favoured in subordinate clauses, interrogative sentences, immediate future contexts, non-first grammatical persons**, and is expanding into **inanimate contexts**.

3. Methodology

Variationist methods are used to examine the future tense in Saipanese English. Statistical analyses of interviews with **32 indigenous speakers** ranging in age from 13-51 years (a subset of a larger corpus collected in 2015) were conducted in R, using mixed-effects modelling.

In total 1'009 tokens were extracted and coded for the future tense. With the exclusion of one *shall* token and habitual uses (N=141), the analyzed dataset consists of **867 tokens**.

4. Results

Results reveal **intra-linguistic** constraints similar to those highlighted for other L1 Englishes:

- The proportion of *be going to* (N=366, 42%) (vs. *will* (N=272, 31.5%) and the futurate present (N=229, 26.5%)) is increasing over time;
- and is favored in subordinate clauses, interrogative sentences, immediate future contexts, non-first grammatical persons and inanimate subjects.

Figure 2 confirms one of the predictions from the literature on L1 varieties: in an earlier stage *be going to* was favored in subordinate clauses, however, its use is expanding into main clauses over time (Tagliamonte, Durham, & Smith, 2014, p. 89).

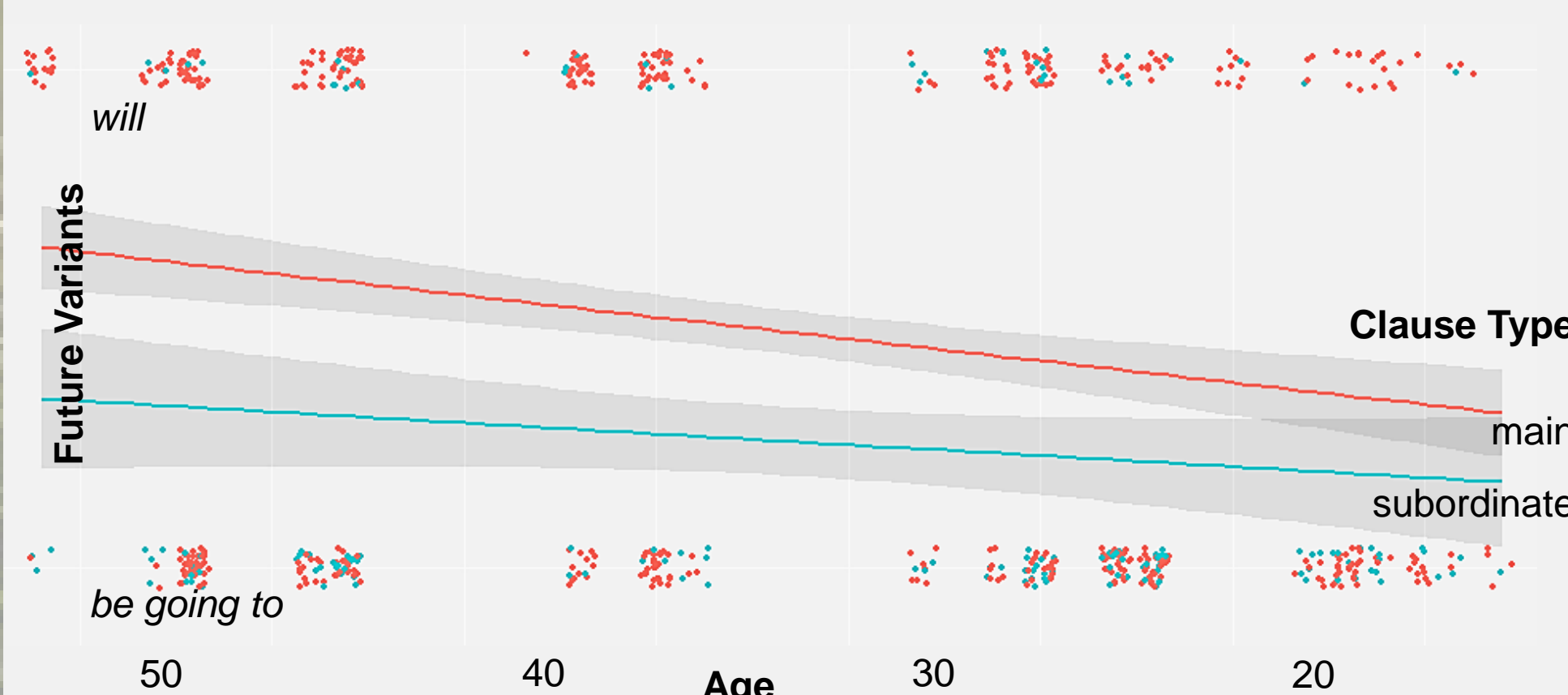


Figure 2: This scatterplot shows how the use of *be going to* (vs. *will*) is more frequent in subordinate clauses but also expands into main clauses.

Very strikingly, however, **extra-linguistic** results show complex interactions for the choice of future variants. *Be going to* is highly present among all social groups, however, variant choice is nevertheless socially conditioned (see Figure 3).

Mobility seems to be a key factor in shaping the grammaticalization process: Speakers who spent a considerable time off-island (a minimum of 5 years/260 weeks) favor the use of *will* whereas speakers with low mobility favor the choice of the futurate present or *be going to*. The future variants, however, are further constrained by sex and age. Therefore, depending on these independent social variables, specific combinations of future variants are preferred:

- young, male speakers with low geographical mobility follow the especially N. American trend of heightened rates of *be going to*;
- low mobility male speakers aged 23+ and female speakers maintain a high rate of the futurate present; and
- mobile speakers favor the use of *will*.

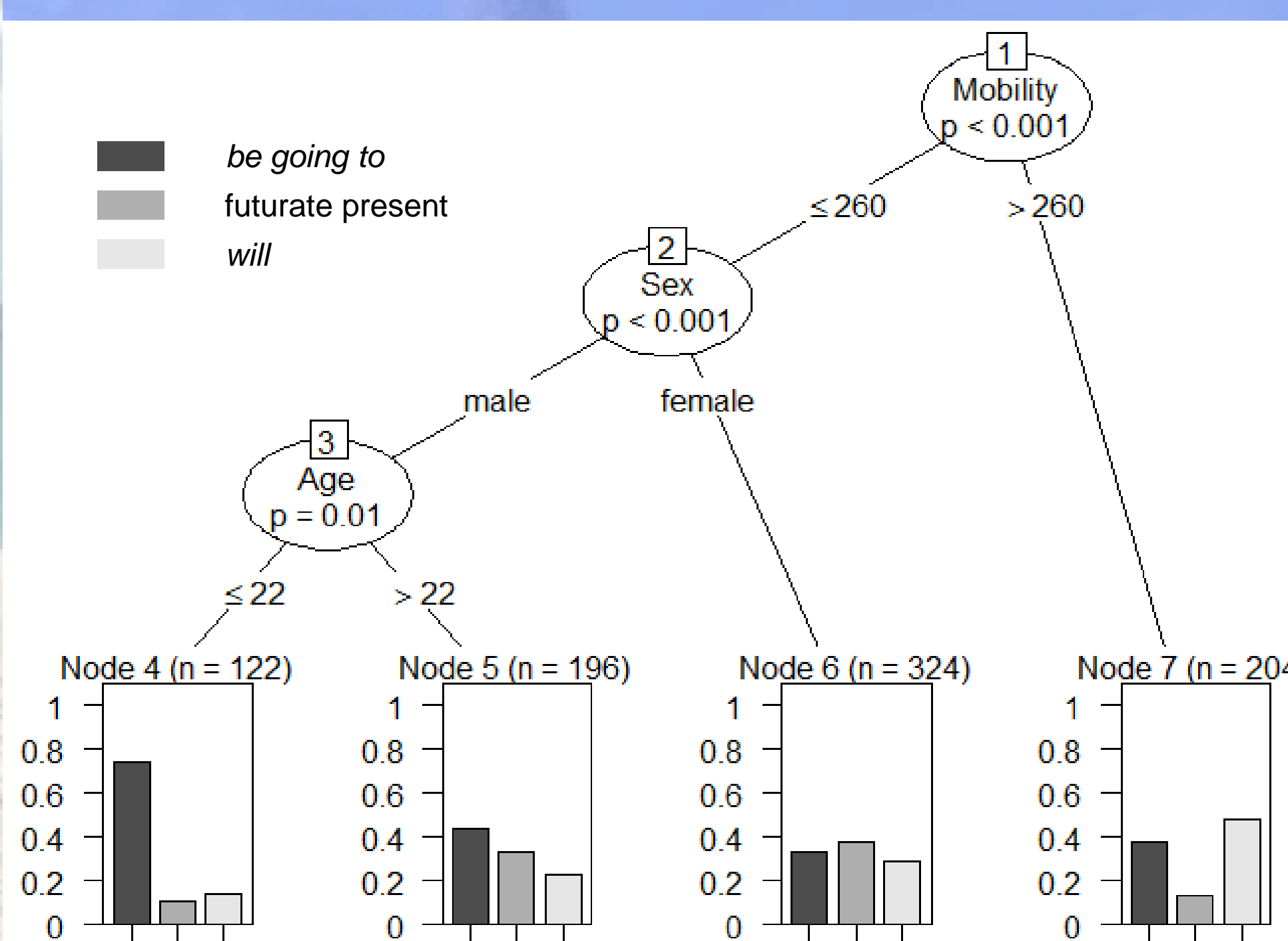


Figure 3: A conditional inference tree showing the complex sociolinguistic interactions that characterize the dataset.

5. Conclusion

Intra-linguistic factors have shown to work in similar ways as those found in other L1 varieties of English and, in this respect at least, these results demonstrate the convergence of Saipanese English towards them.

Saipanese English L2 → Saipanese English L1

Clearly, the *be going to* variant is making inroads into this emergent English variety with familiar linguistic constraints in tact but is nevertheless variably socially embedded. **Extra-linguistic** results yield the following interpretations for each variant:

be going to	<i>Be going to</i> is widely used by all speakers, no matter what age, gender, or mobility experience. Moreover, the form is predominantly used by young male speakers. On the surface this may seem counter-intuitive as these speakers were not especially physically mobile. However, they represent today's technologically mobile generation of Saipan. This may explain the exposure to the especially North American variant.
futurate present	Physically and technologically mobile speakers hardly use the futurate present, whereas female and low mobility male speakers aged 23+ and this form greatly. These groups are either less likely to move off-island or have made a conscious and positive choice to stay on the island .
will	The distribution of variants of highly mobile speakers (<i>be going to</i> (N=77, 38%), <i>will</i> (N=99, 48%), futurate present (N=28, 14%)) resembles the ones found for other English varieties in North America .

These results shed light both on the universality of the linguistic constraints and on the complex constellations of social constraints on the spreading roots of future *be going to* in Saipan.



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