

Socio-historical and political influences on the use of English in Saipan

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1. Introduction: Saipan is the largest of 14 islands in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), located in the north-western Pacific Ocean. The emergence of English in Saipan is being examined in the complex context of its colonial past: Saipan was first colonized by Spain, then Germany, Japan, and finally, by the USA. The focus lies on the influence of the American era on the linguistic outcomes in Saipan: The ongoing change from English as a second language to English as a first language and whether a distinct English dialect is evolving are both investigated. This development is examined according to Schneider's (2007) 'Dynamic Model' of postcolonial English formation. Saipan is an interesting case study in so far as the model mostly has been applied to Englishes that emerged due to British rather than American colonialism.

(1521)
1668-1898

The Spanish Era

- Christianity, clothing, Spanish social mores
- Ancient Chamorros were exiled from Saipan to Guam, decline in the Chamorro population
- Carolinians (from the Caroline Islands) resettled to Saipan around 1815 due to a devastating typhoon

1899-1914

The German Era

- Maintenance of the Spanish political structure
- Law and order, German money
- Registration of land, homestead program on public land: increase of the population
- Establishment of public education (teaching of German), health care, copra industry

1914-1944

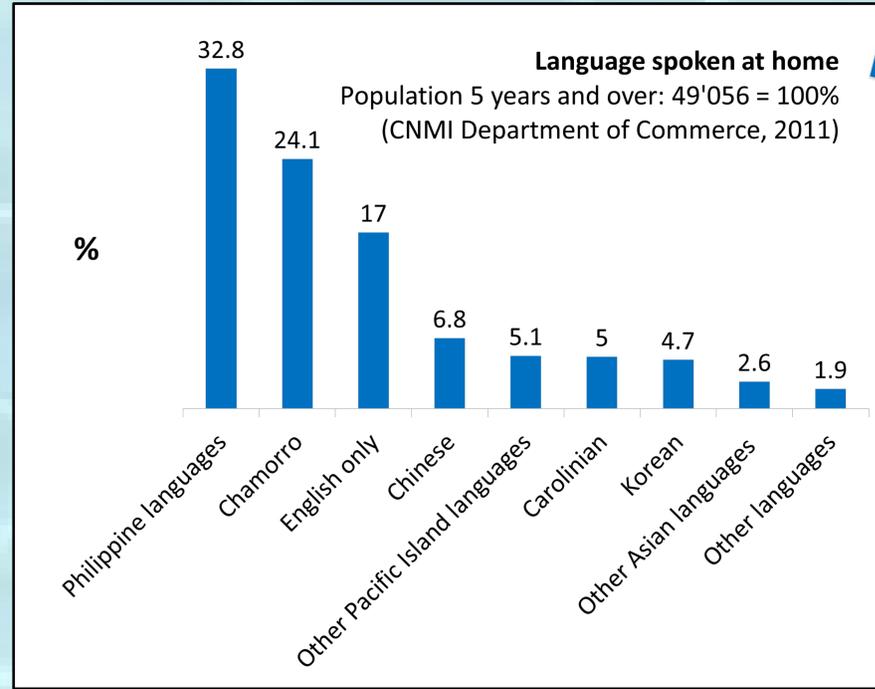
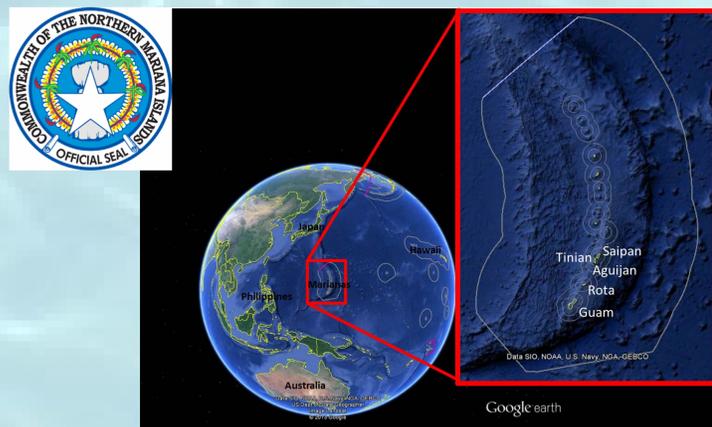
The Japanese Era

- Maintenance of the German/Spanish political structure, Naval administration
- Settlement, rigidity of rules and procedures
- Public education (teaching of Japanese), public health, land policy
- Economy: sugar industry, tuna, rice, pineapple

1944-present

The American Era

- US Navy's Military Government (1944-1947)
- The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) (1947-1984)
- The Present Commonwealth Judiciary (1978-present)



3. Method: recorded informal conversations with 95 indigenous Chamorros and Saipan Carolinians ranging in age from 12 to 79.

4. Hypothesis: Saipan presents an interesting transitional phase of English becoming a first language with local 'island' features.

Frequency of English Usage

- English only: 17%
- Speak other languages (83%)
 - Less frequently than English: 15%
 - Equally often as English: 27%
 - More frequently than English: 39%
 - Does not speak English: 2%

2. Theory: The 'Dynamic Model'



5. Preliminary Observations

Phonology

Vowels:

- Monophthongization of GOAT diphthong
- Raising of the KIT and DRESS vowels
- happy is realised with [i]

Consonants:

- -t/d deletion
- /l/ may be vocalised
- Semi-rhotic
- Consistent use of /h/
- Variable use of /ð/: often realised as a stop [d]
- /p t/ are usually not aspirated, /t/ can be realised as a flap or a glottal stop

Prosody:

- High-rising terminals

Morphosyntax

- Third person -s omission / lack of third person singular concord: *to me it don't feel that long*
- Variable use of plural forms: *maybe in uh two week I'm done; five weeks*
- Negative concord: *I think my separation just made me not care about anything no more*
- Double comparison: *which would be more easier*
- Irregular use of articles: *on the island marriage is like death certificate*

Lexis

- Use of *try*: when telling a story and saying that a friend broke an arm → *I haven't tried that yet – to try used as to experience*
- Use of *ashamed* for being shy
- Use of *plenty* (*plenty homework*) – *plenty* used as adjectival quantifier
- Use of *nothing* (*nothing power*) – *nothing* used as adjectival quantifier
- Use of *to follow* (*I follow you*) – *to follow* used as *I come along*
- Borrowings from Chamorro: *Lanya* (curse word)

6. Discussion: The preliminary observations of some characteristics of Saipanese English seem to suggest that an own local dialect is starting to emerge. However, putting Saipanese English into perspective with other Englishes spoken around the world, many phonological and grammatical features are shared with Palauan English (cf. Britain & Matsumoto, 2014) such as the described phonological and morphosyntactic features above. Many of these features are also shared with Philippine English (cf. Thompson, 2003, p. 52-53) and other postcolonial Englishes in general such as vowel shortening, loss of short-long contrasts (Schneider, 2007, p. 72) and the stopping of /θ ð/ (Schneider, 2007, p. 73) among others. My ongoing research investigates both the distinctive characteristics of Saipanese English, as well as those features which it shares with other varieties.



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