

# The impact of language policies and global movement in Saipan: English as an L1 on the merge

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Saipan is the largest island in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) in the north-western Pacific Ocean. English became a community language in Saipan when the US began its administration post-WWII. Saipan was first part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) before becoming a Commonwealth in 1978. The two indigenous communities, the Chamorros and Saipan Carolinians, each have their own language, yet mostly use English as a lingua franca. Consequently, Saipan is shifting from an English as an L2 to an English as an L1 community according to Schneider's (2007) dynamic model.

The present study discusses this shift of English towards an L1 in Saipan in light of educational language policies established in the American era and the complex language contact situation due to global movement. The study is based on conducted ethnographical fieldwork and a collected corpus in 2015 consisting of 95 sociolinguistic interviews with indigenous speakers ranging in age from 12-79 years.

Since the administration of the US, the two indigenous languages and English are the official languages of the CNMI. Initially, English was taught in schools if an English-speaking teacher was available. In the early 1960s, an English only policy was implemented and Peace Corps were sent to Micronesia. By 1975 bilingual education programs were established and Chamorro and Saipan Carolinian were approved to be taught in (Topping, 1985, pp. 111-122). Despite the effort of the bilingual programs in school, English has developed to be the dominant language in education as well as in government, law, and media nowadays.

Additionally, the recent global movement complexes the language contact situation in Saipan. Saipan enjoys a multicultural, diverse, and mobile population with immigrating and emigrating people. The local residents only make up a fourth of the whole population and most immigrants (43% of the whole population) are contract workers from the Philippines or China, and present a strong and stable community (2010 Census). In this globalized language contact setting, English is used as the lingua franca. Accordingly, many children do not speak their native language and learn English as their L1. However, major socio-demographic changes are taking place and will continue in near future caused by immigration policy changes due the recent US federal government's take-over of immigration in the CNMI. Considering the outward mobility of indigenous people, many spend years off-island, usually in mainland US, for educational, work-related, medical or family reasons. A variationist study on the future tense in Saipanese English has, indeed, shown the strong effect of mobility in shaping the use of English: the patterning of the future tense variants of people who spent more than 5 years off-island resembles that of other, especially North American, L1 English varieties.

This paper explores how past and present (educational) language policies and global movement have contributed to the complex and dynamic language contact situation and the ongoing shift towards English as an L1 in Saipan.

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