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English on Guam: Preliminary Research

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Introduction

Where America's Day Begins
(official slogan of Guam)
America's Paradise in the Pacific
(most popular slogan of advertising sites)

Sharing the theory of three concentric circles by Kachru (1983, 1986, 1992), this report gives a brief description of the Guam (Chamorro) variety of the English language. Like the varieties of countries such as those in Singapore, India, and the other fifty territories where English is a national language and spoken as a second language, the Guam variety of the English language is part of the extended circle.

The history of the native people of Guam is more than 4000 years old and can be divided into 6 major periods: the ancient Chamorro period extended from 500–1552, the Spanish occupation from 1565–1898, the American occupation from 1898–1941, the Japanese occupation from 1941–1944, and finally 1944–up to the present day when Guam became an unincorporated territory of the USA (GVB Guide Book, 2014). Despite the fact that English along with Chamorro is a national language of Guam, there can be no doubt that the culture of the native people of Guam is vividly expressed in the English variety they speak.

A few works have described the status of the English language in Guam (Armknrecht, 1941; Goetzfridt & Goniwiecha, 1989; Underwood, 1987, 1989); Clement, n.d.; Odo, 1972) but little analysis on its status has been carried out (Gumataotao, 1998; Kehoe, 1973, 1976; Kuske, 2017). In addition to these works, Howard (1986) traces the situation of the English language and the culture of Guamanians in pieces of contact literature such as the novel *Mariquita. A Tragedy of Guam*, as does Gault (2015) in her novel *A Mansion on the Moon: A Guam Love Story*. Yet there is much to observe, search, and describe about the Guam variety of the English language. The present report, which is based on an analysis of questionnaires completed by Guamanians, dictionaries of Chamorro and Chamorro English, local newspapers, contact literature, and personal observations of the author, aims to highlight what makes the English spoken in Guam a local variety.

Quantitative and descriptive analyses as well as an observation method were used to define the Chamorro variety of the English language. The results of the study let us conclude that native people follow their cultural traditions and share them with the whole world by means of the English language.

Theoretical Framework

While going through customs upon my first visit to Guam I heard a conversation between two Russian tourists and the customs officer:

- Hafa Adai! – the smiling officer greeted the tourists.
- Why “half a day”? We are planning to stay here for two weeks! – was the response of the puzzled visitors to Guam.

At that very moment there were no doubts left for me that Guam is not only America’s but also a linguist’s paradise in the Pacific. The greeting of the Guamanian that was a mystery for the English-speaking Russians was proof for me as a linguist that there must exist a Guam variety of English, and that was the beginning of my investigation.

The first question that I asked myself was “What is Guam?” According to Underwood (2018, p. 1), “the territory of Guam is an unincorporated and organized territory of the United States.” Guamanians are citizens of the USA but cannot vote in US elections. Guam’s permanent inhabitants are predominantly of native Chamorro stock, (37 %) or Filipino descent (26%); the rest of the population mainly consists of some other Pacific Islanders, Caucasians, and other persons of Asian descent. Therefore, according to the census carried out in 2000, the spectrum of languages spoken in Guam is rather diverse, and is presented in Table 1:

TABLE 1

Languages Spoken in Guam

Languages spoken by Guamanians	The % of the population speaking this language
English	38.3
Chamorro	22.2
Philippine languages	22.2
Asian languages	7
Languages of Oceania	6.8
Other languages	3.5

The island’s original community is of Chamorro natives who have inhabited Guam for almost 4000 years. They have had their own language akin to the languages of Indonesia and Philippines. The Spanish later called them Chamorros, a derivative of the local word Chamurre (the meaning of Chamorri is “highest class in pre-Spanish Chamorro society” (Topping, Ogo, & Dunca, 1975, p. 38). English on Guam today is the language of mass media, instruction at school, and government service. However, it took English much time to conquer the hearts of Guamanians (Kehoe, 1973, 1976; Thompson, 1947; Underwood, 1984, 1987, 1989). Thus, another question arose: How did English come to Guam and what did it finally become upon penetrating through Chamorro and the languages of the previous conquerors of Guam?

Guam was discovered in 1571 by Ferdinand Magellan. At the end of the 17th century it was seized by the Spaniards. A century later, in 1898, the USA gained power of the island, having won over Spain. During World War II, Guam was occupied by the Japanese, and after the war it became one of the largest US naval and air bases in the Pacific, and it was the Navy who were to control Guam.

The first American naval governor, Captain Richard Leary, arrived on the island in 1899 and established the first naval administration. At the time, three quarters of the adult population spoke and wrote in the native tongue of Chamorro and half in Spanish, while English was familiar to a small minority who had worked on whaling ships or in the port town of Sumay in southern Guam (Underwood, 1987).

From the beginning, naval governors made it a priority to increase knowledge of English on the island, especially for children. In 1900, General Order No. 12 was established to provide instruction in the English language. According to that order, all native teachers were inspired to cooperate with teachers of

English cheerfully and harmoniously to make sure pupils obtained a high proficiency level. The day after the order, Guam Governor Leary put forth General Order No. 13, which stated that the ability of a Guamanian to read, write, and speak the English language would improve their own mental condition and they would be better able to help their children who had to go to school. Nevertheless, the situation with improving the English proficiency level was far from perfect (Underwood, 1984), since local citizens tried to maintain pride in their own culture and preferred to speak Chamorro. The next Governor of Guam, Adelbert Althouse (Feb. 7, 1922 – Dec. 8, 1922) tried to solve the problem of improving the level of the English language on Guam by issuing an order to collect and burn Chamorro-English dictionaries and to institute a “no Chamorro” rule in the classroom and on the playground. Yet there were only a few good speakers of English on Guam and the progress was very slow. Despite all that, by the 1930s Chamorros were heavily influenced by American films and music and were mixing various English words like “okay” into Chamorro speech. English also became the language of the print media and military newspapers such as the *Guam Recorder*, which was distributed to the public, and constantly reminded Chamorros that English was the language of success. In 1925, the *Guam Recorder* inspired Guamanians to master their English, stating:

English will bring to the people of Guam, through the public schools, knowledge of sanitation and hygiene, which will enable them to live in the correct manner. This will result still more in the favorable increase in population. Along with such increase will come further and enforced economic development. With economic development will come more of the real pleasures of life. Through English will come a knowledge of fair play and a keen sense of honor such as the progenitors of Americans had at the time of the origin of the language and such as is practiced by the American nations at the present time. With the knowledge of English under American tutorship will come a natural love for labor and industry by those who even come to think themselves educated. A knowledge of theoretical as well as practical agriculture is opened to all and through English, under a present order of things, Guam should become one of the garden spots of the world. (Underwood, 1984, p. 78).

By 1940 English was spoken by 75 percent of Guam’s population over the age of 10 and conversations in English could be heard in the streets of Guam. Not speaking English was becoming a great obstacle in finding a good job with the government or the Navy (Clement, n.d.; Howard, 1986).

Kehoe (1976) states that Chamorro children of Guam have probably been using a Guam dialect of English (GDE) as their first language since 1965 (Kehoe, 1976, p. 42), though the use of GDE and its existence as a variety of the English language (or Chamorro) have not been substantiated by any study. Underwood (1989, p. 76) nevertheless states that “we can and do recognize GDE sounds and contours”. Odo (1972) also points out such initial characteristics of GDE as its deviation from Standard English in phonological rules and intonation features. Gumataotao (1998, p. 6) gives the following terms for the linguistic picture on Guam:

1. Standard English (SE): A dialect most often spoken by “educated” members of society. It is generally used by the media and is generally employed in writing (Edwards, 1979).
2. Non-standard English (NSE): Language that deviates from the grammatical and/or phonological norms of the English language (Richards, 1971)
3. Guam dialect of English (GDE): English that is heavily influenced by Chamorro syntax and intonation. It is a form of non-standard English.
4. Language difference: Spoken languages other than English. It is the natural home language of other ethnic groups.
5. Dialectal difference: A different way of speaking the same language.
6. Attitudes: A reaction to a dialect or of the people who speak that dialect. It reflects how people feel or what they believe.

When comparing Englishes from the Inner Circle with those of the Outer or Expanding ones, researchers concentrate on differences that are labeled as innovations or deviations. Proshina (2007) argues that innovations result from language nativization and acculturation and are accepted as new linguistic features typical of the variety they come from. Among the five factors defining the status of an innovation, “codification and acceptance must be considered the most important, because without them, innovations will continue to be labeled as errors” (Bamgbose, 1998, p. 81). Unlike innovations, deviations are the results of a “productive process which marks the typical variety-specific features; and they are systematic within a variety, and not idiosyncratic” (Kachru, 1986, p. 81), while the former are more creative and are often marked in reference books. An error is also a deviation from the standard, but the cause of an error is the speaker's lack of proficiency in the English language, which usually results in misunderstanding. So, my final question was: What is Guam English? This question is answered using the following methodology.

Methods

In trying to understand the Guam variety of English, my research methodology consisted of four major aspects: questionnaire, personal observations, study of the research on Guam English, and an analysis of the *English the Chamorro Way* dictionary by Santos, Tydingco, Guerrero, M. L., Guerrero, V. L., Pangelinan, Santos, and Matanane (1988).

The questionnaire items concentrated on three main points:

1. Are there any striking differences between the English spoken in Guam and the English spoken in the rest of the USA? Could you possibly think of differences in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary?
2. Aside from the local greeting *Hafa Adai*, are there any other words or phrases used as part of the general English?
3. Are there any peculiarities in participating in business negotiations or business writing?

Among the respondents were hotel clerks, shop assistants in stores, Navy officers, school teachers, and university professors, as well as immigrants from the USA, the Philippines, Japan, and Russia, who had been living in Guam for a long period of time, are considered Guamanians, and thus speak the Guam variety of the English language. The total number of respondents was 68. These people were of different ages, professions and status. These differences were to assist in defining what was an error, deviation, or innovation in the English they speak on Guam. The more often a word, word combination or grammar structure was used among them, the more certain it was that these were true examples of the Guam variety of English. Other materials that were analyzed were mass media, advertising, business correspondence, official papers, two novels on Guam and Guamanians (Gault, 2015; Howard, 1986), and the dictionary, *English: The Chamorro Way* (Santos et al., 1988). First, the answers to the questionnaire were analyzed; the most frequent answers that corresponded to one another were evidence enough that the respondents talked about the variety of English that meets Kachru's (1986) three criteria: intelligibility, appropriateness and effectiveness. These criteria relate to whether the variety can be understood, and whether it achieves its intended communicative effect. Then materials from *Guam Daily* classified ads and social notes columns, books and research on English on Guam were thoroughly studied and analyzed to isolate peculiarities of the Chamorro variety. Finally, the Chamorro dictionary was analyzed for grammar and vocabulary innovations as a final proof of what the Guam variety of English is.

Findings

Analysis of the answers to the three questions above as well as the material from newspapers and the Chamorro dictionary are presented here.

Errors in English Usage in Guam

Among the clearest errors in English were errors in spelling; for example, a sign on the bus saying: “For passanger safety” (wrong spelling of ‘passenger’), as shown in Image 1 below, or a handout for children at a restaurant stating “Some sharks can *loose* (wrong spelling of ‘lose’) 30,000 teeth in a lifetime.”



Figure 1. A sign on a bus in Guam.

Deviations and Innovations in English Usage in Guam

As proof of the Guam variety, there are deviations and innovations in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary that have become part of the “Chamorrized” form of everyday and business English. These are the words and expressions that are used by not only Chamorros but also by the locals who (according to their responses given in the questionnaire) are of origins other than Chamorro but who marked themselves in the questionnaire as Guamanians. The respondents said they liked to play with the Guam variety of English, which underscores their unique identity, and it is much easier in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. These Chamorro English deviations are presented in the second edition of the Chamorro dictionary by Santos et al. (1988), and were mentioned by the respondents to the questionnaire.

These innovations can be grouped into two main categories: first, innovations in pronunciation, spelling, grammar and vocabulary; and second, innovations in rules of speech etiquette. Innovations in pronunciation, spelling, grammar and vocabulary are subdivided into the following:

1. Words spelled and used in the Chamorro variety of English; for example:

- *Abof*, to be on top. “The skies abof the earth” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 3)
- *EstaLader*, local for “see you around” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 17)
- *Gems* stands for the common English name James, as in ‘Gems Bond, Double Jero Seven’ (Santos et al., 1988, p. 22)
- *Miss* for ‘water vapor’ (Santos et al., 1988, p. 38).
- *Ricutdo*, Chamorro name for Ricardo; e.g., “Ricadto!” she called out. Her grandson, a scrawny little eight-year old, appeared from the back room.” (Gault, 2015, p. 7).

2. Particles and expressions rendering special emotions typical for Guam; for example:

- *Aye, aye, aye*, meaning “Oops, I told you so” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 4)
- *Eck*, Chamorro equivalent of “oops” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 17)
- *Uy*, local expression of surprise.

3. Innovations in grammar; for example:

The plural form “-s” is usually missing when needed and vice versa. For example, “Get me two slice of bread” or “I am going to chop the woods” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 63).

“Chilgren” means a boy or girl in a period before puberty and has a plural form – chilgrens (Santos, 1988, p. 11). Synonym of “chilgrens” is ‘kits’, for example, a quote from Pink Floyd will sound like “Yo, titcher, leaf dose kits alone” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 31).

The grammar of Chamorro variety of English states that past tense is the same as present, and there is no future tense. For example: “Lana, that Juner is so tai mamalao, he just drink my beer without asking” (Santos, 1988, p. 51).

To determine tenses, Chamorros use such prefixes as *Ma* (*Ma* + *word*) to make the past tense or *Ma* + *doubled first syllable of a word* to make a present participle (Santos et al., 1988, p. 63).

The verb “went” means “to go”, for example: “Did you went to the store?” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 56).

The past tense of “see” is “sin” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 49)

There is also no difference between pronouns “he” and “she” as well as “her/him”, and the nouns “nephew/niece”. For example, “My sister Maria, he is the one to talk to” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 3).

In her novel *A Mansion on the Moon*, Gault (2015, p. 44) mentions the fact that in addition to pronouns, prepositions are also challenging for Guamanians, since “the Chamorro language has no prepositions as such and has its own way of handling prepositional phrases.”

To denote the degree of an adjective, a Chamorro adverb ‘sen’, denoting “very” or “extremely” is placed before the latter, for example: “sen stupid”, “sen busy”.

4. English words which have gained a special meaning or use in the Chamorro variety:

- *Beer carton*, local barbeque serving tray (Santos et al., 1988, p. 7)
- *Coke*, a local generic term for any soft drink, as in the following dialogue: “Buy me fan coke” – “What kind?” – “Seven-up”. (Santos et al., 1988, p. 13)
- *Corn corn your panty’s tear*, a rhyme chanted by local kids to tease others (Santos et al., 1988, p. 14)
- *Paper toilet* is toilet tissue (Santos et al., 1988, p. 41).

To Christmas means not only a well-known holiday but also a verb with the meaning “to present somebody with something for Christmas” as in “What did Samantha Christmas you?” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 12)

5. A combination of English and some other languages of Guam. For example:

- *Brumekfast* means “ate breakfast” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 9).
- *Na on/naoff* – turn on/of (Santos et al., 1988, p. 39).

6. Calls for animals are also special and unique to Guam:

- *nina-nina*, a call for a pig (Santos et al., 1988, p. 39).

- *Psspsspsspss*, a call for a cat, i.e., “Here kitty kitty” (Santos et al., 1988, p. 43), and its antonym is *sape*, “go away kitty cat” (Santos et al, 1988, p. 47);
- *Tututututu*, used to call a puppy; Chamorro equivalent for “here boy” (Santos et al, 1988, p. 53).

Innovations in the rules of speech etiquette are subdivided into three subcategories:

1. Local greetings

The most striking example in this category is “Hafa Adai!,” a local greeting for “Welcome” (Aguon, 2010, p. 28). This phrase has actually become a symbol of Guam, as this is the phrase that everyone hears or reads upon entering the airport of Guam. This form of greeting is used in official documents such as letters of invitation as well as everywhere in Guam both by local citizens and visitors.

There are also such greetings as *Hoy* for “Hello, is anyone home?” and *Scuse*, used as an equivalent to “Pardon me” when an addressee attracts attention (usually of a stranger).

2. Punctuality

It is typical for Chamorro people to come to the meeting or (non-official) date about an hour later. This phenomenon is referred to as *Chamorro time* [Santos et al., 1988, p. 11].

3. Polite refusal

Shoot shoot, means “No, thanks” and is used to respectfully decline something.

Conclusion

Interviews, personal observations, and some research analysis made me come to the following conclusions of my brief linguistic and cultural study of English on Guam:

There are not many striking differences between the English in Guam and American English. Local inhabitants “watch only US TV channels and listen to the radio in general English” (response from a junior school teacher of Chamorro), so they are surely influenced by this variety of English. Nonetheless, there are a number of deviations and innovations in the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation of the English language in Guam that are used not only by the local citizens but also by visitors to this island.

In addition to the easily recognizable and most popular *Hafa Adai*, Guamanians use Hispanic greeting *Buenas*, or “Good day.” Older generations of Guam use *Manana siYu'os*, “God's morning” (Chamorro greeting). The younger generation prefers *Hi/ Hello/ Good morning*. Sometimes at conferences or business meetings one can hear “*Si Yu'usMā'āse*” – “Thank you” in Chamorro. The official papers of the Ministry of Tourism on Guam conclude with the Chamorro *Senseramente* (“Sincerely Yours”).

All respondents to the questionnaire emphasized that being polite is a crucial factor in any conversation regardless of the person's age, status, nationality and gender. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that women are highly respected in Guamanian society, as the matriarchy still prevails there: “As eldest daughter, Amanda was destined someday to rule her own home and family, and to carry on the culture, traditions, and language of the Chamorro people.” (Gault, 2015, p. 10).

As a final note, it should be mentioned that a new language model can be accepted on the condition that it follows the three criteria: intelligibility, appropriateness, and effectiveness, which are closely connected to mistakes, deviations, and innovations (Kachru, 1992). When a deviation is typical for a

whole society, it becomes an innovation and marks the existence of a regional variant of the English language. In Guam, there are a number of deviations practiced by Guamanians of different descent and used as a demonstration of Guamanian identity as well as a means of saving their mother tongue. This point has much potential for further research on Guam English.

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