

Challenges in a variationist sociolinguistic analysis of a newly emerging contact variety of English

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This paper discusses methodological challenges in the analysis of the variation in the grammatical realization of the future tense in English. Previous research has mainly focused on L1 varieties and the choice between *be going to* and *will*, whereas this study examines the trajectory of grammaticalization in a newly emerging contact variety of English in Saipan and includes a wider set of variants (e.g. *be going to*, *will*, present simple and present progressive).

Saipan is located in the Northern Mariana Islands, where English emerged following the start of US administration post-WWII. 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.

Variationist sociolinguistic methods are used to examine the future tense in Saipanese English (based on a subset of 44/95 sociolinguistic interviews, conducted in 2015, with indigenous speakers). Even though the variable context has been circumscribed by a number of authors (e.g. Poplack & Tagliamonte (1999), Tagliamonte (2006), Tagliamonte, Durham, & Smith (2014), Torres-Cacoullous & Walker (2009)), they focus on L1 varieties. Therefore, methodological challenges arise for such an analysis in a newly emerging contact variety of English:

- How can a bottom-up approach be achieved, which considers innovations from a newly emerging variety, and at the same time aligns with methods from previous research?
- Do the same exclusions (e.g. generic and habitual uses) and groupings of variants (e.g. intransitive and transitive vs. intransitive, monotransitive, ditransitive, intensive, complex transitive, and prepositional) apply in an L2 environment?
- How are locally relevant extralinguistic factors and possible interactions integrated into a model, when previous research has not mentioned them?

This paper addresses these questions, the implication of analytical decisions, differences in results and their interpretation.