

The Influence of American English on Guam English

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In my paper, I discuss how language contact between indigenous people and American mainlanders has influenced the diachronic development of Guam English (GE). The island located in the North Western Pacific has been under (almost) continuous American rule for the past 100 years. As a result, the indigenous people have undergone a shift from speaking Chamorro as a first language to a mostly monolingual generation of English speakers in the time period of only a few generations. Kehoe (1975) pins the change in the inhabitants' first language down to the post WWII generation that decided to raise its children in English. Barusch and Spaulding (1989) state that "during the last 40 years, the U.S. territory of Guam has undergone rapid modernization, accompanied by a deliberate attempt to "Americanize" its population. This effort was successful in producing a generation of young people who share American ideals and aspire to an American life style" (p. 61).

Although the American influence on the island has been well documented, no research describes the influence of these changes on GE. The changes are mirrored in the inhabitants' dialect as the older generations speak English as a second language and the younger generations have moved towards a monolingual language culture that reflects the heavy American influence on the island. Analyzing the full vowel system of a corpus of GE speakers, I will demonstrate the systematic realignment over time to show evidence of a developing orientation towards American English. The dataset includes recordings of approximately 60 minute long sociolinguistic interviews with representative speakers of GE. Younger speakers show vowel plots that are similar to those of General American English speakers, whereas older speakers still show a heavy influence of the substrate language in their vowel system.