

## **Kiribati and the outside: About language contact in a remote and isolated Pacific island nation**

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The 33 islands of Kiribati are scattered across Micronesia in the middle of the Pacific. English is an official language, owing to British administration from 1892 until 1979, but not many people are proficient in it and I-Kiribati, as the inhabitants are called, never speak it among themselves in their every-day lives.

There are hardly any foreign residents (2010 Census) or tourists (UNWTO, 2015). Consequently, contact in an immediate or direct fashion is rare. Nonetheless, there is evidence for linguistic accommodation, as is apparent in my corpus of 1-hour long sociolinguistic interviews with 33 I-Kiribati who differ in age, sex, and experience with the English language. I discuss such instances in a first part of my presentation, particularly English alveolar plosives /t, d/ where there is a gradual shift: from older speakers, who produce both variants with similar voice onset times (VOT) and therefore do not differentiate between the unvoiced and voiced variant, to younger speakers, whose production is much more target-like.

But *who* or *what* do I-Kiribati accommodate to when there are hardly any foreigners present? And *why* is there a convergence towards target norms, resulting in different linguistic patterns across age groups? These questions are addressed in a second part. I discuss how I-Kiribati orient to a spatially removed culture and to underrepresented representatives of it, or in other words, to the outside (see for instance Massey, 1993). Furthermore, by referring to Kiribati's sparse linguistic landscape, I show that a major incentive for this process is the likelihood of emigration due to the impacts climate change is having on their home islands – a likelihood that is higher for younger inhabitants than for older.