

Project Description: English in paradise?: Emergent varieties in Micronesia

1. Summary of the research plan

This project aims to investigate three previously undescribed varieties of English that are developing in Micronesia, in the Northern Pacific Ocean - an area of the world that has a complex colonial past (Spain, Germany, Japan, Britain, Australia and the US are all implicated in at least some places), but which now has English as a state/national language and a language of school instruction (alongside local languages in some cases). Of all the colonial rulers, only the Japanese showed interest in settlement. All parts of Micronesia have had Anglophone colonial rulers, but some only since 1945. Colonial Anglophone settlement of the islands has been minimal. Today, some parts are independent, while others are either fully integrated with, or technically independent, but contractually tied to the US. Micronesia is also linguistically diverse, housing a wide number of Austronesian languages, only some of which belong to the Micronesian sub-branch.

The three Micronesian Englishes that will be examined are those of **Saipan** (in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), **Kosrae** (in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)) and the **Republic of Kiribati**. These have been chosen because they have quite distinct colonial histories, they have different intensities of Japanese contact in the first half of the 20th century, they have followed different postcolonial paths, they have different indigenous substrate languages that might shape emergent new Englishes, and they have different experiences of postcolonial demographic change.

Why are Micronesian Englishes interesting? In general, few postcolonial Englishes that have resulted from US rather than British colonial rule have been extensively examined dialectologically. The main exception, the Philippines, experienced intensive contact with US English at the beginning of the 20th century, unlike in Micronesia, where contact was later and fleeting. Whilst many studies of postcolonial Englishes have examined varieties largely in isolation from others, a recent model by dialectologist Edgar Schneider has proposed a socially, historically, politically and linguistically developmental trajectory that *all* postcolonial varieties of English follow, but again only the Philippines represent US-based postcolonial Englishes in this model. The study of these Micronesian Englishes allows us to test this model, analysing communities that experienced American control, but little American settlement or social contact.

Three PhD students will carry out dialectological fieldwork in these three islands of Micronesia, collecting recordings of local people speaking English. Together with an existing, recently collected corpus of English from the Republic of Palau, west of the FSM, a large transcribed corpus of spoken Micronesian English will be built, supplemented by appropriate written texts in English from the islands. The corpus will enable:

- Close linguistic analysis of the linguistic characteristics of these Micronesian Englishes;
- An analysis of the main sociological and cultural factors that influence the emergent Englishes;
- Analyses of the role of the *local languages* in shaping how these Englishes are nativising. This is likely to be particularly important, given how little contact there has been with Anglophone colonial settlers;
- An assessment of how far through Schneider's developmental trajectory these varieties have travelled;
- *Comparative* analyses of the *same features* across the four Micronesian Englishes in the corpus, enabling an estimation of similarities and differences within the Englishes of Micronesia, and facilitating comparisons with other postcolonial Englishes more generally.

Project outputs will include three PhDs, a jointly authored book and articles on Micronesian Englishes, and numerous presentations at local and international conferences.



North-West Pacific Ocean (based on CPIS 2008)

2. Research plan

The aim of this application is to support three young Swiss scholars to conduct theoretically-driven doctoral research on the socio-historical development of three ‘new’ and previously undescribed dialects of English spoken in Micronesia in the Northern Pacific Ocean – those of Saipan [sai'pæn] in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Kosrae [kou'frai] in the Federated States of Micronesia, and Kiribati [kiri'bas]. At the descriptive level, these three studies will supplement and enable comparative analyses with research on the only other previously linguistically described Micronesian English – that of the Republic of Palau, research conducted by the applicant in collaboration with Prof Kazuko Matsumoto at the University of Tokyo. The output of this project will therefore be three PhD theses (and a number of article publications and a monograph) on the social histories, and, more importantly, the *structures* of the Englishes of three Micronesian island nations, as well as publications by the applicant resulting from intra-Micronesian comparative studies of individual linguistic features. At the theoretical level, the project aims to subject to critical empirical scrutiny Edgar Schneider’s (2007) well-known *Dynamic Model* of the evolution of postcolonial Englishes, focussing in particular on the process of nativisation of local usages of English that lead to the emergence of new varieties.

3. Schedule and milestones

The schedule below sets out the time planning for the project. The three PhD students will each travel to their respective Micronesian Islands for their data collection fieldwork trip at the same time. This maximises the time that the complete team can work together in Bern to discuss data analysis and the emerging results of the project.

Period	Working stage
0-2 months	Literature review: to complete acquisition of a thorough background in the relevant theoretical and descriptive domains of work on World Englishes, including Schneider’s Dynamic Model; accounts of the process of nativisation; English in the Pacific; language contact in general.
3-5 months	Preparing for fieldwork: methodological phase, reading further literature on the ethnography of communication in the Pacific, gaining a background understanding of the basic structures of the respective indigenous languages, data collection techniques, ethics. Organising fieldwork trip, data collection design, securing initial

	'gatekeeper' connections. Write theoretical background chapter.
Milestone 1: The applicant will organise a postgraduate workshop on 'sociolinguistic fieldwork in remote locations', with local and international speakers and session leaders, incl. Dr Matsumoto who has first-hand experience working in Micronesia.	
6-8 months	Fieldwork trip to Micronesia: Each student will collect spoken data from a locally relevant stratified sample of speakers, as well as collect other suitable spoken and written data. Data transcription will begin during this period. Data collection diaries will be written. In Bern, the corpus manager will design a secure and backed up database for all recordings and written data, as well as project website.
Milestone 2: Significant digital corpus of spoken data from 3 Micronesian islands completed.	
9-15 months	All collected data and transcriptions lodged onto secure database; Completion of transcription of spoken data; corpus manager to complete cataloguing of recordings, transcripts and other materials; Initial pilot analyses of appropriate linguistic variables; Linguistic features that will be scrutinised in depth will be determined; PhD students write fieldwork methods chapter of theses.
Milestone 3: Time-aligned transcription of corpus of conversational data completed.	
16-20 months	Detailed linguistic analysis of first variable conducted and written up in draft
Milestone 4: Each PhD student gives presentation at local conference.	
21-25 months	Detailed linguistic analysis of second variable conducted and written up in draft
Milestone 5: Each PhD student and applicant gives presentation at local/European conference.	
26-30 months	Detailed linguistic analysis of third variable conducted and written up in draft
Milestone 6: Each student to write article for journal. Milestone 7: Applicant to write article (in the name of the whole group) on a linguistic feature across all four Micronesian Englishes (i.e. incl. Palauan English).	
31-36 months	Dissertations completed in draft.

Milestone 8: Students and applicant give presentation at international conference.

Milestone 9: Applicant (in the name of the whole group) to write article on a linguistic feature across all four Micronesian Englishes (i.e. incl. Palauan English)

Milestone 10: Compilation of an overview monograph on Micronesian Englishes, authored by the applicant, Prof Matsumoto (on Palauan English) and the three PhD students.

Milestone 11: Three PhD theses completed or nearing completion.

4. Relevance and impact

It is expected this research will be able to offer the following to wider research community:

1. Systematic descriptions of previously undescribed varieties of English from an under-researched area of the world. These descriptions will add to the growing literature in English dialectology on ‘lesser-known varieties of English’ the study of which, Schreier et al have argued (2010: 3, 13), ‘can help us address some truly important issues in (socio)linguistic theory...is essential for gaining a more concise understanding of the mechanisms that underlie sociolinguistic diversification’ and can ‘carry immense potential for linguistic analysis’;
2. Since the corpora from each island are being collected at the same time, and comparative analyses will be conducted across all 4 corpora, the project should be able to deliver, beyond description, an assessment of the typological status of Micronesian Englishes in general, and how they fit into the broader pattern of World Englishes, taking seriously Schneider’s goal of looking beyond individual varieties examined in isolation, to attempt a more holistic classification. Since Micronesian Englishes have formed so recently, in contexts where settler communities were largely absent, and with typologically distinct substrate languages that have not been implicated in varieties described elsewhere in the literature, there is the potential for relatively divergent types to be added to our stock of knowledge about what is ‘possible’ in English;
3. Although the project itself does not have, at this stage, applied linguistic goals, it is reasonable to assume that robust descriptions of local varieties of English could be used to help guide future English language curricula in the societies concerned.

Research outputs:

- Three PhD theses;
- A monograph on Micronesian Englishes, authored by the applicant, the PhD students and Prof. Matsumoto;
- 5 articles in international peer-reviewed journals;

- *At least* 11 presentations by the PhD students and applicant at conferences locally and abroad;
- A database of contemporary spoken and written Micronesian English;
- A website bringing together information on this project, and other work on Englishes in Micronesia.