

The Languages of Three Generations of Chamorro Women

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ABSTRACT

Prevailing historiographies often represent Chamorro women as bearers of culture and language. These prove limited, as they do not delve into the nuances and complexities that led to the transformation of female Chamorro identities. This essay brings to the fore an intergenerational perspective of the language and literacy trajectories of three generations of women on Guam. Present day Chamorro women are brought into the fold of exploring the nuances of female Chamorro identities.

Drawing from ethnographic methodology, this work traces the language and literacy attitudes, perceptions, and practices of these women. The work further deliberates how these women appropriate language and the findings offer a portrait of how Chamorro and English language and literacy speak to the broader issues in Guam's colonial history during the latter half of the 20th century.

Spain ceded Guam to the United States in 1898 via the Treaty of Paris following the Spanish-American War. Since then, save for two years during World War II when Japan occupied the island, the U.S. has maintained control of Guam. Guam's language history reflects its tenuous and ambiguous political relationships. Chamorro language and culture have interwoven elements of colonizers and occupiers of the past while Guam remains a ward of the U.S. as an unincorporated territory.

In the context of Guam, the language of power is English, although Chamorro and English are used in different spaces and situations. More likely than not, English is used in public places that call for official business and Chamorro is used in the home or other private spaces and occasions. This work, originally a part of a larger body of completed research, explores the use of these languages in these spaces and across three generations of Chamorro women.

An ethnographic, qualitative research method was used to "gain a comprehensive view of the social interactions, behaviors and beliefs" (Moss, 1992, p. 155) of the participants in the study. The study's qualitative research design provides a framework to understanding the meaning, context, and process of the events, situations, and actions participants' are involved in and of the accounts they give their lives and experiences (Maxwell, 1996). The purposeful and critical sampling of participants for this study was selected because it is a "strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70). The major goal of documenting personal language and literacy histories can be best achieved by retrieving the information directly from the sources; in this instance, the participants themselves. The Chamorro women in this study are of diverse backgrounds in terms of education, profession, and socioeconomics.

Because the goal of the study was to trace the language and literacy trajectories of three generations of Chamorro women on Guam, several theoretical perspectives were used to examine the sociocultural, historical, and political influences of language and literacy

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development and transmission. In no particular order, the following theories influenced the course of the study.

- Literacy and Social Practice is a theory based on the premise that literacy acquisition and development are socially constructed and that meanings are conveyed in ways reflective of the specific community (Heath, 1999).
- Intergenerational Transmission Theory proposes that “individual development—especially a person’s values, aspirations, and self-esteem—are related to family of origin and the social context within which she grows up and grows old (Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts, 2002, p. 24).
- Community of Practice Theory is used to discuss relationships among individuals who share similar characteristics like language, specific interests, philosophies, and even spiritual beliefs. A community of practice is a mutual engagement that binds members together into a social entity (Wenger, 1998).
- Language and Identity Theory posits that identity is central to understanding language choices because language is shaped by an individual’s identity and others’ perceptions of the individual’s identity (Joseph, 2004). In addition, the construction of identity “must be understood with reference to power relations between the language learners and the target language speakers” (Norton, 2000, p. 6).

The aforementioned theories provided the lens to extract, discover, analyze, and make meaning of the stories shared by the Chamorro women in this study. The women of Generation 1, 2, and 3 have stories to share, stories about language, culture, identity, what they believe it means to be a Chamorro woman and how public, private, religious, and political influences have shaped their identities and roles as Chamorro women on Guam. These participants represent three generations of Chamorro women born before World War II to 1984. Their language histories span a time period of over 85 years.

Chart 1: Three Generations of Intergenerational Chamorro Women

Generation 1 (G1): 1920-1945 <i>I Mañainan-mâmi</i> —Our Elders	Manuela b. 1924	Engracia b. 1925	Rosa b. 1933
Generation 2 (G2): 1945-1965 <i>I Nanan-mâmi</i> — Our Mothers	Teresita b. 1948	Lina b. 1956	Lourdes b. 1954
Generation 3 (G3): 1965-1985 <i>I Hagan Guahan</i> — The Daughters of Guam	Colleen b. 1974	Dolores b. 1984	Rozeanne b. 1975

Generation 1: 1920-1945 *I Mañainan-mâmi*—Our Elders

The women of Generation 1 have stories about growing up on Guam during the 1920s through the 1940s when the US Naval Government controlled the island. There was much change in the way Chamorros lived because of the mandates and policies set forth by the U.S. Naval government. Specific to the issue of language, Chamorro and English, Guam's first of many Naval Governors, Richard P. Leary, made it clear that English was the language of opportunity and success. Via General Order 13, Article 4, Leary ordered that:

All residents are recommend to utilize every available opportunity to learn how to read, write and speak the English language, thereby improving their own mental condition as well as preparing themselves for assisting their children who are required by law to attend school. (1900, p. 38)

General Order 243 furthered this policy by deeming Chamorro language as unprofessional and unworthy. General Order 243 stated, "Chamorro must not be spoken except for official interpreting...No person shall be employed in an Island office who cannot understand English and speak it fluently" (Smith, 1917, p. 6). Language policies instituted by the Naval government were enforced by both government officials and Chamorros employed as a civil servants or teachers. Previous studies on early education and language policy on Guam have noted that there was significant decline in Chamorro language use as a result of policies and orders that were enforced in public domains (Palomo 1987; Underwood, 1987). These policies legitimized the Naval Government's actions in which it marginalized the Chamorro people by dictating their language use and education. The U.S. governed the Chamorros of Guam but did not permit their U.S. Naval dependents to be educated alongside their Chamorro counterparts. This distinct binary between the local Chamorro population and naval dependents led G1 and G2 participants to question their own early educational experiences that required them to conform to the mandated policies. Historical studies have not done justice in clarifying the personal and often conflicting feelings about early education on Guam and the impact this education had on shaping Chamorro and English language attitudes and practices among the Chamorros of Guam.

These G1 women attended school during the first American presence, lived through the Japanese Occupation, and continued their lives on Guam following World War II. When the United States instituted compulsory education, the policy afforded young Chamorros a free education—free but not equal. Education on Guam simultaneously mirrored racial segregation in the United States. Naval Governor Richard P. Leary believed that Chamorro children merited a lower standard of education since U.S. dependents return to the United States (Carter, 1998). Like other Chamorro children, Rosa, Engracia, and Manuela attended public school specifically for Guam children in their formative years and wondered what went on in the "nice American school" built for and inhabited by the children of military personnel. While the public school facilities for Guam's children were mediocre and curriculum focused on agriculture, the American school for military dependents was, in Rosa's words, "Much nicer than ours."

Beyond the physicality of public schools, the labor-centered curriculum placed an emphasis on developing Chamorro children to be productive to the colonial agenda. The Naval Government, as agents of the United States, made it clear that the people of Guam were to be made useful to the U.S.'s agenda to utilize the island of Guam as a military outpost and that the U.S. mission was "one of benevolent assimilation" (McKinley, 1899, p. B(2)). The people of Guam were used to ensure that the United States was successful in their benevolent pursuit. So

as to legitimize the poor treatment and perceptions of Chamorros, another naval report states that there were:

[v]arious services necessary to the Amercian colony, requiring skill performed by foreigners...The people are poor, ignorant, very dirty in their habits, but gentle and very religious...Their wants are few, and they lead lives of Arcadian simplicity and freedom from ambition or the desire for change or progress. They are like children; easily controlled and readily influenced by example, good or bad...These conditions are such that the interests of the Naval station and natives are intimately interwoven. The one, as an organization, cannot escape, or live far apart from the other, and *the efficiency of the first depends entirely on the welfare of the second.* (Stone, 1904, p. 12, emphasis added)

Guam Historian, Anne Hattori, critically and poignantly articulates that the United States', via the Naval Government's actions and orders specific to language and education, "naval agenda was not simply benevolent or paternalistic, but was rather marked by numerous self-serving interests. Teaching the Chamorros to speak English would ultimately enable them to serve the Navy" (2011, p. 29). Although forced to focus on agriculture and U.S. ideology in contrast to the academic curriculum of their naval dependent counterparts, Chamorro children and their parents nevertheless sought to obtain opportunities beyond agriculture and domesticity. This academic binary however led to the devaluation of Chamorro language as one of learning and progress.

Public school curriculum for local children was administered and delivered in the English language, and for these three women, Chamorro was their first language. They were afraid to get caught speaking Chamorro because of the fear of punishment as naval policies penalized the use of Chamorro in educational and professional domains. Monetary fines of five cents per incident and the more traumatizing punishment of paddling were the most common consequences of speaking Chamorro in the classroom and on the playground. Such consequences continued into the next generation and further stigmatized the Chamorro language.

Generation 2: 1945-1965 *I Nanan-māmi*—Our Mothers

The women of G2 were born between the years of 1945 and 1965. Even after the formation of a civilian government in 1950, the English-only policy continued in schools as the language of instruction and in all contexts of official business. Because Generation 1 Chamorros learned that English was the vehicle to academic and professional success, Generation 2's knowledge and use of the Chamorro language lessened. While two of the three women of this generation within this study identified Chamorro as their first language, they also acknowledged that they believed that Chamorro had little use in situations beyond religious and home domains. In addition, Chamorro language offered little benefit to academic and career advancement and success.

During the late 1960s through the late 1970s, the women of G2 completed high school and entered the workforce. These women, along with managing their households, maintained careers and contributed to the financial stability of their families. This shift in women's roles greatly differed from the previous generation. This shift or change may be attributed to the larger, radical shift on Guam in the post-war period due to the end of subsistence living and the beginning of a cash based economy.

Although English was viewed as the language that ensured these women could enter the workforce and maintain careers, their formal uses of English like reading and writing did not take place in the home during their formative years—unless it was school or work related. As such, each G2 woman in this study made the conscious choice to prioritize and make English the language of her own homes. These particular women, much like my own mother and aunts, reified the value of English in the home by conversing with their children in English and using Chamorro only when upset or when they did not want their own children to understand adult conversation. The use of Chamorro and English in these ways set in motion, for the next generation, the perception that English was for public and official domains and that Chamorro language was reserved for private conversations or used as a language of reprimand.

Generation 3: 1965-1985 *I Hagan Guahan*—The Daughters of Guam

The women of Generation 3 possess characteristics of their mothers' and grandmothers' generations. Specifically, Generation 3 women embrace their grandmothers' belief that Chamorro language is central to their identity as Chamorro women. They also value English language and literacy as the vehicle to educational and professional advancement. Essentially, their educational and professional accomplishments have been influenced by their mothers' beliefs and practices. Their grandmothers' influences are evident within the private, religious, and social beliefs and practices in their own lives. These influences have manifested themselves in how they make decisions about education, their profession, family life, and spiritual pursuits.

The existence of dual influences from their grandmothers and mothers relative to language can be attributed to the G2 women having entered the workforce and maintaining employment during their daughters' formative and adolescent years and thereafter. Thus, while the women of G2 were at work for at least eight hours a day, G1 grandmothers took care of their G3 grandchildren. When Lina, Lourdes, and Teresita shared that they went to work five days a week, their children were left in the care of their mothers who stayed at home. Even when their children entered school, after school care was primarily in the hands of their mothers. These G2 mothers were radically different from their G1 mothers because of major shifts in post war Guam that required them to work in order to bring in money so as to survive and thrive in a cash based economy. Their G3 children lived with them, but their G1 mothers had a large role in the rearing of their children. Thus, G3 women possess language attitudes that reflect their grandmothers and mothers.

Each woman within the G3 cohort acknowledged English as being the first language spoken at home and that Chamorro was not the primary language used between parents and children. Each participant attended a private, Catholic school and a public school for some period during their formative years. Mandatory Chamorro language instruction was in place by the time G3 entered their first year of public school.

Tafanmanâyuyut: Let Us Pray

This section is entitled, *Tafanmanâyuyut: Let Us Pray*, because at the heart of the Chamorro family is faith. Regardless of which Christian faith a family subscribes to, strength, love and the will to survive are fueled by prayer. Each woman in each generation within this study acknowledges that it is her faith that keeps her and her family resilient, strong, and close.

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Other than schoolbooks, prayer, songbooks, and mail, Manuela, Engracia and Rosa had little exposure to other forms of print. It is likely that they did not notably value reading because of their limited access to various forms of text during their formative years and the practice that Chamorro culture and ideology were typically passed on orally. But despite the absence of formal Chamorro language literacy instruction, they are able to read Chamorro. The ability to read Chamorro is a result of exposure to early versions of written Chamorro in Catholic prayer and songbooks.

The initial versions of Chamorro prayer and songbooks can be attributed to the work of Capuchin friar *Pale'* Roman Maria Devera. *Pale'* Roman had strong views about the role of Chamorro language in faith on Guam. He was responsible for translating and pushing for the printing of religious literature in Chamorro (Forbes, 2009). It was through his efforts that such materials were made available and accessible to Chamorros. His work was in striking contrast to U.S. policies on language that sought to eradicate the Chamorro language. *Pale'* Roman's work engendered a community of practice that used Chamorro language to instill faith.

The Catholic Church did not ban the use of Chamorro but rather used it to reach out and maintain ties with parishioners. Because Chamorro was the language of the home and prayer, Engracia, Manuela and Rosa learned to read early versions of Chamorro in song and prayer books so as to participate in religious rituals and traditions. Their children and grandchildren also use these Chamorro prayer and songbooks. Engracia even has her children photocopy pages from her collection of prayer books so that her grandchildren and great-grandchildren can learn and take part in family prayers in Chamorro.

G1 women acknowledged that English was necessary for their G2 children to continue their education and obtain employment—an acknowledgement that flourished particularly following World War II. One of the best ways to obtain employment and get ahead was to be able to communicate in English as Chamorros increasingly moved away from subsistence living to a cash economy. Those who spoke and wrote English well received better jobs and better pay.

What is interesting about the Generation 1 women is that they did not purposefully exclude Chamorro from the home despite the English-only policy that was in place for decades. They did not discourage Chamorro or English. Rather, these G1 women bifurcated and valued each language for different purposes. The diglossic situation perpetuated the practice that English was for academics and professional endeavors; Chamorro was for spiritual, personal and social events. Chamorro was valuable in the home as it was an identifier of who the Chamorros were as a people. While Chamorro was publicly rendered useless by the colonial administration in the domains of government, educational and professional contexts, these G1 women did not question the value of their first language or their identity as Chamorro women.

Lina, Teresita and Lourdes of Generation 2 spoke Chamorro and English prior to enrolling in school. At home with family and friends, Chamorro was used to communicate. It was not until they entered school that Chamorro language use was questionable and punishable. Lina and Teresita, whose first language is Chamorro, were exposed to English prior to entering school by family members who visited from the U.S. and interacted with military families stationed on island. Lourdes, whose first language is English and second language Chamorro used English and Chamorro at home; Chamorro was particularly used with her grandmother and older relatives. Similarly, Lina explained that she spoke Chamorro to communicate with individuals who were older than she and English with those who were younger.

These women of G2 were born and grew up after World War II. The years following World War II were a time of change and the stories that these G2 women shared about their

education and early learning experiences are analogous to other Chamorros from their generation. That is, they learned to read and write in English in school, were forbidden to communicate in Chamorro on school grounds, and internalized the idea that English provided access to opportunity. G2 felt the direct consequences of an economy that their G1 parents were forced into immediately following World War II. Specifically, Generation 2 championed the acquisition and use of English and without thoughts of consequence placed the acquisition of Chamorro language in the periphery.

Colleen, Dolores and Rozanne were primarily looked after by their grandparents and grand aunts during their early childhood and early adolescent years because their mothers entered the workforce. The time spent with their grandparents and grand aunts afforded Generation 3 the opportunity to learn and observe Chamorro cultural practices and traditions that they otherwise may not have learned if they were in day care or extended after school care.

English was the first language for these three women, so they did not experience the second language anxiety that their mothers and grandmothers experienced. Academics, social interaction, Sunday religious services, daily prayer, home communication and other acts of literacy were carried out in English. While English was the primary means of communication and literacy, these G3 women did engage in Chamorro language and literacy. Specifically, they used Chamorro words in play or conversation with their peers such as: *toka or malago mumu?* Translated as “You’re in trouble” and “Do you want to fight?” It is interesting that these Chamorro phrases are the ones that G3 women recall because these phrases are generally used when someone does something wrong and will likely get into trouble (*toka*) or when someone is angered and calls another out to fist fight (*malago mumu*). The contexts in which G3 women used such phrases parallels the context in which their G2 mothers used the language with their own children—when they were in trouble. As such, G3 learned to use the Chamorro language when they too were upset with or bothered by a peer; however, it should also be noted that Chamorro words and phrases were also used in positive contexts but just not as often.

Chamorro literacy materials in the form of Chamorro prayer and song books or materials came from Chamorro class at school. Familiarity with religious or spiritual songs in Chamorro is abundant for this generation. Even if prayers are recited in English, songs of devotion for funerals, novenas, and rosaries for the dead are sung in Chamorro.

English literacy materials were accessible to the G3 cohort as their G2 parents, who prioritized English literacy, ensured they had supplies and materials to be successful in school. Their G2 parents encouraged academic excellence, but they did not read to their children during their formative years. Dolores stated, “Really at least in my family, home was family time and school time was school time. The two are separated” (October 15, 2006). Thus, the act of reading was perceived as academic not something that was done for entertainment or fun at home. In spite of the prevalence of English in their life, the Chamorro language remained present via their grandparents, parents, extended family and religious activities. In addition, when they attended public school on Guam during their elementary years, they all received Chamorro language instruction.

The Chamorro language curriculum and instruction delivered at the time these women were in elementary school proved unsuccessful as Colleen noted: “In retrospect, those Chamorro classes did not help much” (January 6, 2007). Most of the Chamorro language that these women know and understand was acquired at home with family and in religious and social situations. Rozanne, Colleen and Dolores learned Chamorro specifically by being around their parents, grandparents, and extended family that used the language at home, social gatherings and

religious activities. Whereas, the Chamorro taught at school was arbitrary and had little to do with their daily life. Chamorro language lessons encompassed memorizing colors, days of the week, months, numbers, and simple phrases. G3 participants did not recall lessons that focused on meaningful conversation. Because these G3 women heard the language among their elders and sometimes with them, they came to realize later that Chamorro was the language of the family and of the Chamorro people.

When asked why she only prayed in Chamorro, G1 Manuela said, “*Kalan ginen I mas tadodong gi korason-hu*” (It’s like it is from the depths of my heart) (January 9, 2007). That is, praying in Chamorro somehow provides greater spiritual and emotional fulfillment than praying in English. Their life experiences paired with the Chamorro core value of *inafa’maolek* and their religious beliefs are telling of their identity as Chamorro women. That is, in large part, their identity is centered on faith, family and the maintenance of Chamorro language and values.

It is sad but apparent that it was Generation 2 who perceived English as the priority language. Following liberation from the Japanese Occupation in 1944 and the signing of the Organic Act of Guam in 1950, Chamorros of the G2 time period contributed to the diminishing of the Chamorro language by not teaching their children to speak the native language of Guam. Many people, like the women of G2, made the conscious choice to exempt Chamorro from the home, often only using the language to correct or admonish their children, without thoughts of consequence. G2 parents did not consider that by not using Chamorro to converse, their children would grow up and be disappointed and ashamed of not being able to speak their native language. Chamorro was hardly ever used to tell stories or talk about the day’s events. English quickly surpassed Chamorro as the language of the home.

Exposed to the comforts and luxuries of modern life as observed in Navy families stationed on Guam and in various forms of media, it is not surprising that Chamorros of this post-war generation desired a similar way of life—the U.S. or stateside lifestyle. Thus, if English was the vehicle to achieve such a life, then Chamorro language and literacy acquisition was not a priority or necessary to academic, social and professional mobility. The perception of the quantity and quality in which English was used signified how educated a person was, and quite possibly, his or her social status.

While English (and not Chamorro) language acquisition was publicly encouraged, Chamorro cultural values and traditions continued to be passed on to their children. For Generation 2, the significance of Chamorro was eclipsed by the notions of U.S. American ideology. The stateside way of life was desired, and so the G2 women made decisions to nurture such desires in their own children. Chamorros’ perception of the stateside way of life included material wealth that was attainable via an American education. This ultimately led to the perpetuation of the idea that English was superior to Chamorro which in turn led their children to internalize the idea that being Chamorro or speaking Chamorro was socially undesirable.

The decision by Generation 2 women to exclude or limit Chamorro in the home was not without reason. The English-only policy included a provision that students who were caught using Chamorro in school were punished physically or through a demerit system. Teresita recalled a childhood incident that occurred on the playground while she played jacks with her schoolmates. Out of excitement, she spoke Chamorro and was overheard by a teacher, “But a teacher heard me and she pulled my ponytail really hard that I started to cry. I was so ashamed. I felt a lot of shame for what I did. And all I did was talk in Chamorro...Boy, she taught me a lesson. I’ll tell you, I learned real fast” (January 4, 2007). As a consequence, these physical punishments or demerits devalued the significance of Chamorro language in their own lives.

Generation 3 women shared that Chamorro language and culture remain a part of their life. Having been exposed to Chamorro language by their parents, grandparents and extended family, they still did not acquire the ability to speak Chamorro with ease. While their understanding of Chamorro is satisfactory, they are not confident in their ability to converse in the language. G3 women realize that Chamorro language is personal and important to maintaining Chamorro culture and identity.

The women of G3 disclosed that English dominates their life and that they use English with their children because they are better at English than Chamorro. They do however use Chamorro phrases and words in conversation with family members and close knit social circles. Their children are also engaged in intergenerational relationships with Chamorro speaking relatives. Rozanne even enrolled her children in Hurao Summer Camp, a full-immersion Chamorro language camp, and Dolores made the decision to keep her daughter longer at a sitter (instead of a daycare center) because the sitter uses Chamorro in the home.

The language choices they have made in their home lives are different from the choices of their mothers. Their attitudes too about English and Chamorro are very different from their G2 mothers, but similar to their G1 grandmothers. That is, they see the value in both languages; however, unlike their grandmothers, they are not confident in their own Chamorro language skills, which prevents them from using the language in their home life more often.

G3's language histories also reveal the attitude they had about Chamorro during their adolescent years. The G3 women were embarrassed to speak English with an accent, and did not want to speak Chamorro for fear of humiliation. They were also indirectly taught by their parents and teachers that Chamorro had little value in their lives. A combination of these factors led them to develop the attitude that to be or speak Chamorro was embarrassing. What may seem worse than harboring feelings of embarrassment was that their feelings did not just apply to Chamorro language itself; it included negative feelings about being Chamorros themselves. They did not wish to identify themselves as Chamorro which included speaking English with a Chamorro accent. This attitude, of course, changed as they matured, but the attitude itself was a hindrance to their acquisition of the Chamorro language.

While some are quick to say that Chamorro language and culture are dying or near death in Guam, this study shows that the culture and language continue to live. Language and traditions manifest themselves in prayer and song, and in private and social spaces. Chamorro language and literacy are present and Chamorro women on Guam continue to contribute as mothers and teachers of Chamorro language and culture. More significantly, as the women of this study demonstrate, despite time and influences that have challenged our identity as Chamorro people, *gaige I lenguahi yan I kuttura gi mas tadodong gi korasson-mami*: the language and the culture are at the depths of our hearts.

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