

# Micronesian Educator

A Journal of Research & Practice on Education in Guam and Micronesia

SPECIAL EDITION, Volume 20, February 2015  
A Publication of the School of Education, University of Guam





*Photograph by Carim Yanoria*

**Nāna by Kisha Borja-Quichocho**

Like the t̄asa and haligi of the ancient Chamoru latte stone  
 so, too, does your body maintain the shape  
 of the healthy Chamoru woman.  
 With those full-figured hips  
 features delivered  
 through natural birth for generations  
 and with those powerful arms  
 reaching for the past calling on our mañaina  
 you have remained strong throughout the years  
 continuously inspire me to live my culture  
 allow me to grow into a young Chamoru woman myself.  
 Through you I have witnessed the persistence  
 and endurance of my ancestors who never failed in constructing a latte.  
 I gima` taotao mo`na the house of the ancient people.  
 H̄agu i acho` latte-ku. You are my latte stone.

The latte stone (acho` latte) was once the foundation of Chamoru homes in the Mariana Islands. It was carved out of limestone or basalt and varied in size, measuring between three and sixteen feet in height. It contained two parts, the tasa (a cup-like shape, the top portion of the latte) and the haligi (the bottom pillar) and were organized into two rows, with three to seven latte stones per row. Today, several latte stones still stand, and there are also many remnants of them throughout the Marianas. Though Chamorus no longer use latte stones as the foundations of their homes, the latte symbolize the strength of the Chamorus and their culture as well as their resiliency in times of change.

# Micronesian Educator

A Journal of Research & Practice on Education in Guam and Micronesia

**Editor:**

Unaisi Nabobo-Baba

**Special Edition Guest Editor:**

David W. Kupferman

**Editorial Board:**

Donald Rubinstein

Christopher Schreiner

**Editorial Assistants:**

Matthew Raymundo

Carim Yanoria

**Design and Layout:**

Pascual Olivares

ISSN 1061-088x

Published by:

The School of Education, University of Guam

UOG Station,

Mangilao, Guam 96923

# **Contents**

Guest Editor’s Introduction.....	3
<i>David W. Kupferman</i>	
The Cost of Schooling for Micronesian Students.....	8
<i>Stephanie H. Kamai</i>	
(Re-)constructing Identity: Historical Linguistics as a Means for Exploring Austronesian Pan-ethnic Identity.....	26
<i>Emerson Lopez Odango</i>	
Currents among People: Social Network Theory of Linguistic Change Applied to the Micronesian Communities in Hawai’i Education.....	63
<i>Nikolas D. Willson</i>	
Notes from my “Native” Daughter.....	94
<i>David W. Kupferman</i>	
Don’t Ever Whisper: Darlene Keju – Pacific Health Pioneer, Champion for Nuclear Survivors.....	112
<i>Suzanne Falgout</i>	

# **GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION**



**BY  
DAVID W. KUPFERMAN**

**Guest Editor's Introduction**

David W. Kupferman

University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu

This special issue of *Micronesian Educator* aims to explore the burgeoning complexity of issues, challenges, and possibilities relating to the increasing Micronesian diasporas from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) developing in the state of Hawai'i, and their various interactions with and through Hawai'i public schools. While there have been occasional papers focused on Micronesians' schooling experiences in Hawai'i in disparate academic journals, reports from educational consultancies, and the popular press, there has yet to be a full issue of any academic journal concerned with this topic. This volume therefore attempts to begin to address the lack of concentrated scholarship on the growing issues of schooling that intersect with the ever-increasing numbers of Micronesians who are moving to Hawai'i for any variety of reasons, and it offers a possible set of implications for those geographic locations, such as Guam, which are becoming the new home islands of the multiple Micronesian diasporas.

One popular trope about Micronesia (here limited to the RMI and FSM) and immigration to Hawai'i is that Micronesian parents are moving to the Hawaiian Islands for better "education" for their children. Yet what is most commonly reported, both in the press and in academic research, is that there is a vast divide between the expectations of Micronesian parents and children, and the expectations of the school system. Since the system is operating from a position of privilege, it is the schools' priorities that invariably win out. As a result, one gets the sense that the manifest relationship between Micronesian Islanders and the Hawai'i public school system is one of varying degrees of indifference, intolerance, and violence. In December 2012, for example, racial tensions and the taunting of Micronesian students led to two days of fighting at Kealakehe High School in Kailua-Kona on Hawai'i Island (Jensen, 2012). In the rather humble amount of literature on Micronesian schooling experiences in the state of Hawai'i, one is hard pressed to find uplifting stories; instead the narratives tend to analyze conflicts of culture



within schooling contexts, or the struggles with language acquisition and cultural acceptance from local peers (see Ratliffe, 2010; Talmy, 2010).

Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast numbers for just how many Micronesians from the Freely Associated States have migrated to Hawai'i, and even the US Government Accountability Office in 2013 decried the lack of accurate recording of Islander movements into the state (Jaynes, 2013). But if one looks, for example, at the latest census from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the trend is clear: more and more Marshallese are moving from the outer islands to the population centers of Ebeye and Majuro, and more people from those areas are moving to the US (Republic of the Marshall Islands, 2011). There is no indication that this phenomenon will ebb any time soon, and the closer the RMI and FSM get to 2023, the expiration date for the funding portions of their current Compacts with the US, we should anticipate that the numbers of migrants will only increase. Many of them will settle in Hawai'i, the first point of disembarkation in the US. It is unclear that the Hawai'i Department of Education is prepared to productively negotiate the encounter with Micronesian students and parents, despite their growing numbers in the schools.

As the reader will quickly note, language plays a pivotal role in each of the essays in this special issue, and taken together, the thread that is woven throughout the papers is that language, rather than being a barrier to sociocultural engagement as it is so often produced by the schools, in fact can act as a bridge between various groups. In the first essay, Stephanie H. Kamai gives a big-picture overview and recent history of the relationship between FSM Islanders and Hawai'i, and their impacts on Hawai'i public schools. She importantly stresses the ways in which language can help to connect, rather than distance, people, notably through the simplest of conversations, the conveyance of respect, and actively listening to what Micronesian parents and children have to say.

Emerson Odango and Nikolas Willson, both linguists, consider the ways in which language in oral societies fosters networks and connections among individuals that are not readily apparent. Odango writes of his relationship with Mortlockese youth during and after his time there both as a Peace Corps Volunteer and as a fellow Austronesian traveller from the Philippines. Historical linguistics is

the key for Odango, as it opens up a space for what he calls “pan-ethnic identity” and the creation of associations among Islanders through a matrix of language exchange. Willson, writing from the Marshalls, contends that it is the “strong networks” apparent in Hawaiian schooling contexts and among immigrant Islander students that create the conditions wherein students struggle against language proficiency. Considering the politics of schooling systems, he argues for a set of “weak networks” that encourage linguistic boundary crossing of diverse kinds.

In the final essay, I attempt to untangle the experiences of my daughter, who is a native speaker of both English and Kosraean, as she was misidentified as an English Language Learner (ELL) student in Kindergarten in a Hawai‘i public school, as well as the politics and discursive formations that defined her language abilities as deficits rather than as assets. This special issue also features a thoughtful book review by Suzanne Falgout, who assesses Giff Johnson’s telling of his late wife Darlene Keju’s story, and her struggles to bring justice to those Marshallese and other Pacific Islanders who were affected by US nuclear testing in the 1940s and 1950s.

I also want to point out that we are including with each of the essays their abstracts in the vernacular: Kamai’s in Hawaiian; Odango’s in Mortlockese; Willson’s in Marshallese; and Kupferman’s in Kosraean. The reasons for this are varied, yet equally important. First, it is high time, in a moment of the so-called “postcolonial,” that the academy treats languages other than English as legitimate scholarly discourse. What is more, each essay leads with the vernacular in order to privilege that language; in this way, English becomes the contingent language, so that speakers and readers of languages other than English can also engage in the dialogue. Finally, to return to the theme of contestation and violence above, it seems an important step to have Hawaiian language in particular in conversation with Micronesian languages in order to demonstrate a counter-narrative that the relationship and networks between the Hawaiian and Micronesian Islands can work in concert, and not always at odds, with each other, whether in the social, political, or academic imaginaries. We hope that with this special issue we can shine a different light on the encounter between Micronesian Islanders and Hawai‘i’s



schools, so that we can broaden the conversation and create spaces for new types of dialogue in and among all of our islands.

## References

- Jaynes, B. (2013). GAO official says Compact Impact reporting is not reliable or consistent. *Kaselehlie Press*. Retrieved October 30, 2014, from [http://www.fm/news/kp/2013/july29\\_4.htm](http://www.fm/news/kp/2013/july29_4.htm)
- Jensen, C. (2012). Kealakehe High closed today after two days of fights; 8 students arrested. *West Hawaii Today*. Retrieved October 30, 2014, from <http://westhawaii.com/sections/news/local-news/kealakehe-high-closed-today-after-two-days-fights-8-students-arrested.html>
- Ratliffe, K.T. (2011). Micronesian voices: Culture and school conflict. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 14(2), 233-252.
- Republic of the Marshall Islands. (2011). The RMI 2011 census of population and housing: Summary and highlights only. Majuro: Economic Policy, Planning, and Statistics Office. <http://www.doi.gov/oia/reports/upload/RMI-2011-Census-Summary-Report-on-Population-and-Housing.pdf>
- Talmy, S. (2010). Becoming 'local' in ESL: Racism as resource in Hawai'i public high school. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 9(1), 36-57.

# **THE COST OF SCHOOLING FOR MICRONESIAN STUDENTS**



**BY  
STEPHANIE H KAMAI**



# The Cost of Schooling for Micronesian Students

Stephanie H. Kamai

## Mo'olelo i ho'opōkole 'ia

He haku hale ka pae'aina o Hawai'i i ka po'e mai nā 'āina like 'ole, ka po'e no nā kumu like 'ole e kū aku i ka nohona ma'a 'ole a me ka nohona kamaniha i kekahi mau manawa. E ninaninau aku kēia mo'olelo i ke a'o aku 'ana ma Maikonekia a e 'imi aku 'ia nā pō'ino pilikino a me nā pō'ino pili'uhane e kali mai ana no ka po'e Maikonekia. Na'u e hō'ōia i nā nānaina a me nā mea ala'alai no nā haumāna a me ko lākou mau 'ohana mai nā Moku'āina Pekelala o Maikonekia i kā lākou ho'ohana me nā kula i ke kahua kūloko a e ho'opuka mana'o aku, na ka 'ōlelo ka mea i ho'opili mai. 'O ka mea hope loa, e ninaninau aku kēia mo'olelo ma nā 'ohana Maikonekia a pehea lākou e wehewehe pono aku i ka holo pono 'ana a me nā pahu hopu nui a lākou.

## Abstract

The state of Hawai'i is host to people from many different countries who for various reasons end up in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment. This paper looks at a brief history of schooling in Micronesia and seeks to identify the physical and spiritual maladies that linger for the people of Micronesia. I identify perceptions and challenges that exist for students and their families from the Federated States of Micronesia in dealing with the local school system and suggest that language can be the bridge that binds. Lastly, this paper looks at how Micronesian families define success in school and the goals that are important to them.

**Keywords:** *Micronesia, schooling, Hawai'i, schooling*

This paper focuses on how students from the Federated States of Micronesia have adjusted to schooling in Hawai'i. First, I provide context to the issues presented in this paper beginning with a brief chronological history of schooling throughout the islands in Micronesia. Next, I explore the reasons why Micronesians have moved to Hawai'i in increasing numbers over the past few years. I present the barriers as identified by those who have studied the perceptions, obstacles and challenges for Micronesian students and families in Hawai'i. I focus on the possibilities that exist when students, their families and educators in the public school system learn from each other about how best to meet the needs of the student. Finally, I look at the implications for the future of Micronesian children in Hawai'i.

### **Micronesia**

Thirty two hundred miles west of the Hawaiian Islands is Micronesia. It is the region of Oceania in the Pacific Ocean which consists of 2,100 small islands, covers an area of 1,000 square miles over an ocean area of 2,900,000 square miles and includes states with Spanish, German, and Japanese colonial histories. Micronesia includes the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM): Kosrae, Yap, Pohnpei, and Chu'uk; the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI); the Republic of Palau (ROP); the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); the Republic of Nauru; the Republic of Kiribati; and the Territory of Guam. In this paper I focus on the interests and goals for the children from the FSM.

### **History of School in Micronesia**

Schooling across Micronesia has had a diverse history subject to the colonial powers at the time. A year after the Jesuit missionaries arrived in the Marianas in 1669, they built the first school. The "colegio" as it is called still exists and is the longest lived educational institution ever founded in Micronesia. In 1852 American pastors opened their first day schools in Ponape and Kosrae. The American pastors began by teaching basic reading and writing in English. Initial interest deteriorated and students soon became more interested in the whaling ships that arrived on their shores. Attendance dropped dramatically and the schools were closed.



Following the Spaniards were the Germans who bought Micronesia from Spain after the Spaniards lost the war to the U.S. in 1899.

During their fifteen year reign, the German government was more focused on the harvesting of resources such as copra, phosphates and fishing (Paul, 2003) than pursuing Christian values in which the Spaniards aspired to teach the people. In 1914 the Japanese government took control of Micronesia and by 1944 “many of the islands soon had more Japanese than indigenous people” (Paul, 2003). This was especially prevalent in Palau where the Japanese outnumbered Palauans five to one. The Japanese established strict rules about what was to be taught in schools, including the Japanese language. The American government would gain control of Micronesia before the end of World War II and remain the overseer of the defense and security of Micronesia to this day. The citizens of the FSM would eventually become a sovereign nation and design their schools upon the American model of schooling.

Depending on the ruling authority at the time curriculum in the schools included topics such as music, farming, gardening, religious doctrine, penmanship, reading and writing, geography, and trade skills. With the exception of the Americans, who after a closure of their schools in 1855 due to a lack of interest changed the focus of their curriculum from learning to read and write in English to becoming literate in the vernacular, each ruling country used their home language as the foundation on which to educate the people. Each ruling authority used their colonial language as a way to gain or force the loyalty of the Micronesian people. It was especially harsh under Japanese rule. Micronesian students were punished for speaking their native tongue (Hezel, 1984).

Moving forward, during the period between 1962-1972 the number of students enrolled in high school soared from fewer than 50 a year to 360 by 1972, and then 800 by 1979 (Hezel, 1984). These upward trends were especially notable in Chuuk after the expansion of high school facilities (Hezel, 1979). And although students were already pursuing college in the United States, attaining a college education became more accessible and desirable in 1972 when Micronesians were first declared eligible for Pell Grants. The number who attended college abroad

went from less than 200 in 1970 to 2,400 in 1978. The Yapese is considered to be the most educated citizenry in the FSM with 13% earning a bachelor's degree.

### **Adoption of the Compact of Free Association**

In 1986 the Governments of FSM, RMI, Palau and the United States entered into a Compact of Free Association (COFA), a series of treaties, where the United States has full authority and responsibility for the defense and security of these states and allows unlimited numbers of Micronesian families to travel freely to the United States (United States Department of State, 2014) and in exchange “the FSM provides the United States with unlimited and exclusive access to its land and waterways for strategic purposes” (United States Department of Interior, 2014). People from these nations are permitted to live, work, and study in the United States as non-immigrants. Americans can live and work freely in the FSM without the need for a visa (United States Department of State, 2014). “The provision was anticipated as essential to the survival of a small-island nation with a high population-growth rate but limited resources and dubious pathway toward economic development” (Hezel, 2013). Of the 108,000 people in the FMS, 48.8 % are Chuukese, 24% are Pohnpeian, 6.2% are Kosraean, and 5.2 are Yapese (Office of Insular Affairs, 2014).

### **Discrimination**

Although Micronesians from the FSM were already traveling to Hawai'i the COFA provided easier access with more people visiting or moving to the state. The nonimmigrant status of the COFA is not understood by many in the state. Without the historical underpinnings it is easy to assume that the scores of Micronesians families who have been observed sitting on the floors at Kapi'olani Children's Hospital are somehow living off the “system.” Or that “those” people living in parks, under bridges or vans are of a lower class than the rest and are where they belong. The misconceptions and negative perceptions are widespread, often appearing in the media, schools, and homes. Their cultural practices can trigger discrimination by some. For example, the traditional Micronesian skirt worn by women can be a “target” of negative assumptions, often displayed through hurtful



comments and gestures (Blair, 2011). Culture is personal. The traditions, rituals, and practices a group accepts as their own are deeply personal and have tremendous significance in how members of a group may think and act. Gaining an awareness of the historical background of the Micronesian people and learning about what is important to them can lead to a positive attitude toward and relationship with the latest migrants. Sadly, that is not the view of many residents in the state.

Another form of discrimination is evident in the recent ruling by the U.S. 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals where it was determined that the state is not required to fund Medicaid for migrants from Micronesia (Blair, 2014). At the center of the ignorance that exists and the discriminatory decision by the state is money or the lack of money. Only about ten percent of the cost to provide health services to Micronesians has been reimbursed to the state by the federal government. The state coffers need to be replenished by the federal government who created the compacts. The situation has not been positive for a people who have endured much and who, for many, are struggling to stay alive.

Heine states that “the legacy of the Micronesians lies in the cultural heart and spirit of its people to be self-sufficient, traveling between its islands to strengthen relationships with family members, and seek out new lands” (2008). She goes on to say that “Micronesians have always been voyagers & great navigators who go on trips in search of new land, to acquire new lands, search for disease-free sites, wives, its social organization system, and this system is anchored in the family” (2008). So how does a people analyze the “insidious effects of their colonial past” and more important, “reclaim or restore the best of what was lost, subverted or ignored in the colonial era and its aftermath” (Pamau, 2005) and surface as a viable place, independently and globally, where life, family, education, and economic security is sustained and cultural values are honored? Will the spirit of the people be able to find rest within their ancestral and cultural practices in the new homeland of their colonizers? How much compromise will be necessary?

According to Hezel, “since the mid-1960s, the Micronesian family at its most basic level has been altered as it never had been before. The revolution has been masked by the fact that some of the forms in the family remain much as they were

before, and the values of sharing and cooperation endorsed by all Micronesian societies are still practiced. Yet, underneath this apparent continuity lie profound changes that have greatly altered the basic structure of the family in recent times” (2008). The reason for this change goes back to the cash economy that became heavily depended on when the Micronesians were under the system set by the ruling authorities from the east and the west. Although the Japanese wages for some families in the islands were considered to be low, a change in the power structure began to take hold. It was the beginning of the difference between the haves and have-nots. Families were no longer as dependent on each other as they once were. As the U.S. military increased its presence, jobs that provided cash salaries replaced the land and sea sustenance that came from the resources of the islands. Progress, as defined in Western terms was set in motion and continues to have dire consequences for the people of Micronesia. Micronesians are forced to seek employment and educational opportunities outside of their states.

### **Migration**

The number of Micronesians moving to the United States increased after the compact went into effect. One of every 3 FSM citizens now lives in the United States (Hezel, 2013). The United States mainland is more affordable, but Hawai'i seems to be the first choice for Micronesians without medical insurance that need expensive treatment (Hezel and Levin, 2012). Between 1946 and 1958 the United States conducted nuclear weapons tests in the region. Stillborn babies, birth defects and cancer are some of the more serious health conditions as a result of the nuclear testing. Consuming foods that lack the nutrition previously provided by their local diet resulted in a high incidence of diabetes. People need chemotherapy and treatment for diabetes; the health system in the FSM is inadequate (State of Hawai'i, 2009, Pobutsky, 2005) for the types of treatment some Micronesians need. The ease in which to travel from FSM also makes Hawai'i an ideal treatment center (Hezel, 2013).

A main reason for Micronesians to migrate is the desire for a better education. The possibility of better job opportunities than what is available in their homeland is another reason for moving. They also attend college or pass through

Hawai'i as a stopover to their next destination. Whatever the reasons for moving to Hawai'i, the number of migrants from the FSM living in the state was approximately 405 in 1978 and in 1990 that number increased to 1,000. The most recent survey to be conducted was in 2012 and it revealed that 26% migrated for work, 25% migrated for educational opportunities, 11 % for medical reasons, and the remainder migrated because of the beauty, food, weather, and close proximity to their home islands (Hezel & Levin, 2012).

In 2008 Micronesians were reported to be the fastest-growing migrant groups in the state of Hawai'i and it was estimated that between 12,000 and 20,000 lived in the state. According to the 2012 survey done by Hezel and Levin, 590 new migrants were registered in Hawai'i each year between 2007 and 2012. Chuukese, the largest group in the FSM were the fastest growing community of Micronesians in Hawai'i (Pobutsky, 2005, Omori, 2007). By 2012, an estimated 7948 or 0.6 percent of Hawai'i's total population are FSM citizens living in Hawai'i.

The Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice estimated that "some 15,000 COFA migrants resided in Hawai'i, where they face many barriers to achieving assimilation and economic security including language, social and cultural barriers, negative stereotyping and marginalization" (2011, p. 3). In a John A. Burns School of Medicine 2007 study on homelessness eighty-two Micronesians were seen at the Hawai'i Homeless Outreach and Medical Education project between May 2006 and September 2006. Seventy three or (89%) were Chuukese, 8 or (10%) were Marshallese, and 1 or (1%) was Kosraen. The top 2 reasons given for homelessness were "over-crowded housing" and "could not afford rent" (Omori, et. al.). Cancer, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, obesity, diabetes and mental health are also identified as key issues for Micronesians (State of Hawai'i, 2009). "Once Micronesians migrants reach Hawai'i, the lack of affordable housing, together with limited English language skills, cultural misunderstandings on both sides, a lack of technical training opportunities, and low wages for entry-level jobs result in many migrant families living below the poverty line" (University of Hawai'i, 2008).



## **What Matters**

Why does all this matter? Health, food, and shelter are basic human needs and a student's ability to thrive is challenged when basic needs are not met. Students from disadvantaged households perform less well in school than students who are from more advantaged homes with access to greater resources. Little or no access to health, nutrition, education, and housing are indicators of poverty and poverty is linked to inequality where people are marginalized and have little representation or voice. Poor health and nutrition inhibit student learning and cognitive development. Central to promoting a student's cognitive development is exposing them to language that is rich and meaningful. However, basic human needs must be satisfied before learning and education can take its appropriate place. This is true for all humans, regardless of their ethnic background. To be sure, earning a college degree can make the difference between a lifetime of poverty and future of economic stability. Micronesians from the FSM understood that.

The pathway to a formal education outside of the islands increased slowly for people from the FSM. During the period between 1962-1972 the number of students enrolled in high school soared from fewer than 50 a year to 360 by 1972, and then 800 by 1979 (Hezel, 1984). These upward trends were especially notable in Chuuk after the expansion of high school facilities (Hezel, 1979). As stated earlier, the Yapese who set out for college earlier than their neighbors is considered to be the most educated citizenry in the FSM with 13% earning a bachelor's degree. Attaining a college education became more accessible and desirable in 1972 when Micronesians were first declared eligible for Pell Grants. The number who attended college abroad went from less than 200 in 1970 to 2,400 in 1978.

## **FSM Students in Hawai'i**

The number of students attending schools in Hawai'i increased from 1192 to over 3000 between 1997 and 2007 (Pacific Resource for Education & Learning, 2007). The age of more than half of Micronesians from the FSM are young. For example, half of the Kosraens are children of the head of the household. Family decisions are generally made by the adults in the family unit. It is the same for the people of Micronesia. The voice of the youth of Micronesia will be coming of age

to be the decision makers for them and the next generation of young people. Preparing them for this responsibility begins in the home. Schools also need to be prepared. So then, what are the responsibilities of the home and how do those responsibilities affect schooling?

In a study focused on the responsibilities that family members have to each other four major themes emerged. After interviewing 27 Micronesian adults Ratliffe found that, 1) identity in the Micronesian community is communal. 2) Family relationships extend beyond the nuclear family and responsibilities for the family are shared. 3) The commitment to family may be in the form of time, money, land, and attendance at funerals and family gatherings. 4) The expectation of Micronesians who move away continues in the form of remittances and church donations to be sent back home. The respondents noted that some of the expectations contributed to stress in the families of Micronesians with school age children as well as for those who are dealing with the cost of living in Hawai'i to send remittances home (2010). Informants reported that conflicts can occur when family obligations clash with school priorities. All respondents discussed being kept home from school for funerals as a cultural practice that was not questioned.

As an educator of future teachers, my work is to prepare student teachers to understand the cycle of teaching. Student teachers are assigned to classroom field experiences with diverse groups of students. The most common questions I have heard from student teachers center around the challenges they face when working with students with little or no English language proficiency. They ask, "How do I work with ELL students?" "How do I communicate with a student who does not speak a word of English?" "How do I communicate with his/her parent?" "How can I possibly pass the student who does none of the work I assign?" These are important and relevant questions.

Deeply embedded in a group's culture is their language and it may be the limited English proficiency of a student that presents barriers to the student's adjustment. Coupled with the fact that the Micronesians are the fastest growing migrant population to Hawai'i is the fact that English Language Learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing segment of the school-age population in the United States growing from 2 million in 1990 to 5 million in 2008 (Goldenberg, p. 48). The Center

for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence estimates that by the 2030s 40 percent of school-age population in the United States will be ELLs (2001).

Goldenberg completed a review of empirical qualitative and quantitative studies on language minority populations and found that “teaching children to read in their primary language promotes reading achievement in English; what works for learners in general also works for ELLs; and because of the student’s language limitations, teachers must make instructional modifications when ELLs are taught in English” (p. 42). Semantics and syntax learned through the first language can transfer to learning a second language since the student has some familiarity with the rules of grammar (Clark, 2011). I agree that language can be learned in its literal form. However, the essence of the mother language is not so easy to transfer to another language or vice versa.

While the law is clear that schools are to provide services to ELLs, the strategies, organizational structure, and attitudes toward providing those services vary greatly in the schools. Absent from the curriculum for ELLs is a focus on bilingualism. Languages follow patterns of learning and a student should continue to speak in his/her first language, in this case the native language specific to the state of Micronesia from which the student originated, while learning to speak English. Frequent interaction to both languages is critical. Beneficial to a student who can speak two languages is that he/she may be more aware of other cultures and other people, thereby developing sensitivity to others. Our language(s) gives us a sense of belonging and a cultural identity with strong ethnic ties to whatever roots we claim.

Good teaching practices to use with ELLs are explicit teaching in meaningful situations and opportunities to use the language in social situations. Effective strategies to use with ELLs are the same for non-ELLs. Establish clear goals and learning objectives, and “validate the student’s culture by learning common phrases in a student’s first language,” (Kaneshiro, p. 107) or encourage students to share information about their culture (Iding, Cholymay, & Kaneshiro, p. 12). Identity texts are one way to affirm funds of knowledge available in the community (Cummins, et. al, 2005). Important to working with bilinguals are using effective



instructional models but so are the human relationships and environments educators create.

### **A Personal Story**

As a school guidance counselor several years ago, it was my role to support the classroom teacher by reaching out to parents and/or guardians of those students who were chronically absent from school. On one particular occasion I was asked to investigate into the whereabouts of a few students who were at risk of failing. I soon learned that the students were from Micronesia and that they were all related and lived in the same house. Since there was no home phone number listed, I decided to make a visit to the home. I invited a colleague to come along with me. Since we had no previous experience and little or no knowledge about working with Micronesian families we were a little apprehensive about how our visit would be perceived.

Upon arriving at the front door of the apartment, one of the students we were concerned about welcomed us in. The apartment was clean and neat, the apartment was quiet. The student introduced us to a woman seated on the floor who was folding laundry. The woman was polite and smiled a lot. We learned that she was the mother of the students who were not attending school. After we introduced ourselves and revealed the reason we were there, she called all of the children into the room, spoke to them calmly, but sternly, in a language we did not understand. As her child negotiated communication between the adults, we were somewhat confident that communication was occurring and that attendance would improve.

The impression I was left with after that meeting was one of respect. The mother displayed a genuine warmth and kindness toward us and her children. The real question was whether or not her children would return to school. The situation improved for the youngest child but, sadly, the two older children dropped out of school. I have often reflected on how that interaction might have been different if my colleague and I had a better sense of the expectations that parents have for their children and the important role that family plays in the Micronesian culture.

Our message was more about compliance and legal issues rather than seeking to understand how important family obligations are for Micronesian families. Hezel defines family as it refers to “the lineage or extended family, often comprising two or three households that shared food and work” (2008). Perhaps if we had been more persistent in our efforts to learn how to connect with them we might have been more successful. More importantly, the students might have been successful. What if we had asked questions like, are there obligations in your family that we were not aware of? Or, how/do those obligations affect your priorities relating to your child’s education? How could we help your children succeed in school? Were we speaking to the one in authority who had influence over the situation? A question like, what can teachers do to support the education of your children takes pressure off of the family and implies a willingness to find a solution together. It would have been important to know what island state they were from. Making generalizations about people can be inaccurate but knowing what island state the family was from would have given us an idea about the possible cultural norms of the family. I believe that follow up meetings and a translator would have helped mom overcome what I perceived to be shyness and at the same time assist the counselors in developing the cultural competence necessary to establish a trusting relationship.

With that said I am not certain that the outcome would have been different and that all students would have returned to school. The youngest student who did return might have returned because he was young enough to embrace change and the chance for him to assimilate to the new school was greater. On the other hand, we must consider the idea that schooling is a term that limits our thinking about how to educate. Kupferman (2013) proposes that serious conversations about alternatives to the structure, and organization of schooling that currently exists are necessary. Kupferman states that, “there exists a space or spaces that allow for a formation of self-determination outside of the ontology of schooling” (p. xiii) which “produces new conditions of possibility” (p. 162). This kind of thinking outside of the box, a box in which we are too familiar and confined, takes imagination, courage, hard work and a look at possibilities that other communities

are trying. Community schools, where the school partners with a wide sector of the community, are finding success.

I am an educator of future teachers. Teacher candidates in our teacher education program are expected to determine the effectiveness of their lesson based on student outcomes and to make adjustments where necessary. They prepare lessons that are relevant for all students, regardless of their ethnicity or cultural history. For teacher candidates to develop expertise in this area they must care about those they teach and be open to learning about the cultural and linguistic background of each student. Therefore, teacher candidates need to develop an understanding of and appreciation for the cultural-based practices that exist for each student in the classroom.

## **Conclusion**

Micronesians are in a state of flux. It is hard to imagine a people enduring so many changes for so many centuries amidst the influence of outsiders without struggling, at the end of the day, to identify what behaviors and customs are truly indigenous to a people. Rynkiewich states that this diaspora is more likely to involve “the dispersal of a people from a homeland to a host country or countries, the formation of a community within the host country that identifies with the homeland, and the maintenance of links between the diasporic community and the homeland” (2012).

The path to becoming a member of the United Nations was not without its struggles. According to Boneparth & Wilkinson, the United States saw Micronesia as a military strategy, and moved aggressively to acquire exclusive rights to the nations (1995). The U.S. has pumped substantial income into the region but the responsibility for the economic development and care of the islands and its people is questionable (Al Jezeera, 2013). Jobs will decrease if the military’s strategic interest wanes any further. As Heine puts it, “the search for better employment opportunities for the growing number of school-aged children is likely to be a continuing challenge for the free associated states” (2002, p. 4).

Although the education system in Micronesia is based on the American model, school in Micronesia is mandatory only until grade 8 or age 15. Since



children are not expected to take English until the fourth grade, proficiency in their first and second language is expected to be low (Heine, 2002). With the number of young children already here, the children who may be moving to Hawai'i and, where a large number of Micronesians are considered to be economically disadvantaged (State of Hawai'i, 2011) it is important to connect through whatever means available. There is evidence to suggest that students do "wish to emulate others and blend into their new homeland" (Falgout, p. 193) and this may be a place for teachers to start. Unless there are dramatic shifts to the trends of the past several years Micronesians from the FSM will continue to seek a better life in Hawai'i. Recovering from the actions and events of the past will take time and the number of FSM school age children to enter the public schools in Hawai'i will continue to increase.

## References

- Aljazeera. (2013). *Micronesians in Hawaii face uncertain future. COFA Agreements provide US regional control in exchange for limited access.* Retrieved January 17, 2014, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/humanrights/2013/10/micronesians-hawaii-face-uncertain-future-201310191535637288.html>
- Blair, C. (2014). *Court: Hawaii Doesn't Have to Give Micronesians Health Care.* Civil Beat. Retrieved May 30, 2014, from <http://www.civilbeat.com/2014/04/21680-circuit-court-hawaii-doesnt-have-to-give-micronesians-health-care/>
- Blair, C. (2011). *No Aloha for Micronesians in Hawaii.* Civil Beat. Retrieved June 2, 2014, from <http://www.civilbeat.com/2011/06/11650-no-aloha-for-micronesians-in-hawaii/>
- Boneparth, E. & Wilkinson, M. J. (1995). *Terminating Trusteeship for the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands: Independence and Self-Sufficiency in the Post-Cold War Pacific.* Pacific Studies, Vol. 18, No. 2.

- Clark, Beverly. A. (2011). First-and Second Language Acquisition in Early Childhood. Retrieved April 15, 2014, from <http://ecap.crc.illinois.edu/pubs/katzsym/clark-b.html>
- Cummins, J., Bismilla, V., Chow, P., Leoni, L., Sandhu, P., & Sastri, P. (2005) *Affirming Identity in Multilingual Classrooms*. Educational Leadership. Volume 63, Number 1, pp. 38-43.
- Falgout, Suzanne. (2012). *Pohnpeians in Hawai'i: Refashioning Identity in Diaspora*. Pacific Studies, Vol. 35, Nos.1/2.
- Goldenberg, C. (2008). *Teaching English Language Learners. What the Research Does-and Does Not-Say*. American Educator, pp. 8-44.
- Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice. (2011). *Broken Promises, Shattered Lives: The case for justice for Micronesians in Hawai'i*.
- Heine, Hilda. C. (2002). *Culturally Responsive Schools for Micronesian Immigrant Students*. Honolulu: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.
- Heine, Hilda. C. (2008). *Micronesians' Contributions and Challenges in Hawaii by Micronesian Voices in Hawaii Conference*.
- Hezel, Francis. X. (2013). *Micronesians on the Move: Eastward and Upward Bound*. Pacific Islands Policy, Issue 9, East West Center.
- Hezel , Francis. X., SJ. (2008). *The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s in Micronesia*. Micronesian Counselor No.73.
- Hezel, Francis X., SJ. (1984). *Schools in Micronesia Prior to American Administration*. Micronesian Seminar. Pacific Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1.
- Hezel , Francis X., SJ. (1979). "Education Explosion in Truk." Pacific Studies, Vol. 2, No. 2.
- Hezel, Francis X. & Levin, Michael J. (2012). *Survey of Federated States of Micronesia Migrants in the United States including Guam and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)*
- Iding, Marie, Cholymay, Novia and Kaneshiro, Sandra. (2007). *Building Bridges, Not Barriers: Inviting Chuukese Family Involvement in Hawaii Schools*. Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology. Volume 1, Issue 1, pp. 10–13. Kaneshiro, Sandra. M. (2008). *Micronesian Students' School Experience in Hawai'i: A Case of Ecological Systems*. A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate division of the

- University of Hawai'i in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education. University of Hawai'i, Manoa.
- Kupferman, David. W. (2013). *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific. A Genealogy from Micronesia*. Springer.
- Omori, J. Kleinschmidt, C. K., Lee, E. K.W., Linshield, T. C., Kuribayashi, T., Lee, D. (2007). *Reasons for Homelessness among Micronesians at a Transitional Shelter in Hawai'i*. *Developing Human Resources in the Pacific*, Vol. 14. No 1.
- Paul, K. A. (2003). *Is There a Problem Here? The History of Micronesian Immigration and Its Affect on the Experience of Micronesian Children in Hawaii's Schools*. A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate division of the University of Hawaii in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education.
- Pobutsky, A.M., Guenconsejo-Lum, L., Chow, C., Palafox, N. & Maskarinec, G. G. (2005). *Micronesian Migrants in Hawaii: Health Issues and Culturally Appropriate, Community-Based Solutions*. *California Journal of Health Promotion*, Volume 3, Issue 4, 59-72.
- Pobutsky A.M., Krupitsky,D., and Yamada, S. (2009). *Micronesian Migrant Health Issues in Hawaii: Part 2: An Assessment of Health, Language and Key Social Determinants of Health*. *California Journal of Health Promotion*, Volume 7, Issue 2, 32 – 55.
- Puamau, Priscilla. (2005). Paper presented at the international conference "Redesigning Pedagogy: Research, Policy & Practice." National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
- Ratliffe, K. T. (2010). *Family obligations in Micronesian cultures: implications for educators*. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 23:6, 671-690.
- Rynkiewich, M. A. (2012). *Pacific Islands Diaspora Studies*. *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 35, Nos. 1/2.
- State of Hawaii, Office of Community Services, Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. (2011). *New Day Plan for Improving Lives and Strengthening Communities*. pp. 1-35.

United States Department of the Interior, Office of Insular Affairs, *Federated States of Micronesia, Insular Area Summary for the Federated States of Micronesia.*

Retrieved from February 17, 2014, <http://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/fsm.cfm>

University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Department of Public Health Sciences. (2009) PH649 *Planning and Needs Assessment, Needs Assessment for Micronesian Health Care in Hawai'i.*

U.S. Department of State: Diplomacy in Action. *U.S. Relations with the Federated States of Micronesia Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Fact Sheet.*

February 3, 2014, Retrieved February 17, 2014, from

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1839.html>

***Stephanie H. Kamai*** has an EdD from the University of Southern California, and has been an Assistant Specialist and the Coordinator of Field Experience in the Education Division at the University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu since 2012. For twenty years she served as a teacher, counselor, and administrator with the Hawai'i State Department of Education, collaborating with students, parents, and teachers on ways to succeed in school and life. At the university level, she continues to focus on student success, specifically preparing teacher candidates who are confident, skillful, and knowledgeable.



**(RE-)CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY:  
HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS AS A MEANS FOR  
EXPLORING AUSTRONESIAN PAN-ETHNIC IDENTITY**



**BY  
EMERSON LOPEZ ODANGO**

# **(Re-)constructing Identity: Historical Linguistics as a Means for Exploring Austronesian Pan-ethnic Identity**

Emerson Lopez Odango

## **Mellapen aweewen taropwe ie mé reen kapsen Mwoshulók, ngiingiin shóón Lukunosh sangei Pakin**

Taropwe ie e alóngólóng óón ia usún historical linguistics (weewen itiitin kapsen loomw) epé kan alisei shóón sukuul reen iaar repé longeetei o pwal weewetei fishi ausheean nonnoon shóón Austronesia llan fanéúfaan (ngé esé lifilifil sangei fanéú fa). Isapw angaangiakanei apworausen itelap ie mi nonno shak llan akiak are kapas, iwe ngé iaa kan angaangiakanei meet ie mi alóngólóng óón iaash féfféer o pwal pwókin iáái mámmááf. Iaa kan angaangiakanei pwókin iáái kile, pwe ngaang eman re Filipiin ngé iké úpwútu llan Merika, iwe pwal ngaang eman Peace Corps Volunteer llan Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Linguistics epé kan alisei sáraáfé reen iaar repé kúttá tipeeu fangan leefiilan arames ie re sái mwo kilei pwe mi ioor—are remi kilei pwe mi ioor ngé resé kan ausheeani—iwe raa toonganei kúttá llan pwal eeu iaal meet weewen nonnoon shóón Austronesia llan fanéúfaan (ngé esé lifilifil sangei fanéú fa), reen iaan epé ioor iaan sáraáfé kakkapas fangan leefiileer ie epé kan allemaala meet esé allem. Kare arames raa kan akkamingngau sangei eeu meet are raa kan shak akkatúmwmwa sokkosafangen eeu mé eeu meet, fáán ttep (ngé esapw fansóun mwonson), arames repé kan ngiimwaleetei arames fáán itan shak mámmááritáár are uluuleer; ie shak, kare sipé kan mwéút nganei shóón sukuul iaar repé akiaki fishi sangei iaar sukuul iakanei historical linguistics meet ausheean nonnoon pwal eeu mweishen arames llan fanéúfaan (ngé esé lifilifil sangei fanéú fa), shóón sukuul kewe repwapw alúkkapeeila kian iaar mweishen shieshei, iwe ngé iaar kakkapasen ngiimwaleetei arames epwapw siiwel nganei kapas aiek reen iaar pwaapwaetei kile sokosokoppaaten meet o pwal reen iaar shangal.



I start my paper following the traditional protocol of Mortlockese gatherings, as I have learned from my teachers:

*Mé mwmwan meet mwonson, iaa mwashan féerei iáái kapsen tirou óómi, pwal iáái kapsen kilissou reen iaash ausimi toonganei shu fangan llan naúsh taropwe kei. Anean amwo ita pwe epé ioor weeweéésh. Amwusaala iáái tipis.*

‘Before all else, I would like to ask for your pardon, and to give my thanks for all of us meeting together in our papers. May it be that there will be good understanding. Please forgive my mistakes.’

By framing my position paper at the onset with two distinct yet related languages—*wikang Tagalog* ‘Tagalog’<sup>1</sup> as given in the proverb, and *kapsen Mwoshulók* ‘Mortlockese’ as given in the greeting—I evoke two language resources that I draw upon throughout my discussion of historical linguistics as a means for students to explore and contextualize the significance of Austronesian pan-ethnic identity. I step away from purely theoretical approaches to this issue, instead taking pragmatic and personal stances. I draw upon my experiences as a US-born Filipino who served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Linguistics provides tools with which young people can find connections they did not previously know existed—or perhaps knew but did not fully appreciate—thus giving them another mode to co-construct what “Austronesian” identity means to them, in the hopes of fostering healing conversations among the youth.

In the following sections, I provide contexts of my own self-identification and conceptualizations of “identity” in the literature. I then give a somewhat technical discussion of historical linguistics and the comparative method, as it facilitates my later discussion of why the Austronesian pan-ethnic identity can have value in

---

<sup>1</sup> Although the national *lingua franca* of the Philippines is called “Filipino,” the language upon which it is primarily based is Tagalog. I self-identify as a speaker of “Tagalog” rather than “Filipino,” based on the language name ideologies developed in my family domains.



school settings. I take personal stances throughout this position paper, since this self-reflective and autoethnographic (Ellis et al., 2011) mode of analysis allows me to answer the questions that I continuously ask in my life, first and foremost as a person who juggles multiple cultural and linguistic identities, and secondarily as an academic who wishes to encourage youth to explore positive spaces of shared histories as alternatives to the discourses of racism.

### **I am an Austronesian Person<sup>2</sup>**

After graduating from college in 2005 with an interdisciplinary degree in linguistics, I decided to join the Peace Corps. I was partly driven by my goal of gaining first-hand experience living and working overseas prior to applying to graduate school, as well as my own altruistic desires for volunteerism<sup>3</sup>—specifically with the Peace Corps, given my parents’ positive perception of the effects of that US governmental organization in their homeland of the Philippines. The most important motivation for me, however, was the opportunity to volunteer in a rural area, so as to gain a better appreciation of the life my parents and elders lived while growing up in the Philippines—my mother’s side from Luzon and Mindoro, my father’s side from Mindanao—and from that to further develop my own appreciation of the sacrifices they have made (and continue to make) for my generation when they immigrated to the US.

Upon receiving news that I was to be assigned to the region of Micronesia—which as a region defined by Peace Corps placement consisted of the FSM and the Republic of Palau—my first reaction was to learn as much as I could about the indigenous languages spoken there. What was especially exciting was the realization that no matter where I would be assigned in the region, I would be learning a new Austronesian language. The Austronesian language family is a group

---

<sup>2</sup> My original section title was “I am an Austronesian,” but I changed it to the current one as a reply to Blundell’s (2011, p. 81) stance: “But what about the people in Taiwan, are they Austronesian? No—people cannot be a language family, anymore than I could be an Indo-European person.” As I argue throughout this paper, a label such as “Austronesian” is multivalent and can indeed be “co-opted” from historical linguistics beyond its original denotation to serve as a pan-ethnic label.

<sup>3</sup> Even though I now have an understanding of the larger critical discourses about international volunteer service, neocolonialism, and development (cf. Daftary & McBride, 2004; Kothari, 2003; Lewis, 2006), I can reflect that at the time of my application to the Peace Corps my goals were framed in the legacy of what my parents and other family elders perceived were positive outcomes of Peace Corps Volunteers before me.

of at least 1,200 languages spoken from Madagascar to Easter Island, from Taiwan to Aotearoa (New Zealand) (cf. Blust, 2013; *inter alia*). Membership in this language family is ascertained primarily through a methodology called the “comparative method” (cf. Campbell, 2013; *inter alia*), as well as through the confluence of supporting evidence from archaeology, cultural anthropology, and genetics.

As a student of linguistics, I was aware of the technical aspects of how the Austronesian language family was defined, and so it was academically interesting to go to Micronesia, but from a personal perspective—as a Filipino who is a Tagalog receptive bilingual (Beardsmore, 1986, p. 120) and heritage learner (Valdés, 2005)—the prospects of living and working with speakers of another Austronesian language were truly exciting. I was eager to learn more about my broader Austronesian heritage, which requires more than just academic command of the facts of my ancestor’s migration throughout the Pacific, and more than just an appreciation of my Filipino identity through language and culture. It requires a concerted effort to understand the similarities and differences of other Austronesians’ lives, from as emic a perspective as possible.

I am extraordinarily fortunate in having been able to learn such a perspective through my experience living and working with the Pakin Atoll community in Pohnpei State during my service (2006–2009). The residents of Pakin are a diasporic Mortlockese community, whose ancestors originated from the Mortlock Islands in Chuuk State. I continue to work with the Pakin community through my linguistic fieldwork (2010–present) on their unique version of the Mortlockese language. The experiential learning of what it means to be a “Micronesian”—more specifically, a *re Mwoshulók* ‘Mortlockese person’ and a *shóón Pakin* ‘person from Pakin’—has allowed me to gain (and continue to gain) an understanding and appreciation of my “Filipino” and “Austronesian” identities.

My experiences are singular in that it is uncommon for a child of immigrants to want to engage in a journey of identity construction at a broader ancestral level. What are more commonly discussed are the struggles of new immigrant children or first generation children born in the diaspora with regard to managing multiple identities, especially as realized through language (cf. Hinton, 2009). This position paper is a small effort in the development of a self-reflective literature about

identity work at ancestral levels, in imagined times and spaces where proto-languages were spoken, remnants of which exist only as inherited words in daughter languages—remnants that nevertheless have the potential to facilitate social change and healing for the youth today.

## **Identity**

“Identity” as discussed in the sociolinguistics literature “is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 588). The identities I evoke of “Filipino,” “Micronesian,” and “Austronesian” are not permanent “badges” that one simply wears, handed down from older generations; identities in relation to language and culture are ever-changing, co-constructed through interaction with other people and through various modes of communication, most especially through language. In taking a social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) perspective, I emphasize the bottom-up “brought-about” (Giddens, 1976) aspects of identity formation to frame the formative discussions youth can have about what broad-level identities mean to them, but not to the exclusion of the top-down “brought-along” discourses that in some senses “already” define for the youth what such identities mean to others (e.g., positive and negative stereotypes about diasporic ethnic groups).

From the perspective of a child, the various components of the aforementioned “Filipino” and “Micronesian” identities are accreted through lived experiences; such components are encountered through processes of intergenerational transmission (Fishman, 1991) and socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2009) in home domains—components such as family, peer groups, language, and cultural practices. For example, the most important realizations of Filipino identity for me personally are my connections to my immediate and extended family and the ability to speak and understand Tagalog—which for me, as a heritage learner, is a never-ending journey (Odango, in press-b). Later in life, in domains such as formal education and the workplace, these children—who are becoming young adults—learn about historical processes that led to the formation

of the politically bounded areas of the Philippines (cf. Constantino, 1975; *inter alia*) and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (cf. Hezel 1983, 1995; *inter alia*), from which modern uses of identity labels like “Filipino”<sup>4</sup> and “Micronesian”<sup>5</sup> emerge. It was not until my graduate school coursework at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) that I was introduced to discourses of decolonization and post-modernism that challenge the foundations of such identity labels; my conceptualizations of what it means to be a “Filipino” or a “Micronesian” continue to be renegotiated and shaped by my experiences to this day.

Such identities of “Filipino” and “Micronesian” are already broad, subsuming other ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities that may not often be represented in wider discourses. My mother is an L1 (first language) speaker of Ilokano, and my father an L1 speaker of Cebuano, two languages that are related to yet distinct from Tagalog—and all three are mutually unintelligible. Tagalog, then, is the *lingua franca* they use among themselves and with the extended family. In my youth, in talking about my ethnic identity to non-Filipinos in an American school system, I would resort to “Filipino” as the label of convenience, the primary reason being that where I grew up in southeast Virginia, most Americans have never heard of “Ilokano” or “Cebuano.” Using a broad-level term like “Filipino” avoids the lengthy explanations that would need to accompany terms that denote specific ethnic groups within multilingual/multicultural Philippines.

I have witnessed similar examples with Micronesian colleagues. A co-worker of mine on Pakin is originally from Feshaiulape Atoll, an outer island of Yap State.

---

<sup>4</sup> The term “Filipino” is exonymic in origin, derived from *las Islas Filipinas* ‘the Philippine Islands’, the name chosen by the Spanish explorer Ruy López de Villalobos, naming the islands after King Philip II of Spain. During Spanish colonial rule, “Filipino” originally denoted a person of pure Spanish ancestry who was born in the Philippines. Eventually the term came to be applied to all people born in the Philippines (in modern contexts). Speakers of Philippine languages—most of which lack the /f/ phoneme—tend to refer to themselves as *pinoy* ‘male Filipino’ or *pinay* ‘female Filipino’, among other local labels.

<sup>5</sup> The term “Micronesian” as a label applied to a group of people requires clarification. There are at least three parameters to consider: geographic, political, and linguistic. Geographic Micronesia consists of the Gilberts, the Marshalls, the Carolines, and the Marianas. Political Micronesia denotes the islands of the FSM (viz. the islands of Kosrae State, Pohnpei State, Chuuk State, and Yap State)—that is, “Micronesia” is a shorthand for “Federated States of Micronesia.” A “Micronesian language” from the perspective of linguistic classification (i.e., as determined by the comparative method) is any of the indigenous languages spoken in geographic Micronesia to the exclusion of Palauan, Chamorro, and Yapese; technically speaking, these languages (e.g., Kosraean, Kiribati, Marshallese, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, etc.) belong to the “Nuclear Micronesian language family,” whereby “nuclear” has the denotation of ‘pertaining to a nucleus’ (e.g., a nuclear family). To call someone a “Micronesian,” then, requires careful consideration of the relevant parameters in any given context (i.e., a person from geographic Micronesia, a citizen of the FSM, or a speaker of a (Nuclear) Micronesian language).



He is an LI speaker of Woleaian, a minority language in comparison to the official state language of Yapese; both languages are mutually unintelligible. I have observed him tell other Pohnpeians that he speaks “Yapese” rather than “Woleaian,” since I infer that the former is a much more commonly encountered term that any FSM citizen would recognize, especially those who reside outside of Yap State. Both examples illustrate that processes of erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2009) occur not only at levels where global decisions and policies are made (e.g., mapping projects and history textbook production), but also at local levels of everyday discourse.

To return to the child perspective, most young people have conceptualizations of what “Filipino” and “Micronesian” mean to them as created through everyday experiences in home, school, and other domains (e.g., church, youth groups, work, etc.). And just as these two broad-level labels subsume other identities (e.g., Cebuano, Woleaian, etc.), they in turn are subsumed by even broader-level “pan-ethnic” (Gans, 1979; *inter alia*) labels of “(Southeast) Asian,” “Native Hawaiian,” and “Pacific Islander” in various combinations (Sandhu, 1997; *inter alia*), all of which are ubiquitous to the degree that a young child growing up in America often encounters them (e.g., in self-identification sections on standardized tests). “Pan-ethnicity” is therefore an analytic lens applicable to any number of identity labels “around which [one can] transcend national boundaries and form community based on cultural background and similarity of experiences” (McFarlane, 2010, p. 101). A pan-ethnic category “subsumes but does not negate ethno-national identity labels” (McGavin, 2014, p. 127). And just like any ethnic group label, pan-ethnicity is defined not only by internal content (e.g., shared cultures, languages, (colonial) histories, etc.), but also by boundaries, however permeable and flexible (Barth, 1998).

Whereas pan-ethnic identities such as “Asian” and “Pacific Islander” are commonly encountered in and out of school, a young person most likely first encounters the label of “Austronesian” in a narrow academic context. The earliest I can remember was in my undergraduate courses on historical linguistics, the branch of linguistics in which the comparative method is used. In that context, however, the discussion about the Austronesian language family was just that of

an example, one of many other examples of language families around the world, including the more commonly known Indo-European language family (to which languages like English, French, Gaelic, Greek, Persian, Armenian, Russian, and Albanian belong). No one asked questions such as, “What does it *mean* to be an Austronesian today?” For me as a young undergraduate, the term “Austronesian” was fixed in its academic context as having classificatory value for linguists, but not as having identity value to an Austronesian person. One of the goals of this position paper, then, is to explore the potential value that Austronesian identity can have for youth as a means of developing alternatives to discourses of racism in school settings.

### Historical Linguistics

In order to facilitate an understanding of “Austronesian” as it is defined in linguistics, I turn to a somewhat technical discussion of historical linguistics, one that I frame in what I hope is an accessible manner such that this particular discussion can be mobilized into other pedagogical contexts with young students. One of the fundamental assumptions in historical linguistics is that languages<sup>6</sup> are always changing.<sup>7</sup> Historical linguists undertake a diachronic analysis of a language or languages, which then facilitates an understanding of (1) the types of changes that occur at various levels of linguistic analysis in human language (i.e., to understand what is and is not possible), (2) the inter-relationships of various languages to each other, and (3) the contributions that languages make to prehistory (Campbell, 2013, pp. 1–5). It is through the second understanding that linguists ascertain which languages belong to which language family. Historical linguists rely on kinship metaphors when talking about the language family: at any moment in time, a set of languages that are currently spoken may be said to have

---

<sup>6</sup> I use the term “language” as a convention that broadly covers all types of speech systems used by communities around the world—languages (both spoken and signed, and including creoles), pidgins, dialects, koinés, communalects, geolects, sociolects, and so forth. The term “speech system” is a neutral term that denotes a conventionalized semiotic system used for communication, an attempt to avoid the often political nature of distinguishing a “language” from a “dialect.”

<sup>7</sup> Consider, for example, the fact that the way the English language as is spoken in America today is significantly different from the English language of Chaucer’s time, and both are distinct from Old English at the time *Beowulf* was composed. The differences are evident at various levels of linguistic analysis, most especially in pronunciation (phonology) and vocabulary (lexicon). So, too, do other languages change, including those for which there is little written documentation available to ascertain the changes over time.

been derived from a “parent” (or “mother”) language that was spoken in the past but is no longer spoken now, such that traits of the parent language are present in the “daughter” languages (i.e., each daughter language is a “sister” to one another).

As each daughter language becomes heterogeneous over time—subtle differences in speaking lead to larger dialectal/sociolectal variation, often caused by migration and the persistence of social and geographic boundaries—the different versions (i.e., dialects) of the daughter language become languages in their own right; the daughter language is in effect a parent language. The development of daughter languages from a parent language thus continues, even to this day. The ultimate ancestor of a set of daughter/granddaughter/great-granddaughter/etc. languages is called the “proto-language” (literally ‘first language’). The development of a dialect into a distinct language is often on the scale of scores of generations (i.e., several hundred years), and any given proto-language can turn out to be a daughter/granddaughter/great-granddaughter/etc. of an even older proto-language.<sup>8</sup>

The comparative method takes a bottom-up approach: drawing upon data from of currently spoken languages, historical linguists systematically determine if a proto-language can be reconstructed from such data (i.e., no knowledge or assumption that the proto-language indeed existed). Historical linguists admittedly have an “easier” time reconstructing, for example, Proto-Romance (i.e., Vulgar Latin) and the Romance language family genealogy because of the extensive written records for Classical Latin, which serve as a sort of landmark to strive toward in reconstructing the Romance genealogy. However, when working with languages for which little or no written record is available, historical linguists must rely on the bottom-up approach without the benefit of landmarks. The endeavor of drawing a family tree and giving it a label is a complex process, the basics of which I discuss here.

---

<sup>8</sup> The most commonly cited examples in introductory textbooks include the Romance language family (cf. Campbell, 2013, pp. 108–110). The ancestor to all Romance languages is Vulgar Latin, which was the nonstandard version of Latin spoken by various non-elite classes (as opposed to Classical Latin). The technical linguistic terminology for Vulgar Latin is “Proto-Romance.” Over time, Proto-Romance split into at least four versions (i.e., dialects that become languages in their own right): Ibero-Romance, Gallo-Romance, Italo-Dalmatian, and Balkan Romance. These four distinct languages eventually developed their own unique splits that led to the development of various languages spoken today, such as Spanish, French, Italian, and Romanian, respectively.

## The Comparative Method

The primary goal of the comparative method is to “to recover as much as possible of the ancestor language (the proto-language)...and to determine what changes have taken place in the various languages that developed from the proto-language” (Campbell, 2013, pp. 107), a process known as “reconstruction.” Historical linguists often begin “with phonology, with an attempt to reconstruct the sound system; this leads in turn to reconstruction of the vocabulary and grammar of the proto-language” (p. 107). As the name implies, the comparative method is a process of comparing the sounds of different languages at the word level, so as to ascertain the phonology of the proto-language. Campbell (2013, pp. 111–128) provides a seven step process for applying the comparative method; I discuss the general process rather than go through each discrete step.

For the purposes of clear illustration of this methodology, I draw upon data from languages that are already identified as members of the Austronesian language family (cf. Blust, 2013):<sup>9</sup> Amis (Taiwan), Tagalog (Philippines), Malagasy (Madagascar), Uma (Indonesia), Mussau (Papua New Guinea), Chamorro (Guam), Mortlockese (FSM), Nggela (Solomon Islands), Fijian (Fiji), and Māori (Aotearoa).<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge the selection bias in choosing languages from the major geographic regions where Austronesian languages are indigenously spoken, as well as in choosing languages for which the data are relatively “well-behaved.”

The comparative method does not compare languages per se, but rather “cognates,” whereby a cognate is “a word (or morpheme) which is related to a word (morpheme) in sister languages by reason of these forms having been inherited by these sister languages from a common word (morpheme) of the proto-language from which the sister languages descend” (Campbell, 2013, p. 110).<sup>11</sup> The

---

<sup>9</sup> In practice, though, when historical linguists are choosing which languages to put through the comparative method without any pre-existing knowledge of a proto-language or linguistic genealogy, they will select languages “for which there is reason to suspect relatedness” (Campbell, 2013, p. 111), such as languages that are spoken in the same geographic region (e.g., on the same island) and among which there are relatively high levels of mutual intelligibility.

<sup>10</sup> The data used for this discussion of the comparative method are taken from the Austronesian Comparative Dictionary (ACD) (Blust & Trussel, ongoing) and Blust 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Strictly speaking, in the scenario in which the historical linguist is not yet sure whether the languages being compared are indeed related to each other, then it is best to consider the words being compared as “purported cognates.”



most commonly chosen words for cognate sets are the basic vocabulary of the language (e.g., body parts, kinship terms, and low numbers in basic counting systems), since such words tend to resist change (or being replaced by a foreign term) due to their high frequency in everyday speech.

The first step is to assemble a cognate set in which all the words have the same denotation. Table 1 provides a cognate set for the basic word meaning ‘eight’ in the languages I have chosen for this discussion:<sup>12</sup>

Table 1. Cognate set for ‘eight’ in Austronesian languages

Amis	Tagalog	Malagasy	Uma	Mussau	Chamorro	Mortlockese	Nggela	Fijian	Māori
falo	walo	valo	walu	ualu	gwalu	walu-w	walu	walu	waru

Even to a non-linguist, one can imagine the implications that emerge from this side-by-side comparison of the same word across geographically and culturally disparate languages, perhaps best phrased as a question: “How is it possible that so many languages can have such a similar word for ‘eight’, considering how far apart they are from each other?” There is certainly the possibility of chance, but the likelihood of ten distinct languages independently developing a similarly shaped word for ‘eight’ is rather slim. Setting aside such a scenario as a “last resort” option, one might then begin to appreciate the contributions that historical linguistics makes to hypotheses of shared cultural origins, human migration, and long-distance voyaging (matters that I address in later sections).

The next step is to establish “sound correspondences,” which are sets of cognate sounds (i.e., at the level of the phoneme) that the historical linguist ascertains from the linear parsing of sounds as given in a particular cognate. For example, the Amis word *falo* ‘eight’ is a sequence of four phonemes: /f/, /a/, /l/, and /o/. Starting with the first phoneme, one then assembles the sound

<sup>12</sup> The common practice in the comparative method is to give the phonemic form of each cognate, most often in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The forms in the ACD are generally given in IPA, although some are given according to the particular orthographic conventions of the language. When discussing phonemic forms in the main text, I follow linguistic convention in placing the forms in forward slashes. Note that Māori <r> is actually /t/. Also note that the hyphen in the Mortlockese form indicates that *walu-w* ‘eight’ consists of two morphemes: *walu-* as the numerical base meaning ‘eight’, and the suffix *-w*, which serves as a numeral classifier for general counting.

correspondence for that phoneme across the set of cognates, which I provide in table 2:<sup>13</sup>

Table 2. Sound correspondence for the first phoneme

Amis	Tagalog	Malagasy	Uma	Mussau	Chamorro	Mortlockese	Nggela	Fijian	Māori
f-	w-	v-	w-	u-	gw-	w-	w-	w-	w-

By creating sound correspondences for each position in the sequence of sounds, one creates a “fine-toothed comb” that systematically keeps track of what changes are happening in the transformation of the dialects of the hypothesized proto-language to its daughter languages. The sound correspondences for the remaining sounds are relatively transparent: all of the cognates show /a/ as the next vowel, all show /l/ as the next consonant (except for Māori, which has /r/), and there is a split with the last vowel between /o/ and /u/, with the majority of the cognates showing the latter.<sup>14</sup>

The next step is to reconstruct the proto-sound for each sound correspondence, essentially reconstructing Proto-Austronesian. At this stage, the historical linguist draws upon a variety of analyses based on known kinds of sound change that already occur in the world’s languages. For example, it is common for the phoneme /p/ to undergo a process of lenition over time to /f/, due in part to the fact that /f/ is an “easier” sound to pronounce than /p/ (in the sense of restricting the flow of air through the mouth). If the parent language has a /p/ phoneme, then it is possible that at least one of its daughter languages will have /f/ instead of /p/,<sup>15</sup> but not necessarily so.

In table 2, out of ten different cognates corresponding to ten different languages, there are five different realizations of the first phoneme: /f/, /v/, /u/, /gw/, and /w/, whereby the first four phonemes are represented only once (in

<sup>13</sup> The hyphen indicates that more material follows this phoneme.

<sup>14</sup> The actual phonetic realization and/or articulation of all of the phonemes in the cognate forms will differ from language to language.

<sup>15</sup> A classic example in Indo-European languages is the word for ‘father’: in English, the word clearly begins with /f/, but French *père*, Sanskrit *pitár*, and Greek *patér*—all of which mean ‘father’—show that other related languages in the family have /p/ instead of /f/. The most likely scenario based on what historical linguists know about phonology and sound change—including sound change as it currently happens in everyday speech—is that Proto-Indo-European had a /p/ phoneme at the beginning of the word meaning ‘father’.

Amis, Malagasy, Mussau, and Chamorro, respectively), and the last phoneme is represented by all the others.<sup>16</sup> One might then ask, “Which of the five possible sounds is most likely to have been present in the proto-language version of the word for ‘eight’?” Perhaps most readers will be instinctually drawn to /w/, since it is represented by six out of the ten cognates. Historical linguists formalize that intuition as the “majority wins” principle: “all else being equal, we let the majority win—that is, unless there is evidence to the contrary, we tend to pick for our reconstructed proto-sound the particular sound in the correspondence set which shows up in the greatest number of daughter languages” (Campbell, 2013, p. 114). Even though other criteria such as directionality of sound change (p. 113) and economy (p. 116) often bear heavier weight in evaluating potential candidates for a proto-sound, the “majority wins” principle is nevertheless a good starting point for positing a potential proto-sound. In historical linguistics convention, any proto-sound or proto-word is represented by an initial asterisk; thus, the proto-sound as inferred from the first sound correspondence set is \*w.<sup>17</sup>

One then repeats this process for the subsequent sound correspondence sets, and from there one reconstructs the entire proto-word; the reconstructed form for ‘eight’ in Proto-Austronesian is therefore \*walu. Despite the lack of written records to “prove” that \*walu was indeed the word for ‘eight’ as spoken by the ancestors of the Austronesians, historical linguists are certain of this reconstruction to the degree that their work on other cognate sets and sound correspondences (i.e., other words that contain the sounds /w/, /a/, /l/, and /o/) independently corroborates their findings. Like many other basic vocabulary words, the word for ‘eight’ is persistent in that even some of the youngest languages in the Austronesian language family (e.g., Polynesian languages) have a form identical or similar to \*walu.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> For the purposes of this brief illustration, one must set aside the fact that these ten languages are not “direct sisters” to each other since they developed at different time depths—that is, some of the languages are “older” than others because they are assumed to have been spoken and developed by older populations (i.e., time depths of human settlement).

<sup>17</sup> The historical linguist must also account for the changes that changed Proto-Austronesian \*w into /f/ in Amis, /v/ in Malagasy, /u/ in Mussau, and /gw/ in Chamorro. One does so by turning to principles of sound change (both diachronic and synchronic) that are found in the world’s languages, such as the fortition of \*w into /v/ and /gw/, the devoicing of \*v into /f/, and the syllabification of \*w into /u/.

<sup>18</sup> Even just a cursory look at comparative word lists reveals that hundreds of Austronesian languages have forms for ‘eight’ that are either identical to or are extremely similar to \*walu. See the ACD page for \*walu at

Campbell (2013, pp. 127–128) asserts that “[t]he reconstruction of a sound, a word or large portions of a proto-language is, in effect, a hypothesis (or better said, a set of interconnected hypotheses) concerning what those aspects of the proto-language must have been like.” And similar to any other hypothesis, “[a]spects of the hypothesized reconstruction can be tested and proven wrong, or can be modified, based on new insights” (p. 128), such as the availability of “better” data (i.e., phonemically accurate based on quantitative analysis of recordings) or the discovery of previously undocumented dialects of a language. The reconstruction of proto-sounds/-words via the comparative method is a never-ending process, since new data force historical linguists to revisit past hypotheses.

### **Linguistic Classification and Family Trees**

Reconstructing the proto-language via the comparative method is just the first step in creating a linguistic family tree. Given the scope of this position paper, I will not explain the rest of the process in commensurate detail as I have done for the comparative method, but I touch on a few main principles; I refer the reader to Campbell 2013 for a more in-depth introduction to the processes of linguistic classification and drawing family trees.<sup>19</sup>

A linguistic family tree is essentially an upside down tree: the proto-language is the root node from which the daughter languages branch out.<sup>20</sup> Historical linguists determine how the branches are drawn from the proto-language to the daughter languages. Because some daughter languages will group together apart from other daughter languages, historical linguists engage in a process of internal classification called “subgrouping.” The only widely accepted criterion for subgrouping is the “shared innovation,” which is “a linguistic change which shows a departure (innovation) from some trait of the proto-language and is shared by a subset of the daughter language” (p. 175). When something unique happens at the level of a proto-language (i.e., a “daughter proto-language” within the larger

---

[http://www.trussel2.com/ACD/acd-s\\_w.htm#5943](http://www.trussel2.com/ACD/acd-s_w.htm#5943) (accessed December 5, 2014), as well as the Austronesian Basic Vocabulary Database page for ‘eight’ at <http://language.psy.auckland.ac.nz/austronesian/word.php?v=204> (accessed December 5, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> See also Crowley 1987, in which the author uses Austronesian language examples widely throughout the text, which initially developed from class materials for his students at the University of Papua New Guinea.

<sup>20</sup> Conversely, the tree can be seen as right-side-up, but with an emphasis on roots spreading out below ground, rather than branches above.

language family), then daughter languages that “inherit” that unique change will be grouped together.<sup>21</sup>

Through repeated processes of subgrouping, revisions of hypotheses, and inclusion of new data, historical linguists are able to create various family trees. A fractal metaphor thus emerges: from a bird’s-eye-view, the entire family tree starts from the ultimate proto-language ancestor and branches downward, but by “zooming in” on each subgroup within the family tree, one sees that other proto-languages (that are themselves daughter languages) develop into more daughter languages. This creation of the family tree at-large as well as multiple “subtrees” allows linguists to classify languages. Group labels such as “Oceanic,” “Micronesian,” and “Chuukic” are not merely geographic or ad hoc in nature, but rather labels intrinsically connected to the names of the ancestral proto-languages (i.e., Proto-Oceanic, Proto-Micronesian, and Proto-Chuukic).<sup>22</sup>

### The “Southern Islands”

The assertion that an Austronesian language family exists is the product of hundreds of years of historical linguistics scholarship. Theories about the dispersal of Austronesian languages are inextricably tied to the movement of Austronesian peoples, often framed in the “out of Taiwan” model of movement: speakers of Proto-Austronesian who lived in Taiwan moved into the Philippines, followed by movement into the rest of Southeast Asia (including further movement from Malaysia into Madagascar), and into Oceania; this dispersal happened in stages over the course of several millennia, facilitated by in no small part by cultural feats

---

<sup>21</sup> An example of a unique change within the Austronesian language family is in the context of the Oceanic languages, which are essentially all of the non-Papuan indigenous languages of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. “Papuan” languages are an array of several distinct language families, comprised of the indigenous languages of places such as the island of New Guinea (viz. Papua New Guinea and West Papua), East Timor, and the Solomon Islands. There is no one single “Papuan language family.” These languages are often identified as being the non-Austronesian and non-Australian indigenous languages of the region, as ascertained by the comparative method and subgrouping. Among the languages selected for this discussion of the comparative method, five of them—Mussau, Mortlockese, Nggela, Fijian, and Māori—are Oceanic languages, meaning that they are descendants of an ancestral language called Proto-Oceanic, which in turn is a descendant of Proto-Austronesian. Even though Proto-Austronesian had \*p and \*b, Proto-Oceanic kept \*p as /p/ and turned \*b also into /p/. As a result, the daughters of Proto-Oceanic inherited only \*p and not \*b from Proto-Austronesian; this is one of the diagnostic shared innovations that allow historical linguists to confidently posit a subgroup called “Oceanic languages” within the Austronesian language family (Lynch et al., 2011, p. 64).

<sup>22</sup> See Campbell (2013, p. 179) for an image of the Austronesian family tree.



of mass agricultural development and long-distance open-ocean voyaging (cf. Bellwood, 1991; *inter alia*).

The origin of the term “Austronesian” traces back to Schmidt (1899, p. 245) who coined the German term *Austronesisch*, derived from *Austro-* ‘south’ and *nesia* ‘island group’ (Lynch et al., 2011, p. 2). Prior to Schmidt 1899, most research on Austronesian languages focused on the languages of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia as well as those of Polynesia, which led to the development of the term “Malayo-Polynesian.”<sup>23</sup> Schmidt coined the term “Austronesian” because “he felt that ‘Malayo-Polynesian’ excluded by implication the Austronesian languages of Melanesia and Micronesia” (Lynch et al., 2011, p. 2). The clarification to make here is that almost all the islands of geographic Micronesia are *above* the equator, as are many islands where Austronesian languages are indigenously spoken (e.g., Taiwan, the Philippines, parts of Malaysia and Indonesia, and Hawai‘i);<sup>24</sup> that is, the Austronesian languages—the languages of the “southern islands”—are spoken by peoples of “northern islands,” as well. Regardless of this inaccuracy in naming conventions, the term “Austronesian” has been reinforced through the long and rich history of historical linguistics scholarship on this language family (see Blust, 2013, pp. 512–599 for a comprehensive literature review).<sup>25</sup>

It is through the use of the term “Austronesian” by linguists that the label finds utility in other academic fields for a variety of topics not directly related to historical linguistics, the comparative method, subgrouping, linguistic classification, or the drawing of family trees. Some examples include archaeology (Bellwood, 1997, 2009), cultural and social anthropology (Fox, 2006), ethnozoology (Blust, 2002; Groves, 2006), diplomacy in the context of Taiwan-Pacific Islands relations (Blundell, 2011), mental health (Guerrero et al., 2013), and language reclamation

---

<sup>23</sup> The term “Malayo-Polynesian” was first coined by Bopp (1841) as *Maleisch-Polynesisch*. As this name implies, researchers at that time were aware of the purported relationship between the languages of Southeast Asia (plus Madagascar) and those of Polynesia—first recognized as a “common language” by Reland (1708)—but little was known by scholars at that time about the languages of Melanesia and Micronesia. Today, the term “Malayo-Polynesian” is restricted to the name of subgroups within the Austronesian language family.

<sup>24</sup> There are also indigenous Austronesian languages spoken in peninsular Southeast Asian countries above the equator, such as Malay (the southern third of the Malay peninsula) and Cham (Vietnam and Cambodia).

<sup>25</sup> The scholarship indeed continues to this day, with international gatherings such as meetings of the International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics, the Austronesian Formal Linguistics Association, and working sessions in the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Annual Meeting, as well as journals such as *Oceanic Linguistics*, all of which provide venues for sharing research about any Austronesian language no matter where spoken in the world (i.e., not limited to specific regions, such as the Pacific or Oceania).

by the youth in the face of language shift (Odango, in press-a). And even outside of academia, “Austronesian” has value as a concept around which Austronesian peoples can rally, realized in celebrations such as the Austronesian Cultural Arts Festival and documentaries such as Dan Salmon’s *Made in Taiwan* (2006) and Anita Wen-Shin Chang’s *Tongues of Heaven* (2013). Both “Austronesian” as a label for languages/peoples and “Austronesia” as a pseudo-geographic term provide foundations on which cross-linguistic/cultural comparisons can be made in the interest of not only theoretical and applied research, but also for pan-ethnic celebration and identity construction.

### Being an Austronesian

There is very little ethnographic research available about the construction of specifically a pan-ethnic Austronesian identity in modern contexts by Austronesians (e.g., discourse-based ethnographic observations about everyday discourse about that label),<sup>26</sup> partially because “[p]anethnic labels may seem intuitive to social scientists who use them, but they are often not accepted by ethnic group members” (Kao & Joyner, 2006, p. 975). Clearly much more is available for groups that could be considered to be “subsumed” in the Austronesian category (i.e., as defined by the linguistic classification of what is an Austronesian language), ranging from local/community level identities to nation-based labels to broader transnational/pan-ethnic labels. Nevertheless, any discussion of Austronesian pan-ethnicity needs to be sensitive to core matters in studies on ethnicity, such as race, gender, power, place, colonialism, epistemology, performance, identity as realized through language and culture, and so forth (e.g., Tilley, 2006; *inter alia*).

Given the limited scope of this position paper, I focus my current discussion of pan-ethnic Austronesian identity through the lens of being “Nesian,” as discussed by McGavin (2014). The term “Nesian” is “predicated on the [pan-ethnic]

---

<sup>26</sup> See Rudolph 2004 for the conception of “Austronesian” as an ethnic group in Taiwan (although one that focuses primarily on the indigenous Austronesians of Taiwan, as opposed to an emphasis on pan-Austronesian ethnicity), as well as Blundell 2011 for realizations of Taiwan’s connections with Pacific Island nations through Austronesian ancestry. Neither publication takes a truly pan-Austronesian scope; consider, for example, that both articles only mention Madagascar as a place in “defining” the geographic scope of where Austronesian languages are spoken, but Madagascar and Malagasy are not discussed as part of the conceptualizations of “Austronesian” in Taiwan. I raise this point as an observation, not as a criticism, since the focus of both papers is on Taiwan and the modern contexts of the aboriginal Formosan peoples.

qualities of the label ‘Islander’...[and] is emerging in online forums and social networking sites to denote a person of Islander descent” (pp. 126–127). It is derived from the regional labels of “Micronesia,” “Melanesia,” and “Polynesia” and the corresponding terms for people from those regions (i.e., “Micronesian,” etc.) (p. 148). These divisions of Oceania have been widely-contested (cf. D’Arcy, 2003; Jolly, 2007; *inter alia*), partly due to their origins—and continued privileged use in academia—as Western classificatory tools for non-Western peoples and places (cf. Clark, 2003; Hau‘ofa, 1993; Smith, 2004).

The term “Austronesian” is interesting in this context in that it is not quite as high-profile as “Micronesian,” “Melanesian,” and “Polynesian,” at least not in a geographic sense: there are relatively fewer Austronesian-centric maps available—that is, maps that recognize the full geographic scope of where Austronesian languages are indigenously spoken, *including* Malagasy in Madagascar in the Indian Ocean—than the many maps of the Pacific that indicate the three-way “-nesian” division of Oceania. “Austronesian” has limited visibility as a term used outside of narrow social science fields such as linguistics and anthropology, in comparison to the pervasive use of the three-way “-nesian” divisions within and outside of academia. It is perhaps partly due to that reason that I rarely encounter anyone who self-identifies an “Austronesian,” in addition to (or as opposed to) being a Micronesian, Melanesian, or Polynesian (or for that matter, a Filipino, Indonesian, etc.).

Nevertheless, the term “Austronesian” does not—*should not*—escape critical reflection, most especially in contexts of power, knowledge, and indigenous origins. The use of “Austronesian” in academia is inextricably linked to the linguistic reconstruction of Proto-Austronesian and the classification languages in the Austronesian language family. This in turn is just one part of larger hypotheses developed in various fields of anthropology (most especially archaeology) about the origins of the people who spoke Proto-Austronesian: their homeland in Taiwan, the movement throughout insular Southeast Asia, the development of Lapita culture, the mastery of long-distance voyaging, the movement throughout Oceania, and so forth (cf. Bellwood, 1991). The confluence of various kinds of

linguistic, archaeological, genetic, and cultural evidence thus points to a clear “answer” to the questions of whence Austronesian peoples and their languages.

Consider, then, that most introductory textbooks at the high school and undergraduate levels that focus on Pacific Islands history often privilege the Austronesian migration hypothesis as a means of introducing students to the (pre-)history of the region. Discussions of indigenous accounts of origins of people, language, and islands are “secondary” to the Western scientific account in such publications.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, I have rarely encountered either in a textbook or in the experiences of an individual teacher an open discussion in which students consider the implications that the Austronesian migration hypothesis (or the reconstruction of Proto-Austronesian) has on their constructions of identity, indigenous origins, and place (i.e., the potential “conflict” between indigenous accounts of origins and the scientific accounts). The “Austronesian” label, then, must always be understood in context and not be taken for granted as a term that emerged in a vacuum—or even as an uncontested “truth” of Western science.

McGavin (2014, pp. 142–143) finds that the emergent “Nesian” identity is a conceptualization of “unity in diversity” and “justifies and constructs a [pan-ethnic] Islander identity especially valid within diasporic settings.” In places like Hawai‘i where being an Islander is multifaceted and constantly challenged—late modern settings of transnational movement and gathering, with shared struggles of maintaining language and culture while developing new identities that are no longer inextricably tied to “original” linguistic/cultural practices—the pan-ethnic label of “Nesian” is added to the repertoire of other labels (e.g., “Pasifika,” “Moana,” “Pacific Islander,” etc.) that are always being redefined by the very people who “wear” the labels via everyday interaction.<sup>28</sup> I argue that “Austronesian” has value as another label to include in the repertoire, one that has a much broader scope than other labels, for it encompasses race, ethnicity, phenotype, language, culture, geopolitical boundaries—even *time*, since

---

<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that all school textbooks do not privilege such indigenous histories. In Pohnpei State, for example, in the early grade levels in elementary school textbooks, students learn about the indigenous origins of Pohnpei, starting with the voyage of Sapikini, the encounter with the octopus Lidakihka, and the building of the stone altar that became Pohnpei Island.

<sup>28</sup> Koh & Joyner (2006, p. 975) observe that “studies suggest that some Hispanics and Asians may embrace panethnic labels *because* mainstream society lumps them together and discriminates against them as a group (Rosenfeld, 2001)” (emphasis in original).

“Austronesian” is an identity that has been thousands of years in the making, ever since at least 4000 B.C. (Bellwood, 1991, p. 91).

Some authors take the prescriptive point of view that “Austronesian” should be restricted to only denoting the language family. Consider, for example, Blundell’s (2011, p. 76, footnote 3) comment with regard to international gatherings such as Taipei’s Declaration of Austronesian Leaders (2002), the Forum of Austronesian Cooperation and Exchange (2003), and the Austronesian Forum (2007): “In my opinion, there is a problem with using the term ‘Austronesian’ when referring to ‘leaders’ and ‘cooperation’ as it refers to a language family, and should not be used otherwise.” While I agree that the original denotation of “Austronesian” refers to the language family, I disagree with Blundell’s prescriptive stance that the language family name cannot transcend that original meaning. Identity work happens at both global/international levels such as political meetings and at local levels such as everyday conversation at home, whereby terms that originated in one context take new meaning in others. Consider, for example, that a term like “Polynesia” was socio-geographic in origin (D’Arcy, 2003; Jolly, 2007),<sup>29</sup> and eventually its use spread to contexts of culture and language; indeed, there is a subgroup of the Austronesian language family called the “Polynesian language family” whose ancestor was Proto-Polynesian, and people can—and *do*—self-identify as being a “Polynesian person.”<sup>30</sup> Just as sounds change over time, so, too, do meanings of words (i.e., becoming wider or narrower in denotation). From a linguist’s point-of-view, I wholly disagree with prescriptive stances on how people can or cannot use vocabulary, most especially in contexts of identity work. “Austronesian” is multivalent, and such a label has positive potential in school contexts where linguistic ideological practices of erasure and differentiation by the youth (Irvine & Gal, 2009) often lead to overt racism.

---

<sup>29</sup> The original use of the term “Polynesia” by Charles de Brosse in 1756 denoted all the islands of the Pacific (Jolly, 2007, p. 535).

<sup>30</sup> Consider again Blundell’s (2011, p. 81) assertion that even though he is a writer (and I presume speaker) of English, he does not consider himself “an Indo-European person.” I ask, then, what in principle prevents a person who speaks an Austronesian language from self-identifying as an “Austronesian person,” if such a label has real value—intellectual, ethnic, emotional, spiritual, therapeutic value—in that person’s life?



## Pan-Ethnic Awareness in School Settings

To return to the matter of how young students are first introduced to “Austronesian,” consider a textbook such as *Pacific Nations and Territories* (Ridgell, 2006), which I first encountered as an elementary school textbook while teaching in Pakin Elementary School during my Peace Corps service. The first part of chapter 4 (pp. 24–28) focuses on migration from a pre-contact perspective, in contrast with “contemporary migration” later in the chapter; readers are posed with the question, “But when, why, how, and from where were these islands first settled?” (p. 24). The following discussion briefly mentions these kinds of evidence, in this order: legends and oral histories, racial studies (i.e., comparisons of phenotype), DNA mapping, comparisons of culture (e.g., Lapita pottery), and language studies (i.e., linguistics). The discussion then turns to the “out of Taiwan” dispersal theory—accompanied by the ubiquitous Pacific map containing arrows indicating the direction and order of movement from Taiwan (p. 25)<sup>31</sup>—and includes the first overt use of the term “Austronesian” referring to the people (not the language family), in contrast with “Australoids” who settled New Guinea (p. 26).

The inferences that readers of such introductory texts have to make—written specifically for teenage students, most especially (but not exclusively) for students from Pacific Islands—is that they are “related” to each other, albeit on the scale of several thousands of years. Such inferences are rarely spelled out overtly in textbooks. Furthermore, the scope of any particular textbook contextualizes the kinds of connections that could be made; in many cases, this results in different kinds of erasure (e.g., no mention of the Austronesian movement to Madagascar in Ridgell, 2006, pp. 25–26).

Different textbooks go to different lengths in providing introductory examples of the evidence upon which scientists rely for such hypotheses of movement and language classification. Consider, for example, Ridgell’s (2006, p. 90) discussion of the languages of geographic Micronesia: there is overt use of linguistic terminology such as “Oceanic subgroup of languages” and “Western Malayo-Polynesian subgroup,” and it is noted that languages such as Chamorro, Yapese, and Palauan “are more similar to some languages spoken in the Philippines

---

<sup>31</sup> Madagascar is conspicuously missing from this map.

and Indonesia.”<sup>32</sup> While it is understandable that an elementary/high school text may not provide direct discussion of what such technical linguistic terminology means, the terms are nevertheless opaque for the primary audience.

To facilitate such technical discussion, however, Ridgell provides a comparison of geographic Micronesian languages in table format, translating two English sentences into 20 different languages. Everyday readers from a Micronesian nation might be intrigued by the similarities they find between their L1 and other languages; for others outside of geographic Micronesia, it is simply a list of translations. To a linguist, though, this is essentially an attempt at creating side-by-side comparisons of related languages—not quite the beginning of the comparative method, but the idea is there. A clearer example is the “Polynesian Language Chart” (p. 185), whereby basic vocabulary such as ‘fish’ and phrases such as ‘How are you?’ are compared across five Polynesian languages. Both examples are covert introductions to the comparative method. Although not explicitly explained to the readers, the inferences are clear: Pacific Island languages are related to each other because one can compare words and find undeniable similarities in the shapes of such words, and the reasons for such similarities are not due to chance but rather shared Austronesian ancestry and diversification over time.

Other Pacific Islands textbooks—especially those written at the introductory college level—provide more technical discussion of the contribution historical linguistics makes to the Austronesian dispersal theory, as well as explicit cognate comparisons across languages in the wider Austronesian language family; example texts include *Ancient Chamorro Society* (Cunningham, 1992) and *The Pacific Islands: Environment & Society* (Rapaport, 2013). These cognate tables often contain “high profile” Austronesian languages that are frequently used across texts, such as Tagalog, Indonesian, Fijian, Hawaiian, as well as whatever other languages are most relevant for the intended readership of the text (e.g., the cognate table in Cunningham, 1992, p. 11 includes Chamorro).

---

<sup>32</sup> Yapese is classified as an Oceanic language (Ross, 1996), not as a Western Malayo-Polynesian language, as is implied by Ridgell (2006, p. 90).

What is striking, then, is that amidst the ubiquity of these cognate tables, dispersal maps, and introductory discussions, there is little by way of current ethnographic scholarship on the identity implications of “being Austronesian,” especially in diapsoric contexts. One particular domain in which researchers can investigate the negotiations of meaning about the “Austronesian” label is in school contexts, especially those in Hawai‘i where students (and teachers) of various Austronesian heritages—Filipinos (e.g., speakers of Ilokano, Tagalog, Cebuano, etc.), Chamorros, Palauans, Chuukese, Pohnpeians, Marshallese, Hawaiians, Tokelauans, and so forth—come together. My position, however, is not solely observational; I propose that overt discussions of Austronesian identity by the youth themselves can provide healing in contexts of overt racism against the new wave of immigrants from Micronesia.

### **Constructing Austronesian Identity in School**

Talmy 2010 provides a discourse-based critical ethnographic account of racializing and racist action directed at students of various Micronesian heritages by a group of “old-timer” ESL students who are primarily (but not exclusively) of East/Southeast Asian heritage in a high school in Hawai‘i. Racist action by members of the latter group allow them to position themselves as a heterogeneous in-group in contrast to the out-group of “fresh off the boat” (FOB) immigrants. Discursive realizations of “distinction” (Irvine & Gal, 2009) allow these students to define their in-group membership (Barth, 1969), a category Talmy (2010) labels as “Local ESL” (i.e., “English as a Second Language” learner), whereby “Local” denotes the racialized identity category specific to Hawai‘i (Labrador, 2009).

Rather than focus on explicit examples of how racism toward Micronesian students in Hawai‘i schools is discursively realized—examples not only from Talmy 2010 and other research, but perhaps also from the reader’s own lived experiences—I turn to suggestions of solutions. I propose that historical linguistics provides students with a systematic way of understanding how ancestral connections are realized, and that through this process of intellectual discovery, teachers can engage students in discussions about what such ancestral connections—as seen through the comparison of words and the reconstruction of

proto-languages—mean for their identities beyond labels that they already use on an everyday basis (e.g., “Pacific Islander,” “Filipino,” “Micronesian,” “immigrant,” etc.).

Given the focus of this position paper and this special issue, I emphasize the construction of Austronesian identity. An important caveat is that not all students in a Hawai‘i school may find value in such discussions about Austronesian identity because they themselves are not of Austronesian heritage—or perhaps they are, but they choose to not explore such an identity despite the “facts” laid out before them. Nevertheless, just as students who are not of *kanaka maoli* ‘Native Hawaiian’ descent can learn about Hawaiian history and identity (or are at least given the opportunity to do so), I argue that the Austronesian pan-ethnic label is one that *should* be co-constructed by *anyone* who is interested in it, regardless of linguistic/cultural/ethnic/racial/blood heritage.<sup>33</sup>

In this particular context of racism toward Micronesian students by non-Micronesian students in Hawai‘i schools, I draw upon the ever-present realizations of Austronesian identity in everyday life,<sup>34</sup> which I see as resources that can facilitate an understanding of what it means to be an Austronesian—and the implications of what it means to overtly express racism toward a fellow Austronesian. Although I myself have never experienced first-hand overtly racist actions by, for example, Filipinos toward Micronesians in Hawai‘i, I have heard

---

<sup>33</sup> I draw upon Bucholtz et al.’s (2014) discussions of “sociolinguistic justice,” which they delineate as having five goals: linguistic valorization, linguistic legitimation, linguistic inheritance, linguistic access, and linguistic expertise. The third goal of linguistic inheritance, in particular, is directly relevant to this discussion of explorations of Austronesian pan-ethnicity: “To learn and/or learn about the languages, dialects, and styles associated with one’s own background and to support others’ knowledge and learning of their respective heritage varieties, to the extent each individual chooses” (147).

<sup>34</sup> By this I mean the instances in which one encounters an Austronesian person, hears an Austronesian language, touches an Austronesian cultural artifact, eats a culturally important Austronesian crop such as taro, and so forth. Not-so-everyday examples—yet important nonetheless—include the successes of *Hōkūle‘a* as a symbol of pan-ethnic identity: Mau Piailug, a *panūwnap* ‘master navigator’ from Satawal in Micronesia, sharing ancestral Satawalese knowledge with people such as Nainoa Thompson, a *kanaka maoli*, in the effort to revitalize Hawaiian traditional navigation and long-distance sailing. The positive effects of such high-profile events include the growing desire of the youth to learn about these traditions, youth who are from both Austronesian and non-Austronesian backgrounds. And yet the voyages of *Hōkūle‘a* are just a few instances in the larger frame of ancestral Austronesian voyaging feats: from Taiwan to the Northern Philippines, from Borneo to Madagascar, from the Northern Philippines to the Mariana Islands, from the Solomon Islands into Micronesia, from eastern Polynesia to Hawai‘i, Rapa Nui, and Aotearoa, and so forth. While such individual accounts are admittedly told through the academic lenses of archaeology, linguistics, and other fields, they perhaps provide greater meaning when considered in the whole of Austronesian identity: a young Austronesian person who is learning to sail today realizes that she or he is but one member in an ancestral line of thousands of voyagers who tackled both the Pacific and the Indian Oceans.

enough anecdotes from colleagues to understand that that the former group distances themselves from the latter. It does not escape me that the kinds of racism that this “older wave” of Filipino immigrants experienced when they first arrived in Hawai‘i (cf. Jung, 2002) are similar to the kinds of racism that this “newer wave” of Micronesian immigrants is experiencing right now. It is admittedly painful to realize that these groups do not mobilize their shared ancestry in ways that address real-world problems, such as racism in school.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the practical implementation of these ideas in Hawai‘i schools, I do offer some ideas based on my experiences teaching introductory level courses in Linguistics at UHM, in which many of my students each semester are of Austronesian ancestry.<sup>35</sup> Instructors can take these ubiquitous cognate charts (e.g., Cunningham, 1992; Rapaport, 2013; Ridgell, 2006; *inter alia*) and contextualize them for students in two ways: (1) explain the technical process of how such tables are created and for what purpose via historical linguistics and the comparative method, as I have done earlier in this paper; and (2) engage students in self-reflection on what it means to have shared ancestry that transcends the labels that students are already aware of, such as “Pacific Islander” or “Southeast Asia.”

The value of (1) is that students engage in academic work that involves both inductive and deductive reasoning, something that is actually quite fun when framed as investigations. Once students gain a basic handle of the process through already prepared cognate sets (e.g., table 1), teachers can assign students various language families/subgroups and have them find the primary data to do their own reconstructions via the comparative method. Students can consult published dictionaries or ask L1 speakers; indeed, if through the latter the students draw upon the linguistic resources of their classmates who are recent immigrants from Micronesia and who are L1 speakers of Austronesian languages, then such students become *valued* as sources of important linguistic data that contribute to a school assignment (cf. Bucholtz et al., 2014).

---

<sup>35</sup> Akiemi Glenn (pers. comm., 2013) has shared similar insights with me regarding classes she teaches in Hawai‘i in which many of the students are of Tokelauan, Filipino, and Micronesian heritages.



The importance of (2) is that students have a space to process what such abstract theories mean to them personally. Through journaling, small group discussions, group presentations, and other activities that promote creative expression, students can process for themselves what value the “Austronesian” label can potentially have in their lives, and what changes that might have for their actions toward fellow classmates, neighbors, and co-workers—people with whom they had no idea an ancestral connection existed. This introspection should be guided by the instructors who can explore with the students important matters such as what value “ancestry” has in modern contexts, what experiences are like for people of Austronesian heritage who no longer speak their ancestral/heritage language or practice “traditional” customs, what the benefits and shortcomings are of using the “Austronesian” label, and so forth. Furthermore, instructors need to ascertain the appropriate circumstances within a course or unit for engaging in such discussions. It is ideal if such introspection is made applicable to as broad an audience as possible (i.e., students who are not of Austronesian heritage). For example, instructors can assign to students projects in which they explore their own linguistic ancestry—Austronesian or otherwise—however far back and to whatever “proto-level.” The classroom discussions, then, become spaces for cross-linguistic/cultural sharing and reflection on the meaning of ancestry and identity.

Processes of erasure remove diversity from sight, and processes of differentiation reinforce oppositions of “us” versus “them” (Irvine & Gal, 2009); both processes are often—but by no means always—realized as racism. Consider again, then, McGavin’s (2014, p. 142) discussion of “Nesian” as “unity in diversity,” a concept that addresses both the erasure of diversity and the differentiation of ethnic/racial boundaries. The “Austronesian” identity, like “Nesian,” has potential as a pan-ethnic identity that can promote unity in diversity: imagine, millions of speakers of over 1,200 daughter languages, all unified by the shared ancestor of Proto-Austronesian. Imagine, then, what kinds of healing could be fostered when a student who had previously looked at her or his Micronesian classmates with derision and ridicule—simply because they are *different*—now sees the classmates as members of an extended ancestral family in which diversity is celebrated and

valued (cf. Koh & Joyner, 2006 regarding their findings of Hispanic and Asian adolescent friendship choices in pan-ethnic contexts).<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

In 2011, I attended an East-West Center (EWC) presentation by anthropologist Manuel Rauchholz about adoption in Micronesia. During the question-and-answer portion, I shared some of my own perspectives based on my host family experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer. One of the attendees was Gerard Finin, who is a co-director of the EWC Pacific Islands Development Program and a former Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines. I talked with him after the presentation, briefly sharing some of my personal and academic background; he pointedly asked me, “Why don’t you then consider yourself a Pacific Islander?” It was the first time anyone had asked me such a question, although those thoughts have always been in my mind. Prior to his question—and ever since then—I have wondered why Filipinos are grouped separately from Pacific Islanders, or from Formosans, or from Indonesians, or from Hawaiians, and so forth, when we are all from *islands in the Pacific*. What in principle forces me to live my personal and academic life as being a Filipino whose identity is “inherently” separate from other peoples with whom I share ancestry, as I have understood through historical linguistics—and given the fact that my direct and distant ancestors are from Pacific islands?

Although I know that there are powerful cultural factors that “limit” our lived experiences through the identities we already possess—including those of our linguistic and cultural birthright—there are other identities waiting to be explored.<sup>37</sup> What has been most inspiring to me is sharing these kinds of conversations with fellow Austronesians who—through their own processes of self-reflection through cross-linguistic/cultural comparisons—make similar realizations

---

<sup>36</sup> I recognize, too, that just like any other (pan-)ethnic label, the use of “Austronesian” can result in the development of other boundaries and oppositions (cf. Barth, 1998) that can also be racialized. Anthony P. S. Guerrero (pers. comm., 2014) points out that there is also the possibility that the celebration of a pan-ethnic identity can lead to tensions regarding the acknowledgement of community/location-specific identities, achievements, and challenges (i.e., new kinds of erasure). However, the potential for negative effects of constructing “Austronesian” as a pan-ethnic identity should not deter those who want to explore its positive effects.

<sup>37</sup> Consider, for example, Wilcken’s (2013) explorations of the connections between Filipino and Polynesian identities through myth, tattoo, and cultural rituals.

as I have shared in this paper. A friend of mine from Fiji came to UHM for his undergraduate degree; it was there that he found great interest in studying ‘*Ōlelo Hawai‘i*’ ‘Hawaiian language’ and the history of Hawai‘i, as it provided a way for him to contextualize his own experiences with *na vosa vakaViti* ‘Fijian language’ and Fiji’s colonial past. The first time I had met him, upon knowing that he spoke Fijian, I asked him to count from one to ten: *dua, rua, tolu, vā, lima, ono, vitu, walu, ciwa, tina*. I replied, first by counting in Tagalog: *isa, dalawa, tatlo, apat, lima, anim, pito, walo, siyam, sampu*; then in Mortlockese: *eeu, ruwou, eluw, rúaanú, limwou, wonou, fisuw, waluw, tuwou, engool*. Our initial conversation was brief, but that moment of shared realization—that three completely different languages had clearly similar numbers such as ‘five’ (*lima : lima : limwou*), ‘seven’ (*vitu : pito : fisuw*), and ‘eight’ (*walu : walo : waluw*)<sup>38</sup>—led to further discussion over the course of our shared time here at UHM between two young Austronesians who realized the positive power of shared ancestry.

I take the stance in this position paper that historical linguistics provides a way for students to explore what “Austronesian” identity means to them. Not only is there the intellectual process of applying the comparative method, reconstructing a proto-language, and creating family trees via subgrouping, but there is also the personal reflective process that allows students to understand what such abstract theories mean for their realizations of ancestry, identity, and interpersonal relationships with others whom they had previously only seen as “different”—and perhaps whom they treated in negatively racialized ways. By no means do I suggest that the logical understanding of “Austronesian” will serve as a magical cure-all for deep-seated racism in the youth. What I suggest, rather, is that “Austronesian” serves as another pan-ethnic label—alongside “Nesian,” “Pacific Islander,” “Pasifika,” “Local,” and others—that widens the potential membership of the in-group, where taunts of hate might be replaced with questions about identity and pride.

---

<sup>38</sup> A recent experience underscores this salience beyond just what a linguist like myself notices. While in Pohnpei for fieldwork in the summer of 2014, in the home of my host family in Sokehs, I was watching a Filipino movie with my host mother, a Chuukese woman who is adept at code-switching into Mortlockese. The movie featured a scene in which a child was counting from one to ten in Palawanon. After the child finished counting, my host mother said aloud, “*Oh, ‘walu’, usun shak iaash ‘waluw’ we*” ‘Oh, “walu,” just like our “waluw”’.

I have often found discourses surrounding the label of “Pacific Islanders” alienating, because even though I consider myself a person whose ancestry is in an island of the Pacific, Filipinos are not overtly incorporated in discussions about “Pacific Islanders,” that is, Micronesians, Melanesians, and Polynesians.<sup>39</sup> That is the reason why I turn to “Austronesian” identity as a concept that has allowed me to contextualize my experiences with various people (i.e., family, friends, classmates, co-workers, etc.) whose ancestries are rooted in geographically disparate places like the Philippines, Taiwan, Guam, East Timor, Palau, Pohnpei, Pakin Atoll, the Mortlocks, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Hawai‘i, Aoetaroa, Sāmoa, and others. Making sense of a pan-ethnic identity has its own unique challenges, to be sure, but by expanding the boundaries of who “belongs” to our sense of self—in this case, as realized/defined by an ancestral language—then we provide another space in which we can promote discourses of healing and social change, as alternatives to the painful realizations of racism in everyday interaction in school and elsewhere.

Among my favorite examples of persistent cognates in the Austronesian language family is the word for ‘star’, which is *bituin* in Tagalog and *fú* in Mortlockese. Although not as transparent as other clear cognates—*walo* and *waluw* ‘eight’, *langit* and *lááng* ‘sky; heaven’, *alimango* and *elimóng* ‘(mangrove) crab’, and others—*bituin* and *fú* are indeed related over thousands of years of change, ultimately originating from Proto-Austronesian \*bituqen.<sup>40</sup> What makes this cognate especially memorable for me is that it was among one of the first cognates I realized when I was learning Mortlockese as a Peace Corps Volunteer. It was a small but immensely meaningful way for me to make sense of where I was—that as a Filipino and speaker of Tagalog, I was among Mortlockese people with whom I share ancestry as realized through language and culture.<sup>41</sup> I also gained an

---

<sup>39</sup> I have often seen examples in health contexts that group together Filipinos, Compact of Free Association immigrants (i.e., Micronesians), and Native Hawaiians, but with the underlying assumption that such categories are separate.

<sup>40</sup> The simplified version of the transformation is as follows: Proto-Austronesian \*bituqen > Tagalog *bituin* > Proto-Oceanic \*pituqun > Proto-Micronesian \*fituu > Mortlockese *fú*.

<sup>41</sup> In 2013, I was having a conversation with my mother, and the topic eventually turned to coconuts. She talked about how as a child, she enjoyed eating the spongy coconut apple (i.e., coconut cotelydon) inside mature copra, especially the early stage of that apple when it is small, sweet, and firm. I could not help but also share with her my stories of eating coconut apple on Pakin. When spending time with my friends on Pakin, whenever we were out and about, far away from the residences, they would often open up a copra for me and offer me the apple to eat; I would

appreciation over the course of my time as a graduate student at UHM (where I have met many other Austronesians) of the still relevant importance of the star as a means of guidance.<sup>42</sup> I fully acknowledge that my position paper raises questions of possible paths to healing, but it does not provide the full picture of methods, assessment, and ethnographic examples. It is for that reason that I hope that readers of this paper—most especially young people who are engaged in processes of identity formation in school settings, “Austronesian” and otherwise—can *lumingon sa pinganggalingan* ‘look back at where we came from’ to gain a better understanding of our *paroroonan* ‘destination’, using whatever metaphors we need to continue onward and to help each other along the way.

### Acknowledgements

To my family who support me in my journey to reclaim and hold on to Tagalog: *Maraming salamat sa inyong lahat, ang minamahal kong kamag-anak*. To the members of the Pakin Atoll community who have continuously supported me during my Peace Corps service and my linguistic fieldwork: *kilissou shaapwúr áámi mwonson reen ióómi alillis sangei loomw toorei iei*. I am thankful to Ryan Likeke Alivado, Dalton-Blake Keanu Beauprez, Robert Blust, Lyle Campbell, David Dugucanavanua, Akiemi Glenn, and Mick Jower for the inspiring discussions upon which this paper is based. I especially thank Anthony P. S. Guerrero and Alexander Mawyer for not only important discussions, but also comments on an earlier version of this paper. I also thank Pius Siten, Shirley L. Odango, and Pia Arboleda for translation assistance with the abstracts in Pakin Lukunosh Mortlockese and Tagalog. All errors in this work are mine alone.

---

jokingly shout out *manau!* ‘life!’. My mother said that the coconut apple is called *para* in Ilokano. Immediately, I told her that it is called *pahr* in Pohnpeian and *faar* in Mortlockese (also realized as *fara-* in compounds). Even though I did not engage in any kind of formal comparison via linguistics terminology in that moment, my mother could immediately see the connection in the shape of the words. Such discursive moments are examples of the language-based constructions of Austronesian pan-ethnic identity, one word at a time.

<sup>42</sup> I especially thank Margarita Cholymay for explaining to me the example of *fún amwmwen* ‘guiding star’ as a principle of traditional Mortlockese navigation.



## References

- Barth, F. (1969). Introduction. In F. Barth (Ed.), *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of cultural difference* (pp. 9–39). Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget.
- Barth, F. (1998). *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Beardsmore, H. B. (1986). *Bilingualism: Basic principles*. 2nd edn. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Bellwood, P. (1991). The Austronesian dispersal and the origin of languages. *Scientific American*, (July 1991), 88–93.
- Bellwood, P. (1997). The Austronesian Dispersal. *Newsletter of Chinese Ethnology*, 35, 1–26.
- Bellwood, P. (2009). Formosan prehistory and Austronesian dispersal. In D. Blundell (Ed.), *Austronesian Taiwan: Linguistics, history, ethnology, prehistory*, revised edition (pp. 336–364). Taipei: Shung Ye Museum and Berkeley, CA: Phoebe A. Hearst Museum, University of California.
- Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality; A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Blundell, D. (2011). Taiwan Austronesian language heritage connecting Pacific Island peoples: Diplomacy and values. *IJAPS*, 7(1), 75–91.
- Blust, R. (2002). The history of faunal terms in Austronesian languages. *Oceanic Linguistics*, 41(1), 89–139.
- Blust, R. (2013). *The Austronesian languages*. Revised ed. Asia-Pacific Linguistics Open Access monographs, A-PL 008. Canberra, ACT: Asia-Pacific Linguistics.
- Blust, R., & Trussel, S. (Ongoing). Austronesian comparative dictionary. Retrieved March 30, 2014, from <http://www.trussel2.com/acd>.
- Bopp, F. (1841). *Über die Verwandtschaft der malaisch-polynesischen Sprachen mit den indoeuropäischen. Gelesen in der Akademie der Wissenschaften am 10. Aug. und 10. Dec. 1840*. Berlin: Dümmler.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7(4–5), 585–614.

- Bucholtz, M., Lopez, A., Mojarro, A., Skapoulli, E., VanderStouwe, C., & Warner-Garcia, S. (2014). Sociolinguistic justice in the schools: Student researchers as linguistic experts. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 8(4), 144–157.
- Campbell, L. (2013). *Historical linguistics*. 3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Clark, G. (2003). Dumont d'Urville's Oceania. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 38(2), 155–161.
- Constantino, R. (1975). *A history of the Philippines: From the Spanish colonization to the Second World War*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Crowley, T. (1987). *An introduction to historical linguistics*. Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea Press.
- Cunningham, L. J. (1992). *Ancient Chamorro society*. Honolulu, HI: The Bess Press.
- Daftary, D., & McBride, A. M. (2004). International voluntary service: Diplomacy, aid, development, or self-service? Paper presented at the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) Conference. Ryerson University and York University, Toronto, Canada. 11–14 July, 2004.
- D'Arcy, P. (2003). Cultural divisions and island environments since the time of Dumont D'Urville. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 38(2), 217–235.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1). Retrieved April 4, 2014, from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.
- Fishman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Fox, J. J. (2006). Austronesian societies and their transformations. In P. Bellwood, J. J. Fox, & D. Tryon (Eds.), *The Austronesians: Historical and comparative perspectives* (pp. 229–243). Canberra: Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, the Australian National University.
- Gans, H. J. (1979). Symbolic ethnicity: The future of ethnic groups and cultures in America. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2(1), 1–20.
- Giddens, A. (1976). *New rules of sociological method*. London: Hutchinson.

- Groves, C. P. (2006). Domesticated and commensal mammals of Austronesia and their histories. In P. Bellwood, J. J. Fox, & D. Tryon (Eds.), *The Austronesians: Historical and comparative perspectives* (pp. 161–173). Canberra: Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, the Australian National University.
- Guerrero, A. P. S., Fung, D., Suaalii-Sauni, T., & Wiguna, T. (2013). Care for the seafarers: A review of mental health in Austronesia. *Asia-Pacific Psychiatry* 5(3), 119–140.
- Hau'ofa, E. (1993). Our sea of islands. In E. Waddell, V. Naidu, & E. Hau'ofa (Eds.), *A new Oceania: Rediscovering our sea of islands* (pp. 2–17). Suva: University of the South Pacific School of Social and Economic Development.
- Hezel, F. X. (1983). *The first taint of civilization: A history of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in pre-colonial days, 1521-1885*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hezel, F. X. (1995). *Strangers in their own land: A century of colonial rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hinton, L. (2009). Trading tongues: Loss of heritage languages in the United States. In A. Reyes & A. Lo (Eds.), *Beyond Yellow English* (pp. 331–346). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Irvine, J. T., & Gal, S. (2009). Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader* (pp. 402–434). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Jolly, M. (2007). Imagining Oceania: Indigenous and foreign representations of a sea of islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19(2), 508–546.
- Jung, M.-K. (2002). Different racisms and the differences they make: Race and “Asian workers” of prewar Hawai'i. *Critical Sociology*, 28(1–2), 77–100.
- Kao, G., & Joyner, K. (2006). Do Hispanic and Asian adolescents practice panethnicity in friendship choices? *Social Science Quarterly*, 87(5), 972–992.
- Kothari, U. (2003). From colonialism to development: oral histories, life geographies and travelling cultures. Unpublished manuscript. Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.

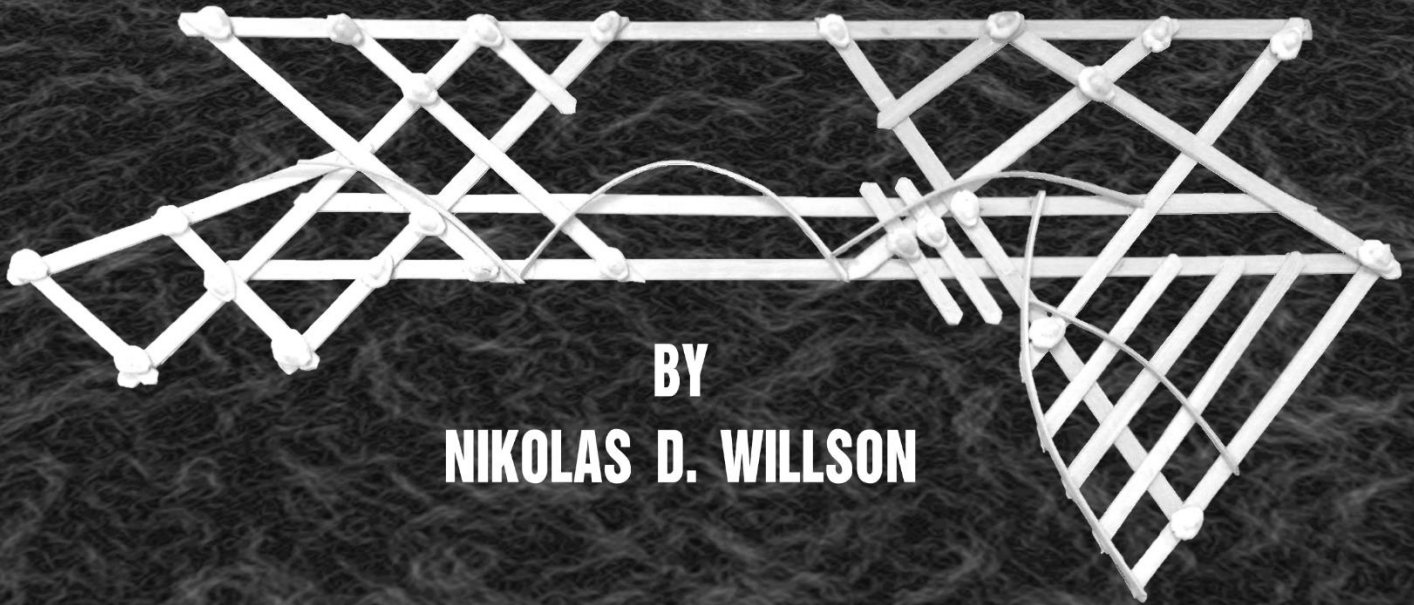
- Labrador, R. N. (2009). 'We can laugh at ourselves': Hawai'i ethnic humor, Local identity, and the myth of multiculturalism. In A. Reyes & A. Lo (Eds.), *Beyond Yellow English: Toward a linguistic anthropology of Asian Pacific America* (pp. 288–308). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, D. (2006). Globalization and international service: A development perspective. *Voluntary Action*, 7(2), 13–26.
- Lynch, J., Ross, M., & Crowley, T. (2011). *The Oceanic languages*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McFarlane, T. A. (2010). Experiencing difference, seeking community: Racial, panethnic, and national identities among female Caribbean-born U.S. college students. *American Review of Political Economy* 8(2), 87–114.
- McGavin, K. (2014). Being "Nesian": Pacific Islander identity in Australia. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 26(1), 126–154.
- Ochs, E. & Schieffelin, B. B. (2009). Language acquisition and socialization: Three developmental stories and their implications. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A Reader* (pp. 296–328). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Odango, E. L. (In press-a). Austronesian youth perspectives on language reclamation and maintenance. *The Contemporary Pacific*.
- Odango, E. L. (In press-b). *May sasabihin ang kabataan 'the youth have something to say': Youth perspectives on language shift and linguistic identity. Language Documentation & Conservation.*
- Rapaport, M. (Ed.) (2013). *The Pacific islands: Environment and society*. Revised ed. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Reland, H. (1708). *Dissertationum miscellanearum partes tres*. 3 vols. Trajecti ad Rhenum.
- Ridgell, R. (2006). *Pacific nations and territories: The islands of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia*.
- Rosenfeld, M. J. (2001). The salience of pan-national Hispanic and Asian identities in U.S. marriage markets. *Demography* 38, 161–175.

- Ross, M. (1996). Is Yapese Oceanic? In B. Nothofer (Ed.), *Reconstruction, classification, description: Festschrift in honor of Isidore Dyen* (pp. 121–166). Hamburg: Verlag Meyer.
- Sandhu, D. S. (1997). Psychocultural profiles of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans: Implications for counseling for counseling and psychotherapy. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development, 25*(1), 7–22.
- Schmidt, W. (1899). *Über das Verhältniss der melanesischen Sprachen zu den polynesischen und untereinander*. Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historisch Classe, vol. CXL. Vienna.
- Smith, L. T. (2004). Building research capacity in the Pacific, for the Pacific and by Pacific peoples. In T. Baba, 'O. Māhina, N. Williams, & U. Nabobo-Baba (Eds.), *Researching the Pacific and Indigenous peoples: Issues and perspectives* (pp. 4–16). Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies.
- Talmy, S. (2010). Becoming “Local” in ESL: Racism as resource in a Hawai‘i public high school. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 9*(1), 36–57.
- Tilley, C. (2006). Introduction: Identity, Place, Landscape and Heritage. *Journal of Material Culture, 11*(7), 7–32.
- Valdés, G. (2005). Bilingualism, heritage language learners, and SLA research: Opportunities lost or seized? *The Modern Language Journal, 89*(iii), 410–426.
- Wilcken, L. (2013). *The forgotten children of Maui: Filipino myths, tattoos, and rituals of a demigod*. n.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

**Emerson Lopez Odango** is a PhD student (ABD) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and an East-West Center Student Affiliate. He was born in the US to immigrants from the Ilokano- and Cebuano-speaking regions of the Philippines. Prior to his graduate studies, he was a Peace Corps Volunteer, serving on Pakin Atoll in Pohnpei State, Federated States of Micronesia (2006–9). His research interests include morphophonemics, Interactional Sociolinguistics, language shift and reclamation, local ecological knowledge, epistemic stancetaking, fieldwork methodology, and the intersection of pragmatics and morphosyntax. His areal focus is on Austronesian languages, most especially Tagalog and Mortlockese.



**CURRENTS AMONG PEOPLE:  
SOCIAL NETWORK THEORY OF LINGUISTIC  
CHANGE APPLIED TO THE MICRONESIAN  
COMMUNITIES IN HAWAI'I EDUCATION**



**BY  
NIKOLAS D. WILLSON**

# Currents among People: Social Network Theory of Linguistic Change Applied to the Micronesian Communities in Hawai'i Education

Nikolas D. Willson

## Kadkadin

Ejaam dik an ri-jikuu! ro jān Maikronijia jeļā kajin Iñlij? Eļōman aer naaj kakōmanmanļok kake? Āindein kajjitōk ko rōļap ippān rūkaki in kajin Iñlij me ewōr aer ri-jikuu! jān Maikronijia. Ijoke elōñ uwaak ñan kajjitōk rot kein im eļap aer waļok raan kein, ak peba in eitōn keepaakļok mool kōn jeļāļokjeņ, eļaptata ikijjien wāween an kajin oktakļok ilowaan doulul in armej. Emaroñ bwe jukjuk-in-pād ko ejakūtkūt aer riit---āerwōt ko repād iMaikronijia --- rej katak kajin ko jet jān ippān ro ri-uwaan doulul ko aer. Ñe emool de in, peba in ej kwaļok ke jekjek eo an doulul ko ilo Awai ej juᵑae wāween an kajin oktakļok, ilo kilaj k-12, kab ilo jukjuk-in-pād ko an ri-Maikronijia ro rej jokwe Awai, im kōn men in ekaapañ jeļā kajin Iñlij. Katak kein rej jitōñļok ñan kilen kōmman doulul kein bwe jet ri-jikuu! ren jamboļok ikōtaan mōn jikuu! im jukjuk-in-pād, jān iien ñan iien, ñan jeļā kajjien ro āerwōt ilo jikuu! im doulul ko jet, kab tilmaak kōn ļōmᵑak im tōprak ko aer.

## Abstract

Why is English proficiency low among Micronesian students? How can it improve? These are the familiar central issues for English teachers of Micronesian students. While unqualified answers to such broad yet topical questions abound, this paper approaches them through the theoretical parameters of linguistic change via social networks. By hypothesizing that in oral societies—such as those of Micronesia—language learning is in fact a kind of linguistic change realized through social networks, the paper shows that the

social structure of Hawai'i primary and secondary classrooms and of Micronesian-Hawai'i immigrant communities feature "strong networks" that act in concert against linguistic change, and in turn against improved English proficiency. The solution that arises from this analysis is to create "weak networks:" periodic travel across the boundaries of campus and community by a select group of students to meet and share ideas with peers outside their networks.

**Keywords:** *literacy, social network, linguistic change, Micronesia, Hawai'i, education*

"The children could not keep up in class, lacked basic skills, ignored homework, were often absent and the parents very difficult if not impossible to reach for conferencing" (Paul, 2003, p. 63). A primary school teacher draws a common picture of Micronesian students today in Hawai'i. Yet it is not the only picture. Micronesians also leave impressions on the honor rolls of Hawai'i's schools. In May 2014, 26 Marshallese students made the honor rolls of ten Hawai'i high schools (*Marshall Islands Journal*). A comprehensive and truthful account of Micronesians in Hawai'i must explain why Micronesians are among the best, and among the worst performing students in Hawai'i. Besides a rapidly growing population (Harris & Jones, 2005) and heightened contrast from public episodes of anti-immigrant prejudice (Blair, 2011) (Vorsino, 2012), I offer that what really makes Micronesians topical among educators today is that successful approaches in teaching and reaching out to other minority groups have had little effect, and are therefore perceived as wasted, with Micronesians. But as educators we may value failures as truthful information: clues to the next effort.

So why do pedagogies often fail with students from Micronesia when they succeed with students from other backgrounds in the Hawai'i education system (Paul, 2003)? A Micronesian youth contemplates the same question as he recalls a peer: "One, I think, Korean, kid he came, he didn't know English, (after) two quarters, after the third quarter he got straight A's" (Paul, 2003, pp. 71-72). While

much of the inquiry of this issue searches philosophy and large scale social forces such as ethnicity, culture, ideology, colonialism, religion, economics and migrations (Peacock, 1984) (Hezel, 2001) (Heine, 2002) (Paul, 2003) (Kupferman, 2009) (Spencer, 2012), this paper will look to differing literacies and a smaller scale social phenomenon called the social network.

Expectations in literacy should be marked as a key difference between Micronesian students and many, perhaps all other English language learning communities in Hawai'i. Even though writing systems exist for most Micronesian languages, and some education in students' first (non-English) language exists for many Micronesian societies, and even while popular online communities "message" and "comment" in Micronesian writing systems, the nature of literacy in Micronesian societies is not parallel to literacy in anglophone Hawai'i. Micronesian societies use literacy in the regular mode of any oral society to whom writing is recent, with "laissez faire" rather than "standard" expectations for text (Rehg, 2004, p. 510). This different relationship with text affects the scope and dynamics of language learning. Without the language repository of a textual corpus, for oral societies, language learning is language change. What some teachers perceive as the slow language learning of Micronesian individuals is actually the result of poor conditions for language change in a social network of individuals, as described in Milroy and Milroy's (1985) social network model. I use this model to describe and predict problematic conditions in the Hawaii community and classroom, and identify student types that may serve and support the actuation of language change. The challenge for educators in this situation is to recognize and use the flow of information in their students' social networks while respecting the strong ties that inform culture and identity. So in answer to the question of why otherwise-successful pedagogies have failed, I now offer the hypothesis of this paper: many efforts to date have faltered because they have assumed Micronesians were a homogenous society with standard expectations for literacy, or (perhaps additionally) that poor student performances resulted from some combination of deficiencies in the individual student, in the parents, or even in the culture. I criticize these assumptions through a discussion of differing literacies and

social network analysis, and suggest a novel approach to pedagogy for Micronesians in Hawai'i based on social network analysis.

### **Literacies**

The first source of the struggles for teachers of Micronesian students in Hawaii is the differing expectations for literacy between Micronesian societies and anglophone Hawai'i society. The more recent academic discourse on "literacy" takes it to mean not just a person's ability to read and write, but a culture's relationships, values and practices regarding text (Gee, 1986) (Ong, 2002). First-language literacy for students in Micronesia has a liminal place in schools. According to Rehg (2004), "the schools of Micronesia are aggressive in promoting literacy, but it is literacy in English rather than in the child's first language that everywhere takes precedence" (p. 512) In Nauru, Nauruan is not taught in the public schools. Nor is there a universally received orthography of Nauruan to teach (David Hough, personal communication, November 10, 2013). In the Marshalls, similar disjunctions exist. While English language teachers must downgrade mistakes in spelling, capitalization and punctuation, many Marshallese language teachers ignore these mechanical areas because there is no standardized definition of mechanics in the literacy of today's Marshallese society. So first language literacy finds limited uses, feedback, and support at Micronesian schools, homes, and at large.

Probably due to this ambivalence to first language literacy, the performance of reading and writing among Micronesians in their mother tongues is often low. This author's experience as an English instructor at the College of the Marshall Islands can attest. In the classroom, the author has recorded the reading speeds of students' whose first language was Marshallese, in reading English and Marshallese. On average, his students read faster in English than in Marshallese. In addition, as a writing exercise, the author has asked students to write paragraphs in Marshallese. Mechanical and stylistic "mistakes" (sentence fragments, run-on sentences, pronoun reference agreement, which may nevertheless reflect the flow of true speech) were extensive. Such mistakes are impossible because they have no definition in Marshallese. They only seem to be mistakes if one assumes



Marshallese literacy should resemble standard English literacy. Yet Micronesian students do not have an expectation for standard literacy, and so do not employ literacy in their first language with the same expectations as their teachers in their second language.

The expectations differ because most popular Micronesian texts—those made by regular people in their daily lives, from stick-it notes to social network websites—are records of speech and verbal thought in all their capacities. This will be called the "speech-record expectation" of literacy. Literacy may fulfill the speech-record expectation by proceeding without standardized spelling, grammar and mechanics. Examples of this appear in popular Marshallese literacy, where texts may use any spelling which approximates the sound of words. In Majuro, the capital of the Marshall Islands, this is most visible in the longest serving weekly newspaper, *The Marshall Islands Journal*, where articles, public flyers and advertisements, including those of government offices that must promote the single official Marshallese orthography, all spell differently. It is not the case that each author follows a certain well-defined spelling system, or even a personal spelling system, but rather that each author spells variably throughout the writing, such that the same word may have two or sometimes three different spellings within the same article. Spelling variation is greatest on Web 2.0 online communities, where the postings of members create the content of the site. English readers may be surprised to learn this variation has no effect on the discourse. So long as the reader can verbalize the text, literacy fulfills its expectation. How different the expectations are in some English language communities, where misspelling and stylistic mistakes—above all in business and academics—can be the basis of total rejection of the discourse as in job and school applications, or at least of rhetorical distractions about the ethos of the writer. In anglophone communities almost universally and from a young age, spelling variation is agreed to be a mark of "laziness" in the writer. This dimension of text-based ethical criticism of the writer is absent in many Micronesian literacies. As in the old saw, "form follows function," and standardization is not a defined function of many Micronesian literacies.

Besides low level mechanical variation in forms, the clearest example of high-level discursive differences in the speech-record expectation for text comes from the College of the Marshall Islands students whose essay drafts begin with terms of public address, such as "Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen," and end with rhetorical gratitude and farewells such as "Thank You, Good Night, and God Bless You." I have found that other instructors at the College and at Majuro high schools attest they must take time to inform such students that an essay is a kind of writing which may never be spoken. We may conclude that these students' model for good writing was speech, and that they conceived of and perhaps were instructed in writing as a speech-record until they encountered someone with a different expectation: an anglophone composition teacher from North America.

To appreciate the challenges posed by bridging differences from the speech-record expectation for text to anglophone expectations, consider what Hawaii English teachers bring to literacy: let us call it the "standardized anonymous" expectation. Here each word has one, or at most two spellings, phrases often follow patterns distinct from speaking, punctuation restricts phrasing and (dis)ambiguates meaning, and it is understood that the reader may be a total stranger, living far apart in time and place, with no prior personal knowledge of the author or the topic, and no intention of reading the words out-loud. For anglophone English teachers, all of these are grade-swaying expectations for text to which many of their Micronesian students must adjust their literacies in two respects: 1) interpreting why anyone would ever write this way, and 2) in actual practice and exercise of the formalities themselves, "dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's." Everyone must adjust to these ideas and practices, but for students from large societies populated by millions of strangers who speak the same language yet come from different human roots, the expectation for anonymity can be easier to grasp. On the other hand, for students who know everyone in their society at most by one or two removes, this is more difficult because they rarely hold discussions on their personal ideas with strangers. In fact in Marshallese society, the first traditional step in meeting a stranger is to discern how distantly related the two of you are. This is called *jitdam*, and besides representing a general notion of welcoming inquiry, it consists of reciting ancestors and geographic background until you find

commonalities. Strictly speaking, *jitdam* is only done between Marshallese. That you would address a total stranger on your personal views is strange, unless you are giving a speech to a large audience, an occasion that happens at least every weekend with religious observances in the Marshalls. It may not be a surprise after all that a student tasked with addressing an anonymous audience may begin writing in the same formula as a public religious speech. Perhaps, for the student, this is the best model for an address to the anonymous.

Because of the primacy of speech we observe in setting the forms, discourse, and other expectations of literacy, let us recognize these students and their families as members of oral societies. For Micronesian students, as perhaps for any oral society with *laissez-faire* literacy, the immediate personal connections of speech are the basis of literacy. The most important consequence of recognizing this is its implication that a student's interlocutors must be the primary informants of the student's literacy.

Then, we ask, who does the Micronesian student speak with? Family, friends and peers in the home, neighborhood and classroom: these are members of the student's social network. These are the interlocutors, those best situated to inform the development of literacy for Micronesian students. The enhancement of performance in literacy must be explored by understanding and carefully modifying how students interact with their interlocutors, or the students' social network dynamics, for the social network moderates the life of behaviors and ideas among peers (Granovetter, 1973) (Milroy & Milroy, 1985) (Trudgill, 2010) (Trudgill, 2012).

While not all Micronesian students should fit the description of the oral society student, especially the descendants of immigrants who have never experienced the society of the homeland, as we will see in the next section, students who may not fit the description alone are nonetheless in frequent contact with, and never far-removed from others who do. How exactly any given student's expectations may match the description of the oral society member above is an empirical question outside the purpose of the current paper. Here it suffices that what is certain for some may be true for all until evidence to the contrary shall arise, detailing the parameters of variation through further inquiry. For

convenience, this paper will assume that most Micronesian students are oral society members, even in the context of expatriate communities.

### **Social Networks**

Since our analysis so far has drawn us to the interlocutors of Micronesian students as the source of their literacy skills, we must understand the conventions of the study of personal interactions in small groups, or social network dynamics. The concept of social network is fairly loose, being applied as it is in so many areas of study: "anthropology, sociology, history, social psychology, political science, human geography, biology, economics, communications science and other disciplines" ("Social Networks," 2014, para. 1). "An individual's social network is quite simply the sum of relationships which he or she has contracted with others, and social network analysis examines the variable structures and properties of personal networks" (Milroy, 2000, p. 217). While definitions of "relationships" and how to "sum" them may vary, all human social network analyses since Granovetter (1973) employ two basic concepts about human relationships: "ties" and "strength." A social network is always a group people with "ties," or times when they contact and interact with each other. The social network is conventionally modeled by a graph with nodes or points that represent people, and vertices or lines that represent ties (see Figure 1). In addition, the ties are qualified with "strength." The strength of ties is variable and partially subjective as a construct of the model of network under study. But strength has some measurable criteria that do not vary in any social network study. These ubiquitous criteria are the total instances of contact between tied network members, and the duration or interval of those contacts. For example, during the course of a day, if two people have multiple times in contact with each other, and the times of contact are also relatively long compared to their contacts with others, their ties are "strong." Conversely, if two people have one or but a few contacts of short duration, their ties are "weak." The terms of strength and weakness can also extend to whole networks. If all the people in a network meet each other many times in a day for long intervals, that network is "strong." And conversely if all the people in a network meet each other once or a few times in a day for brief intervals, that

network is "weak." While models of social networks are more or less rigorous in their definitions of strength, they all use such terms.

Networks may respond to new ideas differently, based on the strength of their ties (Granovetter, 1973). In the Milroy and Milroy (1985) model of language change, "close-knit" networks made up of many strong ties "may be seen to function as a conservative force, resisting pressure to change from outside the network" (Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p. 362), as "strong ties both inhibit linguistic change and support linguistic norms" (Milroy, 2000, p. 218). On the other hand, "loose knit" networks with many weak ties are "innovative," quickly adopting new features of language.

Up to three types of person may appear in the network. Milroy and Milroy (1985) specify "innovators" and "early adopters," while we will complement the early adopter with a third type implied but not named in Milroy and Milroy (1985), the "late adopters." Innovators are people who "lack strong network ties or are loosely attached to close-knit groups" (Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p. 363). Innovators bring a new ideas across networks to groups that would otherwise not have access to the new information. Despite their occasionally valuable role in the network, innovators are "marginal to the group adopting the innovation, often being perceived as underperforming to the point of deviance" (ibid.). In contrast to the marginal innovators, early adopters are "central members of the group, having strong ties within it, and are highly conforming to group norms" (ibid.), yet still sometimes retaining weak ties to innovators. Finally, with few or no direct ties outside the network, there are what we will call late adopters, who are "at the center of a norm-enforcing group" (ibid.), having many strong ties within the group, and who are less susceptible to outside pressures than anyone in the network. Information flows through these three types when it is acquired by innovators in another network, passing from innovators to early adopters, and finally reaching late adopters, who may receive the new information many times from many early adopters. Because of the many connections of a late adopter throughout the network, information may reach the entire network through the late adopter.



## Applying a Social Network Model

### *Communities of Micronesians*

Our first question in applying a social network model of language change to the Micronesian students in Hawaii is, "What kind of social network do the Micronesian communities in Hawaii form? Are they strong or weak?" The answer from a variety of sources is very clear. Micronesian communities form strong social networks. While Micronesian societies are sometimes summarized as collectivist (Hezel, 2001), social network theory calls us to recognize that students, their siblings, parents and guardians, extended family members, and sometimes friends on extended stays, are living together, often in one apartment or house, and in one neighborhood (Kaneshiro & Black, 2012). Okamoto et al. (2008) found that Micronesian participants in their study were living together at one site. "For example, one participant indicated that she lived with 7 people in an apartment, while another indicated that she lived with "twelve or thirteen" relatives in her apartment. Living with a large number of relatives in small apartments was an extremely common condition" (Okamoto, et al., 2008, p. 5). Residing together, contacts are frequent, and because the contacts are centered on the home-life, durations of contact can last through most or even all of a given day. Most of the students who live in a neighborhood will go to the same school, and so these students will see each other at school, and again at home. At least for some Kosraeans, the main consideration in choosing a school in Hawaii is that it be close to home (Kupferman, 2009). Such interwoven contacts between household, neighborhood, and school all must increase the strength of ties, and lead to strong, linguistically conservative social networks.

We must emphasize that networks are formed based on family and shared language. Nowhere is it evident in the literature that "Micronesian" identity is a basis for social ties to the people who are called "Micronesian." The exception is where aggressive outsider groups--reportedly young Samoan males in neighborhood gangs (Okamoto, et al., 2008) --use their own constructs of "Micronesian" as a target for intimidation and violence. In this case, it is documented that those targeted as "Micronesian"--again typically young males--have formed their own neighborhood gangs on the basis of their supposed

"Micronesian" identity for protection from the outsiders. But outside of seeking safety against bigotry, being "Micronesian" is irrelevant to the formation and maintenance of social networks in Hawaii. Instead it is the language groups that form social networks (Milroy L., 2000) (Trudgill, 2010). Though I must refer to social networks of Micronesians in this paper, I mean they are separate networks of people who are over-generalized as "Micronesian" by outsiders and who share a first language, not networks of any Micronesians with any first language. Ties are made, maintained and strengthened through shared language (Milroy & Milroy 1985).

### *Classrooms of Micronesians*

Our second question in applying a social network model is, "What kind of social networks do Micronesians form in the Hawai'i classroom? Are they strong or weak?" To begin, Micronesians are a minority in practically every Hawai'i classroom. For example, in the Hawai'i annual "School Status and Improvement" reports for 2012-2013 all Hawai'i high schools, Micronesian students range between less than one percent and sixteen percent of the total student population in any given high school, excluding two public high schools where there are no Micronesians. This numerical data is powerful evidence that the classroom networks, like the home networks, must often be small, strong, and conservative because in any Hawai'i high school, the Micronesian student population is less than 150, the approximate maximum size for a very strong social network, sometimes also called "Dunbar's number". Dunbar's number suggests the maximum population of a very strong conservative network because it is estimated, based on comparative anatomy and ethology among social primates related to humans, as the largest group of people for which normal human cognitive capacity can conceive and monitor 1) group membership 2) the suspected nature, frequency, and duration all connections between all group members (Hill and Dunbar 2003). In a more colloquial phrase, it is likely that "everybody knows everybody else" if the network is less than 150 people. Anecdotally, this complete interpersonal recognition within the social network is attested in Paul's (2003) thesis. She notes of a Pohnpeian mother, Mrs. S, that she "knew almost all of the [Pohnpeian]

women whose children are at [a local public school]. She also knew who's [sic] children were succeeding and whose were failing and why" (Paul 2003). Such a network is strong.

If 150 people is approximately as large as one strong conservative social network can get, then in Hawai'i high schools, we observe that the populations of Micronesian students are within that predictable range of a very strong conservative social network. All high schools in Hawai'i have less than 150 Micronesians. Elementary schools presumably do not present radically different figures. In addition, the actual populations of the social networks for Micronesians must be smaller, since those social networks form around shared first language rather than geographic heritage. Thus, we have arrived at one explanation for the lower English proficiency of Micronesians as compared with other minority groups in Hawaii. The strongly tied social networks of Micronesians are conservative, slower to adopt new language.

The classroom is a place where new information is presented. However, strong social networks are better at resisting new information because new information which is not aligned with the shared interest of the group is never presented or disappears from lack of sharing (Milroy & Milroy, 1985). Strong social network members are likely to evaluate new information based on their more numerous and stronger connections with network insiders (*ibid.*). This is because in every strong network, the insiders more than outsiders will have more opportunities to reward, and more opportunities to punish the innovator. Thus the innovator (a person who is by definition a relative outsider to the strong network) is likely to evaluate whether or not to share information based on their perception of the values of the strongest-tied insiders.

A closer examination of the experiences of innovators reveals a third social network dynamic besides strong conservative networks at home and in school. Innovators, because of their exceptional knowledge of two or more languages relative to other network members, experience tensions of identity more strongly than network insiders, being more aware of perceptions on both sides of the language divisions that separate strong network insiders, reshaping and reducing the information available to them from outsiders, a fact attested in literature on

"language brokering" (Tomlinson, 1989) (Villanueva & Buriel, 2010) (Benner & Graham, 2011) (Corona, et al., 2012). For example, Villanueva & Buriel (2010) found that young Latina innovators ("language brokers" in their study) in a mainland American high schools experienced anxiety and tension about their language use most often in school environments, and also noted depression related to the same factors. In another study on Spanish-speaking innovators as "language brokers," Benner & Graham (2011) found also in mainland American high schools that reports of discrimination against innovators were correlated with how frequently the students used their first language, and how diverse the high school student population was.

It seems that the language brokering literature and the social network literature have never been brought together, and to this author's knowledge, the present article is the first to synthesize the research on language brokers into social network analysis by identifying language brokers as innovators in social network terms. These observations from the language brokering literature give us an excellent if dark perspective on the complexities of innovation, in that we see it is psychologically painful and creates a target for physical abuse. But besides knowing the general dangers and difficulties associated with linguistic innovation, we must confirm that in the specific case of linguistic innovation among Micronesian students in Hawai'i, students will find it dangerous, for in Hawai'i high schools as well as in the community, it is attested that those perceived as Micronesians are targets for bullying and bigotry (Okamoto, et al., 2008) (Blair, 2011) (Nakagawa, 2011) (Vorsino, 2012) (Letman, 2013).

Thus, in addition to differing literacies, there are at least three dynamics of Micronesian social networks in Hawai'i schools that deter language learning. First is the strong Micronesian social network at home, and second is a similar strong network in the school, both of which are conservative of insider speech and identity and slow to admit elements of outsider speech and identity, while, third, the Micronesian innovators that social network theory predicts must initiate language change are discouraged from sharing new speech due to tensions of identity, discrimination and bigotry. So the very catalyst of language change is inhibited, according to the social network theory model. If innovators are too intimidated to

display and use their knowledge, little if any language change will take place. This analysis matches such reports of slow and limited, even diachronically static improvement by Micronesian students in Hawai'i classrooms, as from this teacher's aide:

I don't know what it is ... I was working with her for a year, she's a really nice girl, but it's just that, I don't know, she catches on really slow .... She improved when I was working with her .... I don't know, something to do with home. She wasn't able to do her homework, nobody helps her out at home and stuff like that. (Paul, 2003, p. 64)

So long as the ties of the network remain the same, social network theory predicts that the information in the network will remain largely the same. If that is the dynamic of Micronesian social network structure in Hawai'i high schools, then how do educators change it?

*Changes in Social Networks as Living Sites of Language, Identity and Culture Changes*

Based on their study of language change and identity in Belfast, Milroy and Milroy (1985) found that "'weak' and apparently insignificant interpersonal ties (of 'acquaintance' as opposed to 'friend', for example) are important channels through which innovation and influence flow from one close-knit group to another, linking such groups to a wider society" (Milroy, 2000, p. 218). Language change starts with the weakly tied innovators because of their greater access to new information in different networks, while their peers deeper inside the social network tend to share and revisit information through their many interconnections. This natural property of information in social networks suggests that changing the language of our students requires identifying innovators, and their comrades, the early adopters and late adopters. As we saw earlier, innovators find new ideas in different networks and return to present them to early adopters. Following a path that begins with innovators, information ultimately reaches the late adopters and the rest of the network. We must ensure that information is flowing in that path.



Educators can facilitate students' individual interactions in a structure and sequence that follows the theoretical pattern of linguistic innovation. If this is done responsively to each individual, the social network itself carries out the innovation. If this is done unresponsively, the students' cultures and identities are in jeopardy. Facilitation must not disintegrate cultural identity in the disruption of existing social networks, the severing of ties. To make a botanical analogy, it is a grafting and latticing of existing branches of a living and life-giving structure, rather than a pruning of the same. Prior educational approaches have been hostile to conservative social networks among students, and an approach aimed at severing ties could only be destructive in a society whose interpersonal ties are the life and space of the language, identity and culture.

### *Eradication*

It is perhaps anachronistic but nonetheless interesting to note that conservative social networks were disrupted in the coercive boarding school systems run by the US and Canadian governments for the re-education and re-socialization of Native Americans and First Nations in the early half of the 20th century (Adams, 1995). In this system, members of the same tribes were sent to different schools, so that the "best" school in this system would have no two students identifying with the same tribe or using the same first language. The destructive effects to identity and students' sense of well-being in these generations remain ignored by the US government, but were acknowledged in 1998 in an official apology from the Canadian government (Bosworth, 2011).

Boarding school itself is a paradigm in eradicating the network ties that sustain and inform one's first language or dialect. Hence in areas of relatively high dialectal diversity but cultural unity, such as the Edwardian Britain contemporary with the first Native American schools, boarding school was an ideal means of language education for standard spoken and written language. Edwardian British boarders' language changed while their culture could remain intact, perhaps even enhanced by interactions with peers who shared the same overall identity but could add some local diversity to the milieu. Yet part of the British boarding school student's ability to cohere in an overall "British" identity comes from a long folk,

national and royal ethnography, since the Dark Ages a history set into literature in some form of the students' first language. In contrast, Micronesian societies have little first language literature aside from the Bible. Yet it is probably difficult to overstate the importance of the Bible, as a work of literacy, and moreover as the single most succinct artefact of Christian identity in Micronesia. So bearing in mind these lessons from history and the nature of the current situation, the challenge of facilitation is to increase spoken language change without severing ties in the social network, and if possible draw upon the deepest literary and identity traditions available so that language change ramifies culture rather than eradicates it.

*Te Lumanaki Schools in the Tokelauan Community*

Precedents in meeting these challenges already exist in Hawaii. Glenn (2012) explores and documents linguistic identity in the revitalization of expatriate Tokelauan language and culture among students and residents in Hawai'i. The Tokelauans are the people of an eponymous atoll east of Samoa, with a language and culture distinct from the Samoans. The community in Hawai'i is small, approximately 3000 (Glenn, 2012), and started its own efforts in revitalization when they realized the younger generations were unskilled in important cultural practices. Presumably without using social network analysis, the strategy of the revitalization effort expresses metaphors and principles similar to this paper's:

... speakers move in currents and as they grapple with their heritage languages they also make use of knowledge about language, how it means and what it means, to marshal resources to reclaim and reinterpret their connection to other communities of speakers—those of their ancestors in the past and those of their relatives overseas. (Glenn, 2012, pp. 207-208)

This outlook expresses confidence in the existing knowledge and connections across networks of people as a resource for responding to adversity through the creation and sharing of new information.

The material structure of the effort was in the creation of schools in the community for language and performing arts. These community schools "grew out of the informal classes held in families' garages," teaching "*pehe* 'songs' and *fātele*, a type of action song" (Glenn, 2012, p. 19). The environment of the meeting was outside the public school, which in network analysis decreases anxiety for innovators and thus encourages their presentation of new ideas. Moreover the topics of the meeting addressed knowledge valued by the students and their communities, which nevertheless public schools would be incapable of teaching in a regular curriculum. Finally, the learning was driven by innovators, teachers with connections to the Tokelauan networks, but also to a wide range of English speech networks as well:

The school operated for six years without a formal curriculum, relying on the imaginations of the volunteer teachers who came from a variety of professional backgrounds in information technology, medicine, business, and academia, but none with experience in language teaching. (Glenn, 2012, p. 20)

#### *Autonomy of Choice and Value*

We see in the Tokelauan revitalization of language and culture that the premises of learning and sharing regard what many members of the community value. No such value exists in the diversity and range of Micronesian identities, unless it is Christianity. Yet public schools are legally incapable of directly teaching Christianity or the Bible outside of general comparative studies of religion, history, and literature. Acknowledging this, we find another fundamental issue in our discussion: public school networks do not present information that is valuable in the life of Micronesian community networks. Kupferman (2009) directly addressed the issue of differing values for religious versus secular education among Kosraean immigrants in Hawai'i, and found that if forced to select religious or secular education, at least some Kosraeans would abandon secular for religious education. Observations like this, in combination with reports of prioritizing church obligations before homework, still more in combination with the identity anxiety of the school

environment, clearly lead us to look for a venue for learning outside the public schools, perhaps in a religious site, which we will take into consideration when we draw a plan for the actuation of language change later in this paper. We may observe, though, the sharp distinction American schools are required to make between religious and secular truths may create a gulf in ideas which forces those who value religion into the difficult choice of "one or the other," a difficult choice which conceivably could arise as frequently as every weekend. While this choice is not unique to the Micronesian population, and other communities—perhaps especially those with standard literacy—make and live with the same choice, high value for religion is a noteworthy factor in the discussion of pedagogies that fail to reach some students.

## **Actuation of Language Change**

### *Network Identities*

Educators must identify their students according to the three kinds of social network identities: innovators, early adopters, and late adopters. There are probably unlimited ways to find these kinds of people in the Hawai'i anglophone classroom, but I discuss general impressions they are likely to make on educators, using formal and informal criteria, from social network theory, observations in Paul's (2003) thesis, and my own experiences as an English teacher in the Marshall Islands.

#### *Innovators*

Innovators have weak ties to two or more networks. As seen in the language brokering literature, these students will stand out because during class exercises they will translate English into the first language of their peers, those who have strong ties in the first language network and who deal slowly and less confidently in English. Besides more rapid and confident interactions using two or more languages, innovators may also take up new concepts and behaviors from outsiders before their peers. This could be seen in areas as distinct as successful performances in content-area classes, and a personal dress and style close to a mode that appears across many language networks in the school and which will not

strongly indicate a single background. In terms of grades the innovator would be a person getting, or capable of getting the best possible grades, A or B. And yet for reasons which teachers usually do not claim to understand, the innovator student may not always perform to expectations. In a social network analysis, this is because innovators may want to avoid being seen as too xenophilic by the strongly tied network peers, and yet value the knowledge and behaviors they access outside that network, and so keep distant from teachers as much as from their peers, remaining in a space where they have some access to both. Innovators are the rarest of network types, and in a classroom of twenty five students, they may number between zero and perhaps two. In journal writing assignments these students may discuss markers of identity as they will contemplate variations in identity more than their peers. The teacher is likely to observe the innovator closely attending the English discourse in class through most of its twists and turns around class-work, current events in the school and community, and even allusions to anglophone pop culture and humor.

### *Early Adopters*

Early adopters are more consistent in their behavior than innovators. Their grades will not vary much, and should be anywhere in the passing range, perhaps with some failures. They use new languages, concepts and behaviors, but they may not stand out without some effort. In terms of their network position, they form a definite periphery on a conservative network, surrounding the late adopters and strongly connected to other early adopters. In the structure of a network, early adopters are the most numerous network type, as they form ties with a few late adopters well inside the network. This may be visible in the popular notion of the clique. Early adopters will be the "followers" who frequently accompany one or two "leaders." Because their strongest ties are inside the group, early adopters may often refer back to the network to assess the condition of support verbally or non-verbally, as we see in Paul's (2003) recollection of a conversation about academic motivation held with a Pohnpeian family, in which a likely early adopter, the eldest child in the family, seems to hold back from sharing a personal idea:

[The eldest child of the W family] got solid B's. [Paul is] very proud of him because he struggled in grade school and he has done all his studying on his own. When [Paul] asked him what was his motivation [sic], college or whatever, he just gave a sidelong glance at his mother. [Paul] took this to mean that he wanted to please his mother, but judging by the look on his face, it may have been more about keeping peace at home. (p. 71)

While innovators experience the same kind of dilemmas of sharing personal ideas versus keeping the status quo, their weak connections in the network and to outside networks leave less access from network insiders to censure or reward the innovator, while the early adopter's stronger connections inside the network lead more consistently to conservative decision-making through the greater certainty of censure or reward from within and around the network.

### *Late Adopters*

Late adopters are at the center of a strong network. They seem uninterested in new ideas from outsiders. They rarely ask questions in their second language directly to outsiders, preferring to turn their questions in their first language to a nearby early adopter, at least one of whom usually accompanies the late adopter. Their dress may little reflect the popular modes among other social networks, especially those of networks of other languages, and late adopters may further present popular markers of the student's own language network. For example, among expatriate Marshallese adults in Hawaii, women may wear *kuam* (a synthetic, colorful full body dress, usually called *muumuu* in anglophone communities) in public spaces, which local community members inside and outside the Marshallese networks recognize as a marker of Marshallese identity. Inside the network, *kuam* represents an important value of modesty for the female body, labor, and practicality. It is the normal domestic attire of women in the Marshall Islands. Although it is not yet documented, social network theory predicts that most people who are comfortable in regularly presenting insider markers of their social network, such as *kuam*, will also access most of their social needs from inside



that network, and thus will be slower to adopt presumed needs of outside networks, such as language. Thus it would be rare to see a woman alone in *kuam* in public Hawaii, and more common to see such a person accompanied by at least one less distinctively marked early adopter or innovator, who is ready to translate and interpret contingencies outside the network. Safety may also be a consideration here. The Honolulu press has recorded prejudice against who choose to wear popular markers of Pohnpeian and Chuukese identity in Hawai'i (Blair, 2011).

Over time, in more traditional terms of academic grades, the late adopter is a person who sometimes achieves passing grades, but who often gets failing grades and may be recommended for special education or counseling because they are perceived as distracted, ill-behaved, unmotivated, etc. The late adopter may take to the popular images of a class-clown or a drop-out, little interested in the formal political structure of the classroom, the school, or the larger society, since they access social needs from alternative political structures or sub-cultures, from well inside a social network, via early adopters' translations and renderings of information that cannot be used or well-understood outside the network. What late adopters learn in this filtered state of outside information, they do not expect to transact among other networks. Because second language learning is virtually always intended for use in an outside network, a use the late adopter has difficulty anticipating, the late adopter will consistently present second language performances that are profoundly informed by their first language, as well as by any interpretations of literacy which their first language employs. To refer back to our earlier discussion of observations in the Marshall Islands, late adopters are the students who begin their essays with "Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen," and end their essays with "Thank Q, and Good Night." Though personal tutoring from network outsiders may have an ephemeral effect for the duration of the face-time, late adopters are likely to make lasting changes only when they receive the same new information via multiple early adopters.

The fullest portrait of a late adopter comes from Paul's (2003) ethnographic analysis of Micronesians in Hawaii. While the subject is an adult Pohnpeian mother

out of school, the characteristics she presents are likely to be shared by many Micronesian students who are late adopters:

Mrs. W can speak English if necessary. She understands when I speak to her, but I have never heard her utter even a single phrase in English in the five or six years that I have known her. .... Mrs. W said that she really likes to go to the parent teacher conferences because she is interested in what her children are doing and how they're getting along, but she regrets that she doesn't really understand what is being said. She must rely on the children to be informants .... Now [Mrs. W] doesn't want to go [to parent-teacher conferences] anymore [sic] because she doesn't know what's going on. (Paul, 2003, pp. 68, 70)

This is a vivid picture of how profoundly and exclusively within their own network late adopters may access their needs, in any dimension of "need". Imagine what happens for late adopters in the school environment, where the network suddenly has less to offer because the peripheral network brings in less information, much of it depleted or reconfigured by translation or ill-defined expectations of network outsiders. The late adopters are stranded inside the network on which they depend, for a few hours, each school day. They may stray from "good behavior" because their network does not present them full access to a coherent model thereof. Metaphorically, the late adopters' interlocutors, those early adopters, probably each have a section of a sketch, which when passed and assembled by the late adopter into a portrait, must resemble a Cubist interpretation of *The Scream* more than a *Mona Lisa*. The challenge of good performance in the English classroom for the late adopters then is like assembling a picture with puzzle pieces which do not match. There is not much to be gained from the effort, except perhaps in relief from the baleful attention of an educator who requires such pseudo-Picassos.

Now lest we construe "late adopter" as a palliation of "bad student," we must acknowledge the value of the late adopter role in the social network, for it is essential. By their close contact with many members of the social network, the late

adopters are the knot which seals and ties together the network as one entity, and the anchors of identity in the flux of humanity. Late adopters' positions deeper within the network allow them to more easily retain information distinctive of language and identity as they are under less pressure to efface them compared to their peers who are closer to the outside of the network. Besides this dynamic cultural role, a late adopter's connections to many within the network mean they are also likely to be the first available to help in a time of need (Granovetter, 1983). Educators should respect this complete ecology of language, identity and inter-reliance which social networks house, and suspend any judgment that one element in the ecology may be good or bad.

### *Identification*

Keeping in mind these considerations of general types, an educator in a given class can take some definite steps to identify specific students in that class. Before class, use transcripts to identify all the passing students. These are innovators and early adopters. Among them, discover the innovators by looking for who is first to translate ideas of an assignment to their peers during class-time. Translators may be innovators or early adopters, but social network theory predicts that innovators will be the first to translate, and they will do so for one or two early adopters. Early adopters then translate among each other or to late adopters. If a number of students are translating to one student, that student is a late adopter. By attending these sequences of the translation of new information, an educator can find the network types in a given class.

Another useful observation to make in a given class is to obtain a more accurate census category about one's students than simply "Micronesian." This category arises more out of geo-politics from imperial Europe to the present day than from the living social phenomena of the people so labeled. Micronesians themselves will not necessarily tend to form social networks based on this identity, except in cases where negative stereotypes from outsiders cause this arbitrary category of people to actually need one another for personal safety. Knowing exactly what background(s) within Micronesia a student identifies with may also predict their network types, for if a student has no first language peers in the

classroom, such a student cannot be a late adopter. Also, if a student self-identifies with more than one background, that student is likely to be an innovator since they by definition access more than one social network.

Class observations like this can happen now. While the Hawai'i education system will have the predictable inertia of a larger and more complex body, and high-level administrators involved with curriculum design and strategic planning will hesitate to use anything until it promises "measurable" contributions to education, the immediate need for this data is in classrooms, and low-level administrators and teachers could easily learn their Micronesian students' true backgrounds in their own classrooms in the first days of class by asking the students to write what countries specifically their families are from, and explicitly disqualifying "Micronesia" as a country. As a start, teachers might begin to disambiguate "Micronesia" with the basic national (political and language) categories in today's Micronesia (in alphabetical order): Chuuk, Kiribati, Kosrae, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Pohnpei, Yap. Many distinct language and ethnic categories are excluded from this list, but this is a broad outline of the most populous different linguistic, ethnic and governmental regions within Micronesia, and so a very basic list of the people who are likely to form social networks in a classroom. If we are to see living social networks, "Micronesian" as a social category must be updated with more pertinent categories based on the linguistic diversity of Micronesia, since as we have seen students use other speakers of their first language to interpret English.

#### *A Current of Information and a Sequence for Innovation*

Once the three network-types of innovator, early adopter, and late adopter are identified, educators must create a current of information where the data suggest it is now stopped, at the innovators. The first step is reassurance and support for innovators. Once or twice in a year, they may benefit from opportunities for additional ties between innovators in the same grade level from different schools, those who might otherwise never meet, being from distant networks. Given inhibitions of identity anxiety experienced by innovators, above all in school settings (Villanueva & Buriel, 2010) (Benner & Graham, 2011) (Corona, et

al., 2012), these opportunities should come outside of school, at a religious venue, and should be facilitated by a few members of the extramural community. Food should be shared, as one of the most potent signs of good-will and friendship in Micronesian societies. No employee of the schools should be present. Any innovator who self-identifies with Micronesian nationalit(ies) or language(s) should be welcomed, regardless of their first language, since innovators by definition belong to more than one group and are likely to be more skilled in English than their first language network peers. Following the recommendation of Villanueva and Buriel (2010), the students so gathered should understand that they are recognized as gifted students, valuable to the entire community and to its future. The innovators should be paired and asked to find common experiences, good and bad, regardless of their backgrounds at different schools. Based on these common experiences, they should come to some agreement on how they can be avoided if they were negative experiences, and how they can be repeated if they were positive experiences.

The next step is to create opportunities for additional weak ties between Micronesian innovators and early adopters who share the same first language. The principle of these meetings is to avoid confronting the conservatism of a strongly tied social network in its entirety and in its familiar element, instead expanding and ramifying networks with a few extra weak bonds created outside the normal circumstances of the network. Three times in a semester, each innovator should join with two early adopters, all from different schools, in a religious venue with food-sharing as above. Their objective should be discussing class-work or homework and their challenges or successes. This forum will allow some time for one-on-one interactions between an innovator and an early adopter without the tensions of the school environment or expectations from daily networks. In the course of these meetings, innovators are more likely to present new learning insights and approaches to the early adopters than early adopters are to innovators because social network theory predicts innovators have greater access to new ideas.

The final step is to wait and measure. Wait for early adopters, by their own means, to introduce new ideas to late adopters. New information from many early

adopters is likely to take effect on late adopters (Granovetter, 1973). If this is true, then general measures of performance such as grade point average should reveal improvements across the Micronesian student populations.

### **Discussion**

In summary, educators of Micronesians in Hawai'i must create a forum outside of school and invite the right people into it at the right time, making a space for students to be themselves and help each other directly or through the people they know (Li, 2012). The beauty of making use of a social network among students is that it allows educators to design student interactions without controlling them. The natural flow of information in society does the work. While this may sound suspiciously simple, here we should recognize a social network as a complex adaptive system which reacts to new information by seeking a new mode of stability (Skyrms, 1996). As a metaphor, complex adaptive systems are like cities: you can design the layout, but you cannot, nor should you want to, control everything that everyone does there. The city itself and its inhabitants discover and manage their needs through their experiences of each other. As the needs and experiences change, so the city and its people change. In Skyrms' discussion of complex adaptive systems, "the typical case is one in which there is not a unique preordained result, but rather a profusion of possible equilibrium outcomes. The theory predicts what anthropologists have always known—that many alternative styles of social life are possible" (1996, p. 81). The mutual interdependence of peers in social networks deserves confidence as a means of learning; after all, that is the nature of the community of academics itself.

### **Conclusion**

I have shown how social network theory informs and makes a few predictions about learning and education for Micronesian students in Hawai'i classrooms. By allowing that Micronesians come to Hawai'i as members of oral societies with different expectations for literacy, for whom language education is language change operating through social networks, we are drawn to certain members of the network, in a certain sequence. Every teacher is capable of



identifying "Micronesian" innovators, early adopters, and late adopters via more accurate first language and cultural groups. Sponsoring weak ties between innovators and early adopters can lead to faster and more extensive changes in language learning, according to social network theory. Beginning with mediated interactions with innovators, going on to sponsoring unmediated interactions between innovators and adopters, the natural current of information through social networks will actuate greater language change while leaving culturally informative ties intact (and indeed creating new ties). The currents of information within and across social networks may help us create pedagogies that better serve the language learning, self-esteem and cultural autonomy of immigrants from oral societies, such as the Micronesians of Hawai'i.

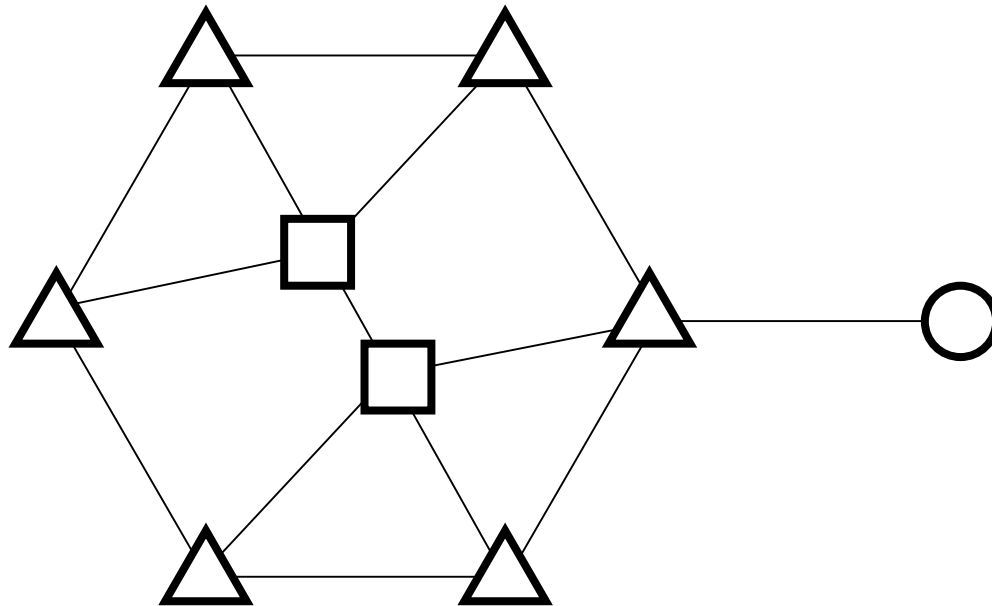
## References

- Adams, D. W. (1995). *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience*. Lawrence: U P Kansas.
- Benner, A. D., & Graham, S. (2011, March / April). Latino Adolescents' Experiences of Discrimination Across the First 2 Years of High School: Correlates and Influences on Educational Outcomes. *Child Development, 82*(2), 508-5119. Retrieved 2014
- Blair, C. (2011, June 20). No Aloha for Micronesians in Hawaii. *Honolulu Civil Beat*. Retrieved from <http://www.civilbeat.com/articles/2011/06/20/11650-no-aloha-for-micronesians-in-hawaii/>
- Bosworth, D. A. (2011). American Indian Boarding Schools: An Exploration of Global Ethnic & Cultural Cleansing. Ziibiwing Center of Anishnabe Culture and Lifeways.
- Corona, R., Stevens, L. F., Halfond, R. W., Shaffer, C. M., Reid-Quiñones, K., & Gonzalez, T. (2012). A Qualitative Analysis of What Latino Parents and Adolescents Think and Feel About Language Brokering. *Journal of Child Family Studies, 21*, 788-798.
- Gee, J. P. (1986, December). Orality and Literacy: from the Savage Mind to Ways with Words. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(4).

- Glenn, A. (2012). Wayfinding in Pacific Linguascapes: Negotiating Tokelau Linguistic Identities in Hawai'i. Honolulu, HI: U Hawai'i at Manoa.
- Granovetter, M. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1360-1380.
- Granovetter, M. (1983). The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited. *Sociological Theory*, 1, 201-233.
- Harris, P. M., & Jones, N. A. (2005). *We the People: Pacific Islanders in the United States*. US Census Bureau.
- Heine, H. C. (2002). *Culturally Responsive Schools for Micronesian Immigrant Students*. Honolulu: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.
- Hezel, F. X. (2001). *The new shape of old island cultures: A half century of social change in Micronesia*. Honolulu: U Hawai'i P.
- Kaneshiro, S. M., & Black, R. S. (2012). Strengths and Resources of Micronesian Students in a Hawai'i Middle School. *Pacific Educational Research Journal*, 14(1), 43-66.
- Kupferman, D. W. (2009). *Lutlut in a Strange Land: Kosraean Immigrant Perceptions of Schooling in Hawai'i*. *Micronesian Educator*, 13, 19-34.
- Letman, J. (2013, October 3). *Micronesians in Hawaii face uncertain future*. Retrieved from Al Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/humanrights/2013/10/micronesians-hawaii-face-uncertain-future-201310191535637288.html>
- Li, G. (2012). Literature Engagement Through Online and Offline Communities Outside School: English Language Learners' Development as Readers and Writers. *Theory into Practice*(51), 312-318. Retrieved 2014
- Milroy, J., & Milroy, L. (1985). Linguistic change, social network, and speaker innovation. *Journal of Linguistics*, 21, 339-84.
- Milroy, L. (2000). Social Network Analysis and Language Change. *European Journal of English Studies*, 4(3), 217-223.
- Nakagawa, L. (2011, July 3). Anti-Bullying Measure awaits governor's OK. *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. Retrieved April 2014, from [http://www.staradvertiser.com/news/20110703\\_Anti\\_bullying\\_measure\\_a\\_waits\\_governors\\_OK.html](http://www.staradvertiser.com/news/20110703_Anti_bullying_measure_a_waits_governors_OK.html)

- Okamoto, S. K., Mayeda, D. T., Ushiroda, M., Rehuher, D., Lauilefue, T., & Ongalibang, O. (2008). Risk and Protective Factors of Micronesian Youth in Hawai'i: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of Social Welfare, 35*(2), 127-147.
- Ong, W. J. (2002). *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the World* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Paul, K. A. (2003). Is There a Problem Here? The History of Micronesian Immigration and Its Affect [sic] on the Experience of Micronesian Children in Hawaii's Schools. U Hawai'i-Mānoa.
- Peacock, K. (1984). The Maze of Schools: American Education in Micronesia. In K. Knudsen (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Pacific Islands Studies Conference: History of the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* (pp. 83-103). Honolulu: U Hawai'i-Mānoa.
- Rehg, K. L. (2004, December). Linguists, Literacy, and the Law of Unexpected Consequences. *Oceanic Linguistics, 43*(2), 498-518.
- Skyrms, B. (1996). *Evolution of the Social Contract*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U P.
- "Social Networks: An International Journal of Structural Analysis." (2014). Retrieved April 2014, from Elsevier Web site: <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/social-networks/>
- Spencer, M. L. (2012). Paths of Central Caroline Island Children during Migration and Times of Rapid Change. *Pacific Asia Inquiry, 3*(1), pp. 7-29.
- Student honor roll in Hawai'i. (2014, May 16). *Marshall Islands Journal*, p. 18.
- Tomlinson, T. (1989). An ethnographic study of students' oral performance in the mixed francophone-anglophone university classroom. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, XIX*(3), 53-71. Retrieved 2014
- Trudgill, P. (2010). Social Structure, Language Contact, and Language Change.
- Trudgill, P. (2012, August). On the sociolinguistic typology of linguistic complexity loss. *Language Documentation & Conservation, Special Publication No. 3*, 90-95.
- Villanueva, C. M., & Buriel, R. (2010). Speaking on Behalf of Others: A Qualitative Study of the Perceptions and Feelings of Adolescent Latina Language Brokers. *Journal of Social Issues, 66*(1), 197-210.

Vorsino, M. (2012, December 19). 20 Kealakehe students punished for fights.  
*Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. Retrieved April 2014



**Figure 1.** Typical graph of a social network. This graph of an imaginary social network shows the ties (vertices) between an innovator (circle node), six early adopters (triangle nodes), and two late adopters (square nodes).

***Nik Willson** lives with his family and works on Majuro atoll, as an English and music appreciation teacher for the College of the Marshall Islands, as a bilingual materials developer with the RMI Ministry of Education and the Customary Law and Language Commission, and as a volunteer for Island Research and Education Initiative. He recently completed a dictionary of Marshallese and English available for free online (google: lalenaan). Current work includes producing children's songs in Marshallese, developing bilingual software for language instruction and learning, and creating leveled bilingual readers in bible stories with help from local churches, as well as more bilingual dictionaries: beginner, junior and collegiate.*

# NOTES FROM MY "NATIVE" DAUGHTER



BY  
DAVID W. KUPFERMAN

# Notes from my "Native" Daughter

David W. Kupferman

Tulik nse nutik inge mutacwacak lutlut wi Kindergarten ke public school se fin acn Hawai'i. Lutlut ah filiyac ke (ELL) suc ma nusin tulik mu sasuc nuke kas english ku srack luti kas english. Fine el fahk kahs English wo ac takunlah pah. Hawai'i Department of Education filiyac mu english lal u munas ke sripen pal se nga registered el ke mutawacyan lutlut ah nga tu sumuslah ke application lal ah mu language luo lal pa Kosraean ac English. Kewana languages luo inge el orekmakin lohm ah len nukewa. Yok kisensiyuk luk nga som in osun nu sin lutlut ah ke sripac se inge. Ma kalem pa wangin akolah wowo lalos nu ke ip se inge. Sahp seselah tulik aset tafun Micronesia in wi lutlut sac mu orekmakin kewana kas lun ninac ac papah tumaclos. Lungse lun lutlut ah pa ngan sulaclah sie sin language ah muh in pa language lal u. Nga akalemye tiac insese luk nu kac . Sim luk u ngetang siyac oru lun Hawai'i Department of Education nuke tiac akolah lalos nusin tulik ma orekmakin languages luo yokna nusin tulik Micronesia. Masap lun lutlut ah filiyac mu tulik se fin orekekmakin languages luo el ekin munas ke English suc ma pa ingan language se ma elos patok yok ke lutlut laos fin acn Hawai'i.

## Abstract

When my daughter entered Kindergarten in public school in Hawai'i, she was classified as ELL (English Language Learner) despite the fact that she is a native English speaker. The Hawai'i Department of Education's assessment of her implied English-language deficiency lay in the fact that I had registered her as bilingual, and as a native speaker of both English and Kosraean. When I challenged the school's approach to misrepresenting my daughter's abilities in language, their remedies were irrelevant to the issue as well as indicative of how unprepared they are to deal with students and families from Micronesia. Using



an autoethnographic frame, this paper looks at the effects of the Hawai'i Department of Education's current inability to negotiate encounters with Micronesian students and families, as well as the political and policy implications of labeling bilingual students as language-deficient in a state that purports to be officially bilingual.

**Keywords:** *ELL, misidentification, bilingualism, test anxiety, politics of education, autoethnography, Kosrae*

“There is always progress when a political problem is replaced by a human  
problem.”

--Albert Camus, *Algerian Chronicles*

### “Making Up” Language

Early in her first year of public school as a Kindergartener in Hawai'i, my daughter was classified as an English Language Learner (ELL) despite the fact that she is a native English speaker. The confusion seems to have stemmed from the fact that she is also a native speaker of Kosraean. Although, to be clear, I should state that the “confusion” – if indeed there was any – came entirely from the school she was attending, and the set of policies regarding first language/s from the Hawai'i Department of Education that I would later encounter. From the perspective of our family, however, her ability to claim two languages as “native” or “first” languages was not a contradiction; rather, she spoke English and Kosraean fluently and learned them concurrently, as she was raised in a bilingual household. This phenomenon should not be surprising, and least of all the Hawai'i Department of Education, since, if nothing else, Hawai'i is the only officially bilingual state in the US. Yet one day she came home with an ominously bureaucratic letter from her school listing the dates of ACCESS testing, during which her English-language skills would be evaluated.

First, though, it might be better if I backed up and started at what is closer to the beginning. The week prior to the start of the school year, all children entering Kindergarten are assessed by their prospective teachers in various skills:

communication, comprehension, reading (or at least letter recognition), basic social skills, and so on. The assessment lasts thirty minutes, and there is an ostensible debriefing meeting with parents immediately afterwards. Since my daughter had attended pre-school the previous year and was fairly socially competent for a five-year old, I didn't expect any issues during my brief conversation with her teacher.

For the most part, she had done just as anticipated, and there were no concerns expressed by the teacher – except one. She relayed that my daughter had claimed to be able to speak another language, although the teacher was unfamiliar with the name of it and could not confidently remember what it was called. She suggested that it sounded like my daughter was mispronouncing “Korean,” but in the end the teacher assumed that my daughter was “just making it up.” However, she wasn't too concerned because her English language skills were obviously those of a native speaker.

I proceeded to explain that my daughter was not, in fact, “making up” a language, and that she was indeed a native speaker of Kosraean (I took care to spell it out for her) as well as English. Her mother, I continued, is from Kosrae, and I did my best to situate it within the context of the Hawaiian social imaginary while taking care not to reiterate any popular myths about “Micronesians” as some monolithic diasporic population. The teacher seemed to take a minute to process my clarification about my daughter's language skills, not the least because of the structures of privilege that I likely represented in that encounter as a white American male, who at the same time was defending the legitimacy of Kosraean as both a “real” language as well as a “real” society, complete with its own epistemological modes of constructing reality. Yet the teacher's conclusions about my daughter's language abilities, and the potential connections to her origins, are telling of a larger “Othering” of Micronesians because, for the most part, many local Hawai'i residents simply don't know enough about this newest wave of immigrants to the islands; or rather, what they do know is rooted in falsehoods and other similarly inaccurate sociohistorical assumptions. The subjectivity of “the Micronesian” in Hawai'i therefore figures as a complex assemblage of a problematic “Other” of whom the popular sociocultural imaginary is largely

ignorant. My daughter may as well have “made up” a language, since, in the context of her teacher and the school, it would not count as legitimate anyway.

While there is little clarity in terms of the numbers of Micronesians moving to Hawai'i and the US mainland and their reasons for doing so, there is even less scholarship that focuses on the Kosraean community, in Hawai'i or elsewhere (Kupferman, 2009; Spencer, 2012). Much of this lack of understanding is therefore reinforced by misinformation and misunderstanding (Blair, 2011), and so Islanders from Micronesia become the latest subjects in a long line of historical problematizations throughout US history: whereas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there was “the Irish problem,” “the Jewish problem,” and so on, today in Hawai'i (and to a different extent in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) we are faced with “the Micronesian problem.”

I should add a caveat at this point and remind the reader that there are a few factors that one should keep in mind so that my daughter's story is not conflated with some broader, featureless generalizations about Micronesian immigrant experiences in Hawai'i. First, as I have mentioned, I am a white American, and so am not a “Micronesian” parent. As such, my daughter exists in a variety of loci of enunciation, that is, a set of times and spaces, simultaneously. I prefer this notion, from Mignolo (1995), as one's locus of enunciation offers more opportunities for considering possibilities for identity, reflexivity, and the constructions of one's subjectivity, than positionality, which by default operates in an unproductive binary (us/them, insider/outsider, colonizer/colonized). This selfsame binary then leads to notions of individuals with bi- or multi-ethnic origins as living in “two worlds” without providing for the potentiality that, in fact, there are a multiplicity of contexts in which all of us operate. I am hoping here to flesh out what those various worlds look like, and how they perform in conjunction with (while occasionally opposed to) each other. Another factor to consider is that my daughter is not technically an “immigrant” to the US in the way that, say, her mother is. (For the sake of space and clarity, I will forego a discussion here about settler colonialism in Hawai'i, yet that is certainly a valid subject of inquiry for a different time).

A final factor is one that underlies this entire essay: my daughter is bilingual, and equally fluent in both English and Kosraean. One might think that these three

issues (her white American father; her non-immigrant status; and her fluency in English) would be classified as beneficial, and in fact provide her with any number of advantages in public school in Hawai'i. Yet her inclusion as a member of a Micronesian community worked to negate those elements, and instead her linguistic connection with the Micronesian student population in the school (of which she is a member) in fact became the primary deficit to her schooling experience. From day one (or rather, from the time of her Kindergarten assessment, before the first day of school), she was identified – by both systems and individuals operating within those systems – as part of a larger “problem.”

The lens through which I consider this problematization of my daughter and her language abilities in public schooling is one of autoethnography, what Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research...connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739). Yet I am not intending to follow the path of evocative autoethnography, and try to appeal to the reader's emotions to make my point. Instead, I am more interested in performing what is closer to an analytic autoethnography, wherein I use these ethnographic field notes from my daughter's experiences so that they are “not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalization” (Anderson, p. 388). This essay is, therefore, not one focused on victimization or delegitimization; rather, it is but one of a myriad number of examples of Micronesian (writ large) encounters with public schooling, and their real effects on people. It is through this brief reflexive exercise, and speaking from diverse loci of enunciation, that I engage with both my and my daughter's confrontations with the school.

### **The Myopia of Sight Words**

Shortly after the new year, my daughter came home with a letter from the school stating that she had scored as “exceptional” on the ACCESS for ELLs language acquisition test. ACCESS for ELLs (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners) is an annual assessment developed by World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) for all fifty state Departments of Education in the US. WIDA, housed at the University of

Wisconsin, came into being as part of a grant made possible under the auspices of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. In the decade since its development, the ACCESS test has become the most ubiquitous evaluation instrument for assessing English language proficiency in the nation. What is more, the ACCESS test is “given to Kindergarten through 12 graders who have been *identified* as English language learners” (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, emphasis added). It is this notion of identification which is most problematic.

The day after receiving this supposed “good” news about my daughter’s English language capacity (that she was “exceptional” and therefore at the head of the ELL class), I went to ask her teacher about it; namely, why she was tested in the first place, seeing as how she is a native English speaker. Her teacher was unable to explain how it was that she was tested without having first informed me. However, she was far more helpful in explaining why my daughter had been identified as ELL: at the end of the first quarter, she had not yet successfully completed her first sight word book.

For those who are unfamiliar with them, sight words are typically based on the one hundred most common words in English. Children, in this view, should be able to recognize them by sight, rather than sounding them out, in order to facilitate reading. The sight word movement has been embraced fully by the Hawai’i Department of Education, and stands in stark contrast to the whole language movement that came to prominence in the 1980s. While I am not concerned here with revisiting the history of the reading debates of the last few decades, it is important to note that, broadly speaking and without meaning to sound too reductionist, whole language attempts to develop literacy skills in children through attention to context and the relationships among and between words. Sight words, on the other hand, are learned in isolation, and remove any meaning from the words other than their recognizability. Johnson (2004) differentiates between whole language approaches as constructivist, in that they are focused on the learner and connect words to both each other and to larger meanings in the world; while literacy strategies such as sight words are, in contrast, instructionist, as they are teacher-centered and concerned primarily with skill-building.

Another complication related to sight word books is the way they are used. At my daughter's school, they operate as high-stakes tests; that is, they are all or nothing. You either get every word correct or you fail the entire assessment. My daughter practiced reading her first sight word book of 20 words for the first two weeks of school, both by herself and with an adult in the house. By the third week of August, she had attempted her first sight word test, and failed. She missed one word. She continued to practice, and again tried to pass the first sight word book the following week. She failed again, this time missing a different word. When I asked her if she wanted to keep practicing, she began to shut down. She wanted to have nothing to do with sight words, and I was not inclined to force them upon her. Rather, she began to display outwards signs of conventional test anxiety, and she refused to be tested on the sight words for the foreseeable future. Segool, et al. (2013) note that "test anxiety is associated with impaired test performance and impaired knowledge acquisition in academic skill areas" (p. 495), as it simultaneously impacts an individual's behavior and physiology. Thus, while my daughter was able to continue to sound out words as she read to me entire books at her reading level and demonstrate fluency by taking into account context clues and making meaning of groups of words, she became less and less fluent in reading the first twenty sight words. When I occasionally prodded her, she would grudgingly practice the words, but before long she struggled with them to the extent that, by the middle of October, it seemed that she was seeing them for the first time. Interestingly, when those same words appeared in her books, as parts of complete sentences and thoughts, she had no trouble identifying or reading them. By the end of the school year, when she had revisited the sight word books and began to pass them, she explained that her teacher tested her on the words in the order they appeared in the book, so that my daughter was not actually recognizing them so much as she was memorizing their order.

Yet the political weight and implications of the sight word books was much greater than even test anxiety, for it triggered a mechanism within the school (and by implication the state Department of Education) that identified her as ELL. Indeed, the sight word books in this case are little more than a symptom of a larger systemic philosophy of language and learning that treats languages other than



English as a “problem.” In conjunction with the social imaginary’s simultaneous negative production and erasure of Micronesian languages, cultures, and people as contingent – and therefore delegitimate – the tale of sight words becomes rather complex.

The great irony of this is that Hawai‘i is the only state in the country that is officially bilingual (at least on paper, although a case can easily be made that the use of Hawaiian in official communications is both sporadic and subordinate to that of English). And so, ignoring the inconvenience of legislated bilingualism, the schools in the state consider “other” languages – and, by extension, the “Others” who speak them – as a problem to be solved, or at the very least overcome. In this way, as Macedo, Dendinos, and Gourani (2003), contend, language policy in the public schools is both produced by, and productive of, a larger “English-first” globalization project that seeks to normalize English as “real” language, in the public and political sphere, while relegating all others as dispensable. Similarly, Safford and Drury (2013) trace the emerging conflict between multiculturalism and prescriptive state educational language policies, so that while the influx of new languages and cultures in the schools represents, on the one hand, a sort of “colonization in reverse” wherein during the last two decades, a time of the so-called postcolonial, formerly colonized groups migrate to the metropolis, there is also a simultaneous normalization of English as the language of schooling. As a result, “There is little space for schools to respond to local language and cultural contexts and therefore little space for teaching or assessment practices that take account of bilingual children’s learning paths” (p. 73). It is this lack of a space, which is foreclosed on by national English language policies such as those codified in NCLB and reinforced by the ACCESS test for ELLs, that produces the conditions in which identification of English language learners becomes routinized and, in terms of federal dollars, rewarded. Thus, when I took my concerns to the administration at the elementary school, I was first passed off to the ELL coordinator, who told me that there are over 100 students [out of 400 in the school] who are identified as ELL, and that I should therefore not worry about the classification of my daughter. But if my daughter was mis-identified, for various reasons, the possibility exists that other students had been as well. What, then, are the implications of a school that

has cheerfully labeled (and potentially mislabeled) 25% of its student population? Or, put another way, does the ACCESS test simply *identify* ELL students, or does it in fact *produce* them?

### **An Identity of Erasure**

In my quest to find out just how exactly my daughter had been classified as ELL, I eventually found myself in conversation with the assistant principal (this is after I had exhausted my interactions with the classroom teacher and the ELL coordinator). Over the course of a series of phone calls, he finally provided another piece to the puzzle, perhaps the most important (and certainly containing the most political implications for our discussion here): on my daughter's student enrollment form for Kindergarten, I had (mistakenly, it turns out, according to the assistant principal) listed my daughter's primary language as in fact two languages, English and Kosraean. Under "Language Information" at the top of the second page of the form, one is instructed to "select a letter from the list and fill in the blanks below," followed by three language contexts: "Student's First Acquired Language"; "Language Most Often Spoken at Home"; and "Language Most Often Used by Student." The letter "A" designates English, followed by 24 Pacific Island and Asian languages, listed B-K and M-Z. The letter "L" denotes "Other" with a blank line for one to specify the language. My mistake, I was told by the assistant principal, was in putting two letters in any blank. Thus, each of the three contexts were marked "A/L" (with "L" representing Kosraean, which is not one of the other listed languages – notably among them, Chamorro, Chuukese, Marhalese, and Pohnpeian).

The assistant principal informed me that by putting any letter other than (or in addition to) "A" for English was an immediate flag for bilingualism. Taken together with my daughter's first quarter grade of "NY" ("Not Yet") on passing her first sight word book, she was a prime candidate for ELL identification. I protested that there were at least three things wrong with this reasoning: first, the assumption that bilingualism implies that a language other than English must be an individual's first language; second, that one cannot have more than one first language (which is true mostly only for mainstream American society and is much

harder to find in other societies); and third, that “bilingual” is a category of deficit, in that to be bilingual assumes that one is incapable of native fluency in English. (Again I will point to the irony of these assumptions in the state of Hawai‘i, which has designated itself, through legislation, as officially bilingual.) I suggested that it was possible not only for my daughter to be bilingual, but to also have native fluency in both languages (since she in fact does). In the meantime, I was told, in an echo of the ELL coordinator’s response to my concerns, not to worry, as my daughter had initially tested as “exceptional” on the ACCESS test in the fall. I explained that she was “exceptional” because she *walked in* as a native English speaker, not because of any services she may have received at the school. This concept seemed lost on the assistant principal, which led to a problematic series of emails between the two of us.

The first message, from the assistant principal, reads as follows:

This is [*sic*] e-mail is in response to our conversation on February 10, 2014 regarding English Language Learner testing, and the bilingual designation, of your daughter. As explained, there are currently three options you may select moving forward:

1. Allow [your daughter] to be tested. If [she] passes the Access test she will be monitored by our ELL coordinator for two years. If monitoring shows [she] is performing well without the need for ELL services, she will no longer be considered as an English Language Learner. Her Language Information would remain as English/Kosraean.
2. Write a letter requesting [your daughter] not participate in Access testing and a separate letter requesting removal from the ELL program. Both letters would need to be completed on an annual basis to opt of testing and ELL services.
3. Complete a Home Language Survey to indicate English only as primary language so an ELL Language Change Form & Action Code 01 Documentation can be processed. This option would remove the Kosraean designation on the SIS-10W form under Language Information. (Personal Communication, Feb. 10, 2014)

I was thus given three equally distasteful choices: accept my daughter's ELL designation and allow the school to "monitor" her until the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; write two letters every year until she graduates high school opting out of services; or effectively erase her Kosraean identity by designating English as her *primary* language and thereby producing her Kosraean language abilities as contingent. No one of these options should be acceptable to a parent of a child who was misidentified, since they each shift the burden of proof from the school on to the parent. Fixing the school's mistake now became my responsibility. Taken together, however, they speak to a larger set of forces at work in educational language policy that foreclose on the possibility of counter-narratives for bilingual students, and especially for those whose language or culture status is already suspect.

When I asked for clarification as to where these options came from, I received another telling email eleven days later, which I will consider in its component parts. To begin, I was given a thorough briefing on Hawai'i Board of Education policy and protocol as it interprets federal rules and regulations, notably the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), better known for the past decade as NCLB. Throughout this disquisition, the use of language is rather important. For example, the assistant principal stated that the school, as an institution operating as part of a federal Title III grant, is required to "evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of programs and activities in assisting limited English proficient students to attain English proficiency" under the auspices of the Hawai'i Department of Education's Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Support (OCISS). Here, as elsewhere, my daughter is produced by this discourse as having "limited English" proficiency, since the assumption employed by the assistant principal is not one of working with me, the parent, but rather protecting the school and the system under which it operates. Also of importance here is the use of the word "monitor," which was also included as part of the first of three choices originally presented to me. It is this process of what Dean (2010), elaborating on a concept originated by Foucault, defines as the assemblage of governmentality, the "techniques and practices by which it [the government] works, and the rationalities and strategies invested in it" (p. 179), whereby governmental practices produce

particular subjectivities through surveillance, evaluation, and monitoring. It follows, then, that even if I were to have accepted the terms of option 1 above, and even if my daughter had tested out of ELL services, she would still be produced as language-deficient (through no fault of her own) simply because of the ways in which the state, functioning through the school, discursively limits her possible conditions of being.

There is another node of the circulation of power operating through the discourse of the second email from the assistant principal, one that reads more like a reinterpretation of Napoleonic justice, by offering to provide services to those who may not, in fact, need them. Here I am told that

OCISS takes a conservative approach to be absolutely sure that any student who is identified as a possible English Language Learner (ELL) is on track to being successful. The ACCESS test is part of this conservative approach and is required because your daughter received the Not Yet (NY) for sight words on her report card. While I understand your concern that a single NY can pull a student to be tested, we would prefer to have confirmation a student has been verified to be proficient in English rather than let a student fall through the cracks. The options I presented to you are in line with the conservative approach. (Personal communication, Feb. 21, 2014)

It is by erring on the side of prudence, of needing to “verify” that my daughter does not require ELL services, that the school in fact creates the conditions in which she is not only identified as ELL, but monitored (for two years after testing out of services!) as an ELL. All of this despite my earlier suggestion that, in fact, my daughter is a native English speaker. The fact that she is also a native Kosraean speaker demands verification. By this logic, my daughter, and all other bilingual students (including those from Micronesian households), are guilty until proven innocent.

The email ends with a review of my options, to either write letters or acquiesce to the ACCESS testing. Again, let us pay attention to the use of language:

The second option to write a letter to exempt [your daughter] from testing, and another to exempt her from services, is a decision that is rooted in parent/student rights to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Persons with limited English proficiency are a protected class, and thus would be protected under law. The letters would inform us that you are waiving your rights. The third option is to continue with our responsibility to test [her]. (Personal communication, Feb. 21, 2014)

In the first case, my daughter has now been produced as “a protected class” and “protected under law”; yet again, she is still an ELL in the eyes of the assistant principal. Interestingly, here he is setting the school up as the protector of her rights, while I am implicitly endangering her should I choose to write the letters. However, the school’s responsibility in the final sentence is relegated not to services or legal “protection,” but rather to testing. Taken together, these statements suggest that my ELL daughter has the right to be tested, and little else. At the same time, while having the right to waive my rights (as I as the parent am also “protected under law”), by doing so I potentially would be harming her by violating her right to be tested.

This “art of government” produced through the discourse is on display in these emails. I was not going to allow my daughter to be tested as an ELL (since she is a native English speaker), nor was I going to erase her identity, as suggested by the third option in the original email. (In point of fact, when I asked how the third option would even work, the assistant principal informed me during a phone call that I could simply scratch out “Kosraean” on my daughter’s original enrollment form.) I was thus left with writing letters, and was told in a final email from the assistant principal:

Mr. Kupferman,  
You will need to write two letters.



Letter 1: Refusal for ELL program services. Please clearly state you are waiving all rights for ELL program services for your daughter. In addition, be sure to include effective date, and [her] full legal name. Please understand with the refusal [she] will NOT receive any type of ELL services, even monitoring, for the duration of her education in the Hawai'i public school system.

Letter 2: Refusal of the annual ELL ACCESS test (*Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners*). Please clearly state you would like [your daughter] to be excluded from the ACCESS test for the 2013-2014 school year. Testing is a separate from ELL program services, consequently this letter will need to be submitted each school year to be excluded from testing. (Personal communication, Feb. 24, 2014, original underlining)

Again, the *techne* of governmentality, what Dean (2010) describes as the “means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies” through which “authority [is] constituted and rule accomplished” (p. 42), dictates the limits and boundaries within which I am to operate as a subject of the school. Thus, I am “refusing” the beneficence offered to my daughter by the institution, despite the suspect (and erroneous) circumstances under which it was determined that she needed those benefits in the first place. In my letters, I did not refuse anything (for I determined that the school in this instance had nothing to offer). Instead, I stated that I was exercising my rights and those of my daughter to not be subjected to ACCESS testing on the simple grounds that she is a native speaker of English as well as Kosraean, and that these factors are not mutually exclusive.

There is a final aspect of this bricolage of governmentality that bears mentioning, and it has potential implications for other Micronesian students who are, like my daughter, dealing with a system and educational milieu that is neither aware of nor prepared for their linguistic or sociocultural backgrounds. Returning to the enrollment form, the item immediately below language is ethnicity. The

second section directs parents to “check all that apply.” Letter “L” in this case is White, which I checked, as well as letter “O”: “Micronesian (Ex. Chuukese, Marshallese, Pohnpeian).” In the next section is a simple question: “What is the student’s primary race? (Select only ONE letter from either the ethnicity or race and fill in the blank).” In the case of my daughter, with a white American father and Kosraean mother, she has no *primary* ethnicity. When filling out the form, I asked the front desk at the school if I could write “none” (the most accurate response) in the space provided. I was told no, that I had to pick one ethnicity/race. I looked again at the form and noticed the box I could check right below this simple yet problematic question (and one that is potentially wildly problematic in a minority-majority state like Hawai‘i, where “primary” ethnicity is instantly rendered with the complexities of history, migration, and colonization). The wording next to this box read: “I decline to provide ethnicity and race information. I understand that if I do not provide this information, a school representative will designate the ethnicity and race categories for my child.” Nowhere is there an explanation of *how* this designation will occur; one should be skeptical, however, given the ways by which students who may be native English speakers are identified as ELL. The link between bilingualism in English and Kosraean and the school’s production of my daughter’s primary ethnicity (despite her multi-ethnicity) demonstrates the very real impacts of governing the individual in a social context fraught with misinformation and a denial of those individuals as legitimate and sovereign beings.

Language, intimately tied to culture and one’s ability to construct and communicate reality and ways of being in the world, does not have to be produced as a deficit, especially if one has facility in multiple languages. Where such language policies as those created under NCLB fail is in their inability to see the tangible and material connections between one’s home language and academic language, and between one’s home culture(s) and the educational imaginary (Nieto, 2013). Bilingualism is an asset, yet it is produced and governed as a barrier, as something that needs to be “fixed” and that can only be remediated by the schools (Safford and Drury, 2013). When considering the implications for Micronesian children and parents as they negotiate the encounter with schools in Hawai‘i, it is clear that the schooling system is not yet prepared to meet them or listen to their needs and

expectations. My daughter's story is by no means typical, and yet it may very well be, especially as more and more Micronesian children of various backgrounds, parentages, and language abilities find themselves attending Hawai'i's public schools. My daughter's circumstances are but one example, and the barriers and assumptions that both she and I encountered are rooted in the same types of systemic failures to produce the Micronesian "other" as legitimate. Our goal should be to provide a counter-narrative to the schooling experiences of Micronesians in Hawai'i, and produce the conditions that normalize the sovereignty of Islanders as non-contingent. Rather than suggesting she erase her Kosraean identity, the school would do well to encourage her to embrace it. Nothing will make me happier than to hear my daughter explain this notion to school officials in both English and Kosraean.

## References

- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 373-395.
- Blair, C. (2011). No aloha for Micronesians in Hawai'i. *Civil Beat*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://www.aroundHawai'i.com/community/features/2011-07-no-aloha-for-micronesians-in-Hawai'i.html>
- Dean, M. (2010). *Governmentality: Power and rule in modern society*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Johnson, G.M. (2004). Constructivist remediation: Correction in context. *International Journal of Special Education*, 19(1), 72-88.
- Kupferman, D.W. (2009). *Lutlut* in a strange land: Kosraean immigrant perceptions of schooling in Hawai'i. *Micronesian Educator*, 13(1), 19-34.
- Macedo, D., Dendrinos, B., & Gounari, P. (2003). *The hegemony of English*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Mignolo, W.D. (1995) *The darker side of the renaissance: Literacy, territoriality, and colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Nieto, S. (2013). Language, literacy, and culture: Aha! moments in personal and sociopolitical understanding. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 9(1), 8-20.
- Safford, K., & Drury, R. (2013). The 'problem' of bilingual children in educational settings: Policy and research in England. *Language and Education*, 27(1), 70-81.
- Segool, N.K., Carlson, J.S., Goforth, A.N., Von Der Embse, N., & Barterian, J.A. (2013). Heightened test anxiety among young children: Elementary school students' anxious responses to high-stakes testing. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(5), 489-499.
- Spencer, M.L. (2012). Paths of central Caroline Island children during migration and times of rapid change. *Pacific Asia Inquiry*, 3(1), 7-29.
- World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment. (2014). Access for ELLs Summative Assessment. Retrieved September 1, 2014, from <http://www.wida.us/assessment/ACCESS/index.aspx>

*David W. Kupferman is an assistant professor of education at the University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu. He has a PhD in educational foundations from the University of Hawai'i – Mānoa, and previously lived and worked in the Marshall Islands and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. His first book, *Disassembling and Decolonizing School in the Pacific: A Genealogy from Micronesia*, is available from Springer as part of their *Contemporary Philosophies and Theories in Education* series. He is most interested in the ways ideas and epistemologies in the Pacific Islands intersect and conflict, and what the effects of those interactions are on the people who engage with them.*

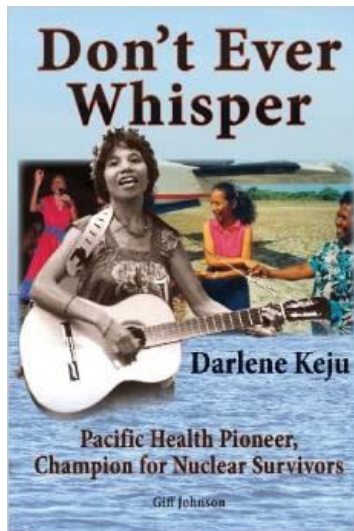
**DONT EVER WHISPER: DARLENE KEJU  
PACIFIC HEALTH PIONEER, CHAMPION  
FOR NUCLEAR SURVIVORS**



**REVIEW BY  
SUZANNE FALGOUT**



# Don't Ever Whisper: Darlene Keju - Pacific Health Pioneer, Champion for Nuclear Survivors



Review by SUZANNE FALGOUT. Giff Johnson (2013). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. 443pp. Paperback. 29 illus. ISBN-10: 1489509062, ISBN-13: 978-1489509062. \$14.17 USD.

*Don't Ever Whisper: Darlene Keju – Pacific Health Pioneer, Champion for Nuclear Survivors* is a heartwarming and inspiring tale of the transformation of a shy Marshallese girl, Darlene Keju, into a globally recognized activist on behalf of the environmental, health, and cultural survival of her people.

The biography is written by her loving American husband, Giff Johnson, who became a longtime resident of the Micronesia and an accomplished writer focusing on the history and politics of the region, particularly on nuclear issues in the Marshall Islands. Johnson is thus able to very skillfully interweave the story of the path-breaking actions of his wife, Darlene, within a detailed account of Marshallese environment and culture as well as significant regional and world events.

Darlene's life was one of both tradition and change, in her own personal life and in her work on behalf of the Marshallese people. The book begins with Darlene's early life deeply rooted in outer island Marshallese culture and family on the island of Wotje, and then greatly altered when the family moved in the 1960s to the urban island of Ebeye near Kwajalein Missile Range. Completing the mission-style elementary schooling offered there, her forward-thinking family next sent



young Darlene to live with a host family in Honolulu for an American-style education. Although she originally followed in the footsteps of her entrepreneurial father by studying business, Darlene's life dramatically shifted again when she met Giff Johnson and became a part of his well-connected, liberal, activist family. First learning from him about her own country's nuclear history, Darlene embarked on a period of voracious self-education about this event in Marshallese lives, including research on newly-released United States government documents on their nuclear testing. This new knowledge developed in Darlene a lifelong personal commitment to activism on behalf of Marshallese radiation victims and their overall health.

Stepping outside of Marshallese conventions of expressed modesty, especially among young women, Darlene found the courage to speak out on this little-known topic. She traveled around the Marshall Islands, raising the awareness of urbanites and outer islanders about the true nature and extent of the United States' nuclear testing program and the effects of nuclear fallout. Those visits also led her to question the US designation of only four Marshallese islands as officially exposed. Darlene also spoke at numerous regional, national, and even international events, bringing this issue to global attention. It was especially the speeches she delivered at the World Council of Churches and Pacific Conference of Churches that made her an international spokesperson for the issue. That outspokenness on such a politically-charged topic, however, would make her a controversial figure and would prove to be an impediment in her ability to directly enact further change for Marshallese peoples.

With perseverance, patience, and some skillful maneuvering, Darlene was eventually able to earn a Master's degree in Public Health from University of Hawai'i. There, she ended the oral defense of her thesis in typical Marshallese style--with guitar and song, accompanied by members of her own family—thereby also professing her cultural pride in being a Marshallese. Returning home to the Marshalls, Darlene continued to successfully combine knowledge gained from American institutions with Marshallese styles of expression in order to improve community health and social conditions.

Darlene eventually found work as the head of the newly established and crucially important Marshall Islands' Family Planning Program. To communicate

this sensitive knowledge, she created culturally-valued forms of entertainment--skits accompanied by music that were created and performed by the youth. This less direct form of communication became very popular; crowds eventually grew to standing-room only.

Those youths who became members of the Family Planning Youth Drama Team were trained, American-style, to speak up about such controversial topics; but, at the same time, they were also learning about such important Marshallese valued customs as song, cooperation, and sharing. As members of the Youth to Youth in Health program, these dedicated adolescents helped to overcome several problems associated with urbanization within the islands. They had a special connection with other youths in the community, which helped to foster positive changes in their behaviors. And, their own successes, furthermore, also began to reverse the negative stereotype of urban Marshallese adolescents as aimless and disconnected from their culture and their families. They were now seen as contributing members of the Marshallese community, and furthermore ones that knew and helped to preserve the traditions. Over time, grant funding and other forms of support from a very wide range of sources helped to expand these programs and training workshops to the outer islands and occasionally even beyond. This expansion also included the enlistment of wives as health care providers, the training of young women as financial managers, and the development of workshops to promote economic activities for youth on outer islands. These continued achievements led to the development of a new Marshall Islands' Division of Adolescent Health, focusing on the needs of this chronically under-served population, with Darlene Keju as its head.

Darlene's accomplishments were remarkable in themselves, and even more so when we consider that her efforts on behalf of the health and well-being of Marshallese people were accompanied by a series of personal tragedies. Like many other Marshallese exposed to radioactive fallout from US nuclear testing, throughout this period her parents, an elder sister, as well as Darlene herself struggled with cancer. Near the end of her life, Darlene rejected further invasive medical treatments in Honolulu, preferring to return to the Marshalls to continue her work on these initiatives. She continued to work until the end, finally

succumbing at the young age of 45. Her gravestone bears an inscription that imparts the courage and wisdom of both her culture and her life: “Don’t be afraid to make your way through strong ocean currents to get to the next island” (page 345).

Giff Johnson tells us that he wrote the book about his wife, Darlene, because he believes she was a pioneering citizen and a role model for people of the Marshall Islands, one whose example should be known by current and future generations. Furthermore, he cites a quote from Bishop Tutu about the example of Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa, “You know what? The great thing about everything good that has happened is that it can happen again. Simple as that” (Page 386, quoted from John Carlin, *Invictus: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation*, 2010).

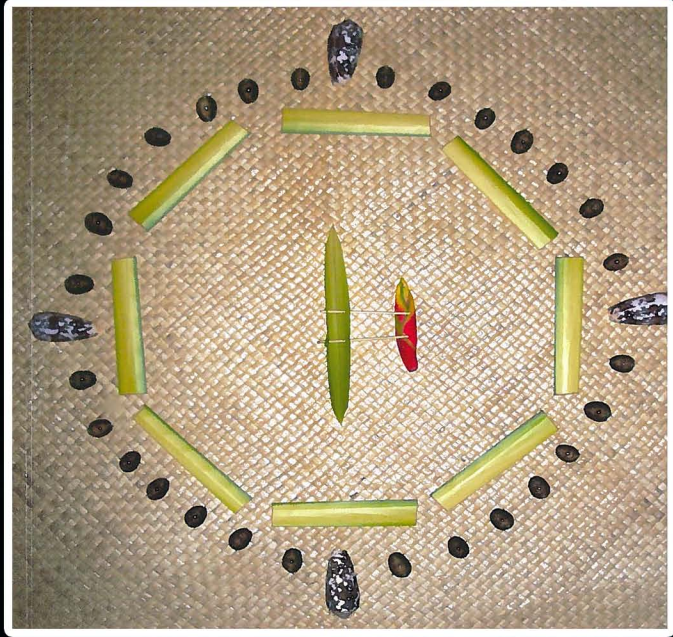
Indeed, this story of Darlene Keju, her life and her works, seems to be written primarily for peoples of the Marshall Islands. Recounted in great detail--with reference to many events, people, islands, and cultures--it assumes prior knowledge of the Marshall Islands and the general Micronesian region. For readers who are less familiar with this part of the world, the book would have benefitted by providing both general Micronesian and detailed Marshall Islands maps, a timeline of important events, as well as an index.

Yet, Giff Johnson is helping to spread this inspiring story of Darlene Keju and the Marshall Islands in a variety of other ways. The book is also available on Kindle, has its own website and Facebook page, and is a topic of discussion on the Marshall Islands’ [yokwe.net](http://yokwe.net). The book has also been turned into a documentary film, for which Giff Johnson also occasionally provides guest talks.

Let us hope, along with Giff Johnson, that the goodness exemplified by Darlene Keju will indeed inspire others--in the Marshall Islands as well as other places in the world.

*Suzanne Falgout is a Professor of Anthropology at University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu. She is a specialist in Micronesian Cultures, particularly of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia. She has conducted research on a wide range of topics—archaeology, oral traditions, history and memory, indigenous epistemology, concepts of self and gender, marriage and the family, emotions, and education in Pohnpei; plus the history American colonialism and anthropology within the wider region. She has also conducted work among Micronesians in Hawai'i, following their diaspora, settlement, and especially the plight of young Micronesian migrants in Hawai'i schools. A special focus of her work is on World War II in Micronesia, from indigenous perspectives. She is the co-author of two books, *The Typhoon of War and Memories of War* (with Lin Poyer and Laurence M. Carucci, University of Hawai'i Press). She has also traced the progress of that War back to Hawai'i, where enemy combatants captured in that region were sent to POW camps in Hawai'i. She is a co-editor of a special issue of *Social Process in Hawai'i, Breaking the Silence: Lessons of Democracy and Social Justice from the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp in Hawai'i* (with Linda Nishigaya, University of Hawai'i Press).*





Heiwa: Heiwa is the pushing of the canoe on the unfolded mat to demonstrate how a canoe will actually sail in the ocean from the departure island to the destination island. The navigator uses one or more stars or constellations and uses the faunan etak (primary reference island) and possibly a fauan yatil (secondary reference island) in tracking the course. Heiwa is also used to explain the feeling of the canoe's movement caused by the waves and swells hitting the canoe.

Image Design:  
Lawrence J. Cunningham and Manny Sikau

