

Spreading roots? Variation patterns of the future tense in Saipanese English

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This paper investigates the English *go* future, a well-established example of grammaticalization among L1 varieties, which shows layering with *will*, the present simple and the present progressive. *Be going to* developed over time from a verb expressing movement to a future marker. Whereas previous research has focused on L1 varieties, this study examines the trajectory of grammaticalization in a new emerging contact variety of English. The assimilation of Saipanese English towards L1 varieties and the extent to which local factors contribute to the acceptance or rejection of today's dominant future tense variant *be going to* are investigated.

Saipan is the largest island in the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands in the north-western Pacific Ocean. English became a community language there when the US began its administration post-WWII. The two indigenous communities, the Chamorros and Saipan Carolinians, each have their own language, yet mostly use English as a lingua franca. And, indeed, Saipanese English is gradually shifting from L2 to L1 status.

Variationist methods are used to examine the future tense in Saipanese English. Statistical analyses of a subset of a corpus collected in 2015 (sociolinguistic interviews with 95 indigenous speakers ranging in age from 12-79 years) were conducted in *R*. Results reveal constraints similar to those highlighted for other Englishes: E.g. African American diaspora varieties, British-origin rural and mainstream varieties in Canada (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1999), Toronto (Tagliamonte, 2006), Quebec (Cacoullos & Walker, 2009) and communities across the United Kingdom (Tagliamonte, Durham, & Smith, 2014). The use of *be going to* (37%) is increasing overall and is favored in subordinate clauses, interrogative sentences, immediate future contexts, non-first grammatical person, and is expanding into inanimate contexts. The trajectory of the grammaticalization of the future tense, then, follows a development similar to that of L1 varieties and, in this respect at least, demonstrates the convergence of Saipanese English towards them.

Very strikingly, however, extra-linguistic results show complex interactions for the choice of a future variant. Mobility seems to be a key factor in shaping the grammaticalization process: Speakers who spent a considerable time off island (a minimum of 5 years) favor the use of *will* whereas speakers with low mobility favor the choice of the futurate present or *be going to*. The future variants, however, are further constrained by age, sex, and occupational classification. Therefore, depending on these independent social variables, specific future variants are preferred: More traditional blue-collar speakers and young females favor the choice of the futurate present, mobile and older speakers favor the use of *will*, whereas young, white-collar male speakers follow the especially North American trend of heightened rates of *be going to*. Clearly, this variant is spreading by making inroads into an emergent English variety with familiar linguistic constraints in place but is socially

embedded. These results shed light on linguistic constraints in terms of universality and on social constraints in Saipan for the spreading roots of future *be going to*.

References

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