

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: THE CASE OF GUAM¹²

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I would like to start off my talk with a song: a song in my Chamorro language from the island of Guam in the Marianas. This may be the first time you have heard my language. The words of the song are:

*Håfa nai Chamorro
Håfa para ta cho'gue
Guini gi tano'-ta
Para i famaguon-ta*

And this is the meaning in English:

*So what Chamorros?
What are we going to do?
Here on our land,
For our children?*

But much is lost in translation; the Chamorro word for 'land' has more meaning than the English word and so does the Chamorro word for 'children'. The deep knowledge is lost. A translation can never express the full meaning.

I was a teacher for many years, then dean of a college and now a director (of the Centre of Excellence for Chamorro Language and Culture at the University of Guam) and I have travelled throughout Micronesia, to all major islands. Along the way I have made many friends in the business world and all this experience has led me to realise that there is a need for us to involve the community in our work of language maintenance, to look beyond the schools, to look at all the realities of the place for language maintenance. I am fortunate to be working alongside people who have been in the field of language protection and maintenance, and they are guiding me in my work. Together we have the education and experience to help each other find ways of involving the community. If we focus on education alone, we will be narrow in our thinking. We

¹² This is an edited transcript of Dr Salas' presentation.

need to see that education is just one little piece in the language planning process. We need to take risks, to overcome hurdles, and to look at practical ways. And we need to work with influential people. Now, this is something many of us don't think is important or necessary, but we won't get anywhere if we do not work with people who have influence.

Guam is heading in a direction of culture and language attention that Chamorros are not wanting. We have already reached the stage of needing language maintenance for the Chamorro language. Therefore, it is crucial that we focus on language maintenance right now, while our minds are keen and while we have a lot of enthusiasm. It is a particularly opportune time because the government is supporting our efforts. To give you an example—on January 12, this year became the Year of Chamorro Language and Culture, and I am proud to be chair of that event. I'll say more on this topic later; I need to tell you about Guam first.

Guam has 171,019 people.¹³ About 39% are Chamorros, that is, about 62,000 people. Approximately 25,000 of them 'hold' the Chamorran language. Fluent speakers are 60 years and above Chamorros between the ages of 40-50 have most likely missed out in speaking and learning the Chamorro language in their lives. The worry is their limited or non-use of the Chamorro language. Who will pass on, or is passing on, the language to their children?

While geographically Guam is in Micronesia, politically it is not. It is a territory of the United States. Guam is 36 miles long, between nine and twelve miles wide, and has 23 villages. Guam is the largest of the islands of Micronesia. It is also the hub of Micronesia: people come there to shop at places like K-Mart, and they eat at KFC and MacDonald's. They migrate to Guam for education and for jobs. The main revenue comes from tourism and the US military. Strategically, Guam is important because it is close to Asia.

¹³ <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ne.html> The CIA World Factbook accessed July 2006.

The official languages are English and Chamorro. The government uses English in its daily operations with minimal use of Chamorro. Chamorro is used at home in some households. Although there is a Catholic church in every village, only four masses are conducted in Chamorro. The concern for Chamorro occurred in 1964, 41 years ago, with the formation of the first Chamorro Language Commission. It wasn't until 1970 that Chamorro became an official language and Public Law 14-53 mandated that it be taught in all schools. As late as 1969 there were signs on the road which read *Speak English language only!* Between 1980 and 1990, Chamorran activist groups began to form. Chamorro language classes at the University of Guam were begun around this time and in 1999 the government established the Department of Chamorran Affairs. In 2003 the Centre of Excellence for Chamorro Language and Culture at the University of Guam was opened. Today we have cultural dance groups, Chamorro language programmes, day-care centres, TV and radio programmes in the Chamorro Language. We are recording Chamorro and we now have a collection of these in the Micronesian Area Research Centre, University of Guam. There is also a University of Guam Charter Day, which is an opportunity for the promotion of the Chamorro culture.

In terms of strengths, Chamorro is a living language, both in its spoken and written forms. But it has its weaknesses—our language has not been given a place of pride. Fewer people are speaking it, and historically it has been suppressed. Spain claimed Guam for the Spanish crown in 1565 and Spanish was taught until 1898, when the U.S. claimed it and English was taught. Then in 1941, Japan staked their claim and Japanese was taught. Now we are back to English again. All these occupations have greatly impacted the development of the Chamorro language. Today, Guam has a diversity of languages and cultures. Where does Chamorro stand in it?

Earlier, I stated that I would return to the declaration of 2005 as the year of Chamorro Language and Culture. I now return to that topic. The Governor of Guam, who is of Chamorro descent, attended the ceremony at our Chamorro village and presented our certificate. At the same time,

the legislature gave us a legislative proclamation and promised their support. It is now the Committee's responsibility to take it forward and this is happening. We are busy forming sub-committees whose members come from all walks of life—business, education, communities—and we will see that the program moves forward in a positive way. It is so important to involve the entire community. To provide you with more information on this aspect of the work involved in language maintenance, here is a handout on just what the general public can do. I pulled this off the Internet, in my capacity as your resource person, and it may give you some ideas you can use in your countries.

[Editors' note: Dr Salas discussed some points (a) from *In Public*: section 6.1 headed Strategies for Restoring and Revitalising Use of First Nations Languages, and (b) from *What is Language Planning?* These are given below.]

From *In Public*

Use the indigenous language in promotional posters, billboards, traffic signs, road signs.

Support and reward the use of the language on public occasions.

Find ways to integrate the use of the language into the workplace.

Use the indigenous language in community newsletters.

Organise evenings or events where you can bring speakers of the language from different communities together, and encourage young people to attend.

From *What is Language Planning?*

Renowned language planner Joshua Fishman (Fishman 1990) proposes eight stages which, if carried out successfully, can bring the use of language back. They are:

Ensuring Intergenerational transmission

8. Reconstruct the language, especially those that are not well documented.
7. Mobilise fluent speakers.
6. Restore intergenerational transmission (through family, neighbourhood and community reinforcement).
5. Teach the language in school.

Extending the Usage

4. Implement immersion and strong bilingual education.
3. Use the language in work environments.
2. Offer government services in the language.
1. Use the language in higher education, media and government.

Stage 6 is the most critical stage. It involves the promotion of use of the language in the home. You can do all you like in the school, but it is only when the home environment and the community are impacted that you will see success.

As educators, as linguists, as specialists, or as directors of education, we need to tear down the walls. We need to bring an awareness of the link between education and the community and bring education and the community closer together. In my opinion, this has not been done very well in Guam yet. We have tended to focus on the schools alone. Let's look at some success stories from *What is Language Planning?*

Hebrew is often named as a language that has been successfully revived. ... Jewish people went through centuries of being suppressed in their religion and culture. In 1948 the State of Israel was created. By this time, the speaking of Hebrew had been kept alive, often in secret, in religious ceremonies. Much of it, however, was confined to religious texts.... Jewish people who moved to Israel ... were from many different language backgrounds ...and needed a common language...A nation-state with autonomy over educational, political and social institutions enabled the quick come-back of Hebrew, which was enforced as the national language in all public institutions after 1948.

Maori has been called a 'language that has risen from its deathbed' The Maori language revival was driven by: (i) the creation of a popular movement within the context of a movement towards cultural and political autonomy; (ii) flexible boundaries of ethnicity: everyone who professes to Maori identity and cultural roots can be incorporated in the community.

My Power Point presentation shows extracts from R. Cooper's book, *Language Planning and Social Change*, and I shall comment as we view them.

- Language planning is typically carried out for the attainment of non-linguistic ends such as consumer protection, scientific exchange, national integration, political control, economic development, the creation of new elites or the maintenance of old ones, the pacification or cooption of minority groups, and mass mobilisation of national or political movements.
- When planning is directed towards increasing a language's uses, it falls under the rubric of status planning.
- When planning is directed towards increasing the number of users—speakers, writers, listeners or readers—it falls under language acquisition.
- Bilingual programs which employ good teaching practices and use the mother tongue for more than a token proportion of the curriculum may well be successful.
- Language planners cannot ignore the time-dependent nature of change in language use, language structure and language acquisition.
- Language planning was employed to maintain or strengthen elite power, the power of the influential, the power of those who get the most of what there is to get, the power of counter-elites.

Elites and Counter-elites

- Government leaders
- Literary elites
- Language scholars
- University professors
- Linguistic consultants

So there you are. You have an idea. You know your idea is good for the whole country. You want to take it through. OK. You need your influential people to help you out. Some of you may say to yourself: "Oh! I don't know about that!" but in fact these are the people who can move forward with an idea. So you go to your president or your governor or whoever it is. To give you an example: Dr. Katherine Aguon has been working for at least 20 years on phrase books, dictionaries, radio shows in and so many more activities in Chamorro. Former Congressman Robert Underwood and Dr. Bernadita Camacho-Dungca have done likewise. Dr. Aguon went persistently to the governor

to plead with him to declare this year, the Year of Chamorro Language and Culture, and he finally agreed. It is a good time to be active in this way, an opportune time, for our governor and most of our senators are Chamorro. But this won't always be so; in the years ahead Chamorros may be in a minority in these upper echelons. This is the time to move.

Here's the next slide:

Chief determinants of variability in success of language learning.

- Intensity of study
- Quality of instruction
- Usefulness of language outside the school

The intensity of study refers to the courses that are taught, and quality of instruction refers to the teachers. Here I must point out that this is an area that needs improving. We see that our children are taking Chamorro as a subject all the way through school but are leaving without gained fluency. Something is not working and we cannot blame the teachers. We must look at other factors. Could it be their professional development? Could it be the home environment? Could it be the attitude of the community?

My next slide:

Opportunities and incentives

- Opportunities and incentives to learn are important to success.
- Material incentives to learn (business, employment).
- Commercial incentives for the promotion and defense of language maintenance.

Opportunities and incentives—I like these words! Employers should make knowledge of Chamorro a pre-requisite for getting the job. So if a person can't speak Chamorro, they will have to learn it. This sort of thing is happening in California, where teachers have to know Spanish. If they don't, they attend courses, and the government pays them to do so. There's the material incentive!

The next two slides:

Language Maintenance

- Implies its acquisition by the next generation
- Efforts to return to a more desirable state of affairs
- When a language declines, smaller and smaller percentages of ensuing generations acquire the language. Prevention of decline requires maintenance of acquisition.

Language Maintenance Goals

- Create or improve the opportunity to learn.
- Create or improve the incentive to learn.
- Create or improve both opportunity and incentive simultaneously.

The language maintenance goals involve the school and beyond, into the community. Classes in Chamorro can be held—and so can intergenerational talk sessions. Remember that Chamorro is needed in order to communicate with the elders. The government needs to insist on giving Chamorro more prestige, and this can be done by making it a requirement for government officials.

Now we move on to language maintenance methods. These are all possibilities and we need to find out which ones work for us.

Language Maintenance Methods

Direct ~ Classroom instruction, provision of materials for self-instruction in vernacular language, production of literature, newspaper, radio, television programs in simplified version of vernacular language

Indirect ~ efforts to shape the learner's mother tongue

Incentive to learn methods

Vernacular language is compulsory subject in secondary schools

Vernacular language is the medium of instruction

Teaching of the vernacular language as a subject begins in the early grades

Opportunity and incentive for learning methods

Immersion in bilingual education program

I have a few comments to make on the last slide, which deals with values in language maintenance efforts. A word of caution in connection with Point 1: once you start focussing on one language, Chamorro for example, all the other linguistic groups, such as the Filipinos in our case, are not too happy. This has to be handled with care! What is the language plan for major language groups? With regard to Point 2, we must remember that language and culture can never be separated. Doing language activities is the same as doing cultural activities. And regarding Point 3, an economic benefit for Guam is eco-tourism. This can be expanded if cultural practices are promoted and included. Tourists can be taken to the jungles, to village fiestas—yes, every village has a fiesta once a month and everyone is invited. There's dancing, food, cockfights, even Bingo! We need to piggy-back on what's good, build in other things that can promote literacy.

Value in Language Maintenance Efforts

1. Support by community and schools of a threatened language can mitigate the negative attitudes towards the language and its speakers, which typically accompany language decline and which have been internalised by speakers and potential speakers of the language.
2. Language promotional activities usually help to transmit the ethnic history and traditional lifeways which are typically threatened along with the language: the self-awareness and self-confidence which can be gained through the recovery of such information have value in themselves; and
3. Economic benefits accrue to local communities engaged in revitalisation or maintenance efforts in the form of jobs for teachers, teacher-aids, teacher trainers, curriculum and materials developers, and so forth.

So there we are. We are moving ahead in Guam; we've done the research and now it's up to us to revitalise and restore our language.

And to end; this talk, I'd like to share these (cousin to jellybeans) with you. As you can see, there are lots of different colours and each has a

distinctive flavour. Like jellybellies, we are colourful people. Some colours are radiating now; others are dull. Some jellybellies are culturally appropriate (coconut-flavoured, lime-flavoured, banana-flavoured); others are not. In Guam, there is a richness of languages and cultures and when people have the opportunity to live their languages and cultures, respect and appreciation of others will also develop.

Si Yu'os Ma'åse'