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Language change: linguistic imperialism
or empowerment?
*Observations on the use of English in
contemporary urban Samoa.*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Social Anthropology

at

Massey University, Albany

New Zealand.

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2014

Abstract

English is widely considered to be a global language, the lingua franca of the modern world, and the language of globalisation. For some cultures, this English imperialism equates to the loss of their indigenous language(s). Amidst growing concerns that language loss is occurring in the Pacific, this research seeks to explore the use and purpose of English in contemporary urban Samoa, and considers the effect this is having on *Gagana Samoa* – the Samoan language.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory, this study argues that English occupies an important place in Samoan society as it possesses symbolic and economic capital which can be utilised by both individuals and family units, within Samoa and overseas. Furthermore I explore the role of music in English language acquisition and use, and assert that music is a means of gaining symbolic capital within Samoan society. Finally I discuss Samoan perspectives of language change and consider the future of the English and Samoan languages in Apia.

The fieldwork for this research was conducted over a period of six weeks in the village of Moata'a, and the wider Apia area in Upolu, Samoa. My research methods consisted of participant observation, discussions with key informants and informal interviews. I also carried out observations at three early educational establishments, Sunday school, preschool and primary school.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have contributed to making this thesis a success. Words cannot adequately express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude, though I hope you can all accept the important role each of you has had in this journey. *Fa'afetai tele lava.*

Dr Eleanor Rimoldi and Dr David Ishii, thank you for believing in me from day one. Your unfaltering support, positivity and care have made this process a fantastic learning experience as well as an extremely enjoyable one. I feel honoured to have worked so closely with you, and I will carry with me all the advice you have imparted.

Thanks also to Professor Cluny Macpherson, Dr Moses Faleolo, Dr Kathryn Rountree and Dr Graeme McRae for your encouragement, advice and assistance throughout this process.

The entire postgraduate group at Massey. Thank you for validating my fears and frustrations, for your kind support, and, for reminding me to laugh.

My adoptive families; The Alofa-Metzgers and the Ionas. You looked after me as if I was one of your own, and provided me with a home away from home. *Fa'afetai tele le agalofa ma le agalelei.*

Rev Dr Taipisia Leilua and the Sunday school teachers of the *Moata'a* Congregation Christian Church of Samoa. Thank you for welcoming me into your village, church and home and providing me with many wonderful experiences.

Galumalemana Alfred Hunkin and Letuimanuasina Dr Emma Kruse-Va'ai thank you for all your assistance and time.

Leasiolagi Dr Malama Meleisea, To'oto'oali'i Roger Stanley, Mata'afa Keni Lesa, Reverend Falefatu Enari and Dr Penelope Schoeffel thank you for giving me your time. Thank you also you for the insightful and thought provoking conversations.

Xavier your selfless time and care made such a difference to the enjoyment and success of my time in Samoa. I am indebted to you in many ways. Thank you so much for everything.

Tapulei, Faleolo, Sharon, Bete, Ronald, Losa and all the children at Taumesina. Thank you for protecting me from the dogs and the 'cheeky' boys. Thank you for the language lessons, games and always making me smile.

Moata'a preschool, Moata'a primary school and St Mary's primary school - thank you for welcoming me into your classrooms and answering my many questions.

Lai, your wisdom has been invaluable and your 'interview' remains one of the highlights of my fieldwork.

Fabie, you are an angel. Thank you so much for all the time and effort you invested in me, you were instrumental in my preparations for Samoa. Also Tai and everyone else at the Pasifika Haos thank you for making me feel so welcome in your home.

To everyone at the 'naughty table' at Manu Mea, thank you for the advice, encouragement and fun memories.

Thank you also to those whose names I haven't mentioned but who showed me kindness in Samoa. Each of you contributed to making my fieldwork a wonderful experience that I will treasure my entire life.

To my parents - your unwavering support, love and encouragement have been crucial to the success of this project. Thank you especially, Mum, for inspiring me through our own journey and also for the countless hours spent proofreading.

Olivia, my oldest and dearest friend. You have been my biggest supporter, believing in me even when my own faith was wavering. Thank you so much for always understanding, never questioning and remembering to bring me olives.

Finally, thank you Guy. Thank you for encouraging me to follow my dreams and realise my goals. Thank you for supporting me in every way you could to make this journey possible. And, thank you for not losing your sense of humour when I had all but forgotten mine. We did it!

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