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RESEARCH BRIEF
PACIFIC RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND LEARNING
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The Language Question in Pacific Education

The Case of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

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Abstract

This paper uses a sociohistorical lens to examine complex issues surrounding language-in-education policy in Micronesia. It is motivated by the realization that language policy and practice in this region, like many other parts of the world significantly impacted by outside contact, rarely align. This is especially evident in contexts where demands for English have already established themselves and an increasingly global agenda of schools as a primary support to the process of modernization and marketing of the nation-state is firmly in place. Drawing on an example of language policy review from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), we consider community expectations through various perspectives of local stakeholders as shared in public discussion of language issues in Pacific education. The review raises difficult questions brought into play when persuasive globalizing forces that stress the need to learn English come in contact with a more context-oriented language agenda at home.

> All social policies, including those related to language and education, operate in a dynamic social environment where other currents of social, political, economic, and psychological changes carry their own momentum and interact with official decisions and the day-to-day activities of schools and classrooms. (McGroarty, 2002, p. 17)

The question of language in education in Micronesia is quintessentially complex. The unsettling impact of imperialist expansion on Pacific language education policy making varies across and within countries and institutions. Responding to the interplay between local traditions and global (economic and political) forces that *carry their own momentum*, policymakers choosing the medium of instruction (MOI) in schools are faced with difficult decisions. Making sense of such language policy decisions, as Pennycook (1998) points out, involves understanding "both their location historically and their location contextually" (p. 126). Hence, we consider language education policy implementation in Micronesia to further understandings of the impact of global contact in local contexts to questions of language as a MOI.

We draw on the work of a number of scholars in the field of language education policy (Tollefson 1995, 2002; Hornberger 1997, 2003; Corson 1999; Huebner & Davis 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; McGroarty 2002) to address how local policy and planning are both supported and supplanted by the global expansion of English. We begin by describing the sociohistorical context of language and schooling in the Pacific region in which we work, locations where the local and global "contingently and conflictually touch" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 207). We borrow from Mignolo (1998) four movements of globalization to frame our sociohistorical discussion: Christianization, civilizing mission, development/modernization, and the current transnational and global market drive. Recognizing the increasing global agenda of Pacific schools and the need for English as a MOI, we explore how this need is significantly enacted, particularly through the momentum of economic and political forces in the region. The case of language education policy review in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) illustrates how one Pacific island nation is beginning to address issues brought into play when persuasive globalizing forces stressing the "need" to learn English come in contact with a more context-oriented agenda at home.

Locating the Geopolitical, Historical, and Contextual

We locate this study in Micronesia, a region rich in geographical, cultural, and political dimensions that uniquely define it. Made up of thousands of high volcanic islands and low-lying atolls, the geographic region currently comprises 6 distinct U.S.-affiliated political entities, about 17 dominant ethnic and cultural groups, and at least 20 languages and numerous dialects, as shown in Table 1. The Compacts of Free Association with the U.S., signed in 1986, 1994, and 2003, unite Pacific island people by newly determined political boundaries. However, the people of this region remain geographically, ethnically, and culturally diverse.

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Table 1. Island Area, Political Status, Ethnicity and Cultural Groups, Languages Spoken, Language Education Policy, and Population in U.S.-Affiliated States

Island Area	Political Status	Ethnicity and Cultural Groups	Languages Spoken	Language Education Policy*	Population
American Samoa	Unincorporated and unorganized territory of the U.S.	Samoan	Samoan	10/90 bilingual program: Samoan/English	70,000
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)	Commonwealth in political union with the U.S.	Chamorro and Carolinian	Chamorro and Carolinian	English	74,612[a]
Federated States of Micronesia (FSM): Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap	Constitutional government in free association with the U.S.	**Chuuk:** Chuukese, Mortlokese, and Puluwatese **Kosrae:** Kosraean **Pohnpei:** Pohnpeian, Pinglapese, Nukuoro, Kapingimarangese, and Mokilese **Yap:** Yapese, Ulithian, Satawalese, and Woleaian	**Chuuk:** Chuukese, Mortlokese, and Puluwatese **Kosrae:** Kosraean **Pohnpei:** Pohnpeian, Pinglapese, Nukuoro, Kapingimarangese, Mokilese, Ngatikese, and Mortlokese **Yap:** Yapese, Ulithian, Woleaian, Satawalese, and Pulwatese	30/70 transitional bilingual program: **Chuuk:** Chuukese/English **Kosrae:** Kosraean/English **Pohnpei:** Pohnpeian/English **Yap:** Yapese/English, Ulithian/English, Woleaian/English, and Satawalese/-English	107,008[b] (est. 2000) **Chuuk:** 53,595 **Kosrae:** 7,686 **Pohnpei:** 34,486 **Yap:** 11,241
Guam	Unincorporated territory of the U.S.	Chamorro	Chamorro	English	157,557[a] (est. July 2001)
Republic of Palau	Constitutional government in free association with the U.S.	Palauan	Palauan	50/50 bilingual program: Palauan/English	19,092[a] (est. July 2001)
RMI	Constitutional government in free association with the U.S.	Marshallese	Marshallese	30/70 transitional bilingual program: Marshallese/-English	50,840[c] (est. 1999)

*Language education policy information derived from each entity's individual national and/or education policy.
[a]Central Intelligence Agency, 2002. bFSM Mission to the United Nations, 2002. cRMI Office of Planning and Statistics, 1999.

To locate language policy historically, we draw on a number of stages of colonial expansion. Mignolo (1998) contends that “a growing awareness in the emerging European consciousness of its mission to Christianize and civilize the world” became “the foundation of the colonial civilizing mission” (p. 32) and, in later years, the modernizing of the nation-state. While it is not our purpose to argue for or against this civilizing mission or a modernizing nation, we use these global processes to locate the colonial discourses (and power) embedded in this momentum, especially those forces that promote the “need” to learn English.

It is well recorded that expansion in the Pacific brought colonial languages (e.g., Spanish, German, Japanese, and English) to the region. Relocating languages and cultures in the Pacific is a historical reworking of the strategies used by expansionists to repress local sensibilities and rationalities, and was more about continued colonial expansion than the promise of nation-building or meeting the needs of the local people (Hezel, 1975). Phillipson (2003), a language policy scholar, claims that language policy decisions emerge out of such dynamic sociohistorical contexts: "Language policy is manifestly an integral part of social policy. All states engage in it, when creating societal conditions that permit some languages to thrive and cause others to die off" (p. 13). We believe education language policies in the Pacific influence and are influenced by the creation and perpetuation of such societal conditions.

Instances of Globalizing Processes on Language and Schools in Micronesia

In locating language policies in Micronesia historically, it is important to understand how the language of schooling has been used by foreign powers to impose their belief systems on local traditions. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an interdenominational mission agency based in Boston, established the first schools in eastern Micronesia during the early 1850s. Their schools focused on converting the local "heathens" to Christianity. They used English as their primary means of instruction until they learned the local languages. "At this point the school ceased to be merely a vehicle for gaining access to the people and winning some influence over them; it became a tool for helping the islanders to acquire literacy in their own language" (Hezel, 1985, p. 2). The importance of the written word, the need to be literate, and the values imbedded in that worldview firmly established themselves in eastern Micronesia, and the RMI in particular, by the late 1860s. Once instruction began in the local language, the missionaries established the Marshall Islands Training School in order to train native teachers and pastors to spread the work of the mission. English was used as the primary language of instruction and "the young adults attending the schools, almost all of whom were boarders, dressed in western clothes and ate with knife and fork, for they were to set the high standards of personal behavior that their compatriots would seek to emulate" (Hezel, 1985, p. 3). These early schools not only established the need to be literate within indigenous communities of oral traditions, but also gave rise to new values, ways of living, and definitions of success that could be achieved only through the learning of English. The impact of these early mission schools in the RMI is evident in the fact that these churches continue to play a significant role in the community to this day.

Despite the success of these early schools, we are reminded that the missionaries were on a Christianizing mission. They arrived on these shores wanting to save the heathens from their savage ways and mold them into the Christian image of a moral man. Schooling, and more specifically English, provided the means through which they could transform the local native into this man, worthy of preaching the message of the gospel to save his fellow natives. These early schools established this central purpose of education and the role of English that would be emulated by the colonial powers to come. Schools and language learning were strategic devices to gradually and deliberately undermine local traditions and values in order to mold the native man into someone who better reflected foreign values and, therefore, was better suited to meet the needs of the foreign power (Hezel 1973; Mignolo, 1998; Spring, 1998).

The colonial powers that would follow the missionaries did not deviate far from this path. The first administration, Spain, began its reign in 1886; its primary goal was to "Christianize the people and make them loyal subjects of Spain" (Hezel, 1984, p. 4). To this end, the new government left the educational work to the Capuchin missionaries, whose influence was mostly limited to Saipan and western Micronesia. In 1899, Micronesia was purchased by Germany, which attempted to maximize its economic control and influence over the islands. This was evident in the Germanization policy that was created in 1906. As Hezel (1984) notes, "In essence the policy was an exploitative one: Germany was to derive economic value from its colonies in exchange for the benefits of civilization that it was bringing to the native people" (p. 5). In the RMI, this Germanization policy and the accompanying subsidies for German language instruction helped the Missionaries of Sacred Heart to establish their own mission school in a place that had a strong Protestant history. With the Japanese takeover of Micronesia in 1914, however, the German missionaries were dismissed and the Catholic mission schools they established were dismantled. The Protestant mission schools, which had been in the hands of local teachers, were the only mission schools to continue functioning after the Japanese takeover (Hezel, 1985).

In 1915, the government of Japan established the first public education system in Micronesia, offering 3 years of elementary education with 2 additional years for advanced students. The purpose of the system, as stated in an official Japanese ordinance, was moral education. The way to achieve a moral education was evidently through learning Japanese, as half of the instructional time was spent on Japanese language learning. According to Hezel (1985):

> As students learned the Japanese language, they could be expected to become rapidly more 'civilized' . . . and the enlightenment of Micronesians through education could not help but make them more loyal to the Japanese Emperor and more economically productive members of the Empire. (p. 6)

These schools would continue to function and produce the laborers needed to drive the largest economic growth ever experienced in Micronesia until World War II.

The patterns of schooling and language learning were firmly established by the work of the early missionaries in Micronesia and were continued throughout the colonial period that followed. What should be noted here is that during both the German and the Japanese administrations, the focus was on the exploitation of Micronesia for economic purposes. Schooling, and learning the language of the colonizer in particular, would not only serve to "civilize" the natives but would also instill new values and world views enabling them to be more productive members of the colony/empire. Hezel (1985)

makes this point succinctly when he writes about the history of education in Micronesia:

> Micronesian students attended these schools in ever-greater numbers as years went on. A great part of the explanation for this rests, then as now, with the obvious fact that a knowledge of the language of the ruling power was a very important asset, especially if one wanted to advance socially and economically. (p. 6)

Therefore, the "practical" value associated with knowing the language of the colonizer and/or the language of the economic market was firmly established in Micronesia before the ideas of lingua franca and globalization had entered our modern vocabularies.

After World War II, due to its strategic importance, Micronesia was set up as the only strategic trusteeship under the supervision of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and in 1947 the UN allowed the U.S. to govern and administer Micronesia as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The primary goal of the U.S., as mandated by the UN, was to "promote the advancement of the inhabitants of the Trust Territories and their progressive development towards self-government or independence" (Information Technology Section, 2000, para. 2).

At the start, the TTPI government set out to accomplish a goal of eventual self-sufficiency of the territory. As a result, schools were assigned to the responsibilities of the local municipalities and local Micronesians operated and staffed them, using their local languages as the MOI. However, in the early 1960's, the U.S. was faced with the enormous challenge of protecting its defense interests in the region on the one hand and accomplishing its UN mandate on the other. In response "… the President, on April 18, 1962, approved National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) No. 145, which set forth as United States policy the movement of Micronesia into a permanent relationship with the United States within our [the U.S.] political framework" (Solomon, 1963, p. S-II). To secure its strategic interests, the U.S. deliberately set a policy contrary to the UN mandate of leading these islands toward independence. This new policy would drastically change the pace and purpose of social and economic development in the region, and once again the schools and the languages they taught would be used as a means of securing foreign interests in the region.

The new policy was implemented with a program of intensive development in Micronesia; total U.S. assistance to the region more than doubled between 1962 and 1963, from $6.1 million to $17 million, and by 1970 that number climbed to $54.6 million (Hezel, 1984, p. 21). The U.S., like its colonial predecessors, used schools and the languages taught in them as a means to indoctrinate the local populace in order to secure its own political interests, and to this end the TTPI government set aside close to 45% of their budget for the development of the health and education sectors. As Hezel (1975) writes:

> Early policies, established under the Navy and the first decade of the civil administration were later reversed during the 1960s as hundreds of classrooms were built, expatriate teachers hired on, and English made the official medium of instruction in schools." (p. 4)

The role of education in achieving Micronesian loyalties to the U.S. was clearly documented in the Solomon report (1963):

> These goals of course, constitute a major reversal of the old policy, prevalent in the early years of the United Nations, of "protecting" trusteeship people. It is a policy which calls for careful treading because it proposes to disturb, if not destroy, patterns of life that have served Micronesians for centuries. Insofar as education is concerned, the revised policy places the schools, more than any other public institution and agency, in the vanguard of a deliberate program of cultural change. (Section II-B-5: p. 131)

In these early American schools in Micronesia, it was the use of English as the MOI that played the central role of ensuring "deliberate cultural change" by exposing Micronesians to American values, traditions, and patriotic rituals. As the TTPI government grew, the need to learn English became firmly established in the region, as it was a prerequisite to having a good-paying government job. Schools in Micronesia would continue to be run by the TTPI government until 1986, when the RMI and the FSM entered into a Compact of Free Association with the U.S., an agreement that secured U.S. strategic and political interests in the region through payments that provided start-up funds for these newly independent countries. Unfortunately, the effects of 40 years of TTPI government administration in Micronesia would continue to linger far beyond the initial declarations of independence, as would the policy of English as the primary language of schooling.

To this day, the governments of the RMI and the other Freely Associated States in Micronesia (the FSM and the Republic of Palau) continue to be heavily dependent upon U.S. Compact funds. "In terms of national budget, U.S. federal grants and aid packages, on average, accounted for 45% of the overall budget revenue for the RMI during the first Compact period, 1987–2003" (Heine & Chutaro, 2003, p. 9). In the current Compact II, much of the emphasis is on developing a local economy and improving the quality of education in the RMI to offset dependence on the U.S. This creates pressures for the education sector, which is then tasked with preparing students who are capable of competing in the global economic market. This global market drive has perpetuated the long-standing myth, introduced during the TTPI administration, that English is the avenue to economic and social prosperity. The myth has become so strong that it has taken on a life of its own. It is this legacy of schooling and language learning that continues to linger in the classrooms of the RMI today and in the minds of those who are tasked with developing an educational language policy for the future.

The Case of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Our interest in the language policy of the RMI Ministry of Education (MOE) was coupled with a requirement of our U.S. Department of Education contract to conduct policy work in the region. The RMI was selected as a site for language policy review because of significant differences between language policies and the practices we observed in classrooms. For example, in policy, grades 1–3 English Language Arts is given

45 minutes daily, yet in practice it was given 120 minutes daily. We found many teachers using Marshallese to teach from English texts, while others used English with little use of Marshallese to teach from the same texts. The RMI offered us a site rich in language policy and practice contradictions worthy of review.

We first provide a description of the language context in the RMI and then offer an explanation of the current language policy as written. Excerpts from eight in-depth interviews with parents and community leaders (former members of a government-appointed language commission in the RMI) provide varied and differing perspectives on the language-in-education question. The interviews were conducted in English or Marshallese (choice of the interviewee) by the authors, a Marshallese educator and two English-speaking educators from the U.S. and Canada. A committee of MOE staff (including principals, central office staff, and the Secretary) identified by the Secretary of the RMI MOE was convened for purposes of this language policy review. We share this work as part of a critical conversation surrounding the current situation—*the way it is*—and how one ministry took a language planning approach (Fishman, 1978; Corson, 1999) to review a policy that differs from practice, making a commitment to a process in which a context-oriented agenda began to re-think *the way it might be*.

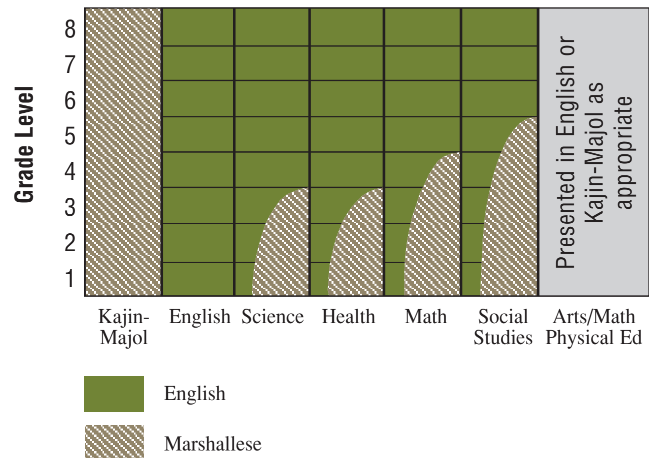
The Language Context in the RMI

Marshallese, one of several Nuclear Micronesian languages, is an Oceanic language that belongs to the Austronesian language family (Lynch, 1998). While Marshallese is a complex, intact, oral language, social contact has had its linguistic effects. Spencer (1996, p. 14) offers, "All of the Nuclear Micronesian languages bear the imprints of contact languages (particularly Japanese and English) to some extent." Lexical, semantic, phonological, and grammatical change has occurred through contact. A new orthography introduced in the late 1980's is significantly different from the one introduced by American Protestant missionaries from Boston years ago. In the 1980's, a more phonetically regular symbol to sound correspondence was created. In the Marshall Islands, children are learning this new orthography at school, a system that many family and community members did not learn. Use of the old orthography predominates, although both can be found in the community. Marshall Islanders speak their vernacular at home and within the community and church. The lingua franca for most is English, which is used to communicate with those from outside the Marshallese community. The RMI media offers radio in Marshallese and television in English. And, while there is no research to cite, interviews with various members of the Marshallese community indicate that English is heard on playgrounds and at community gatherings much more than in the past, suggesting that a language shift may be occurring.

The RMI MOE Language Policy as Written

Though the RMI stretches over a wide expanse of ocean and the Marshallese people live on remote islands and atolls, their seafaring ways resulted in the use of one language—Marshallese. As the responsibilities of a new nation began to unfold, a committee was formed on behalf of the MOE to articulate a language policy for schools. In 1992, once ratified by the government, the language policy was introduced to the people of the RMI. It states, "Marshallese shall be the medium of instruction with exception of the English language classes. As prescribed in [Figure 1], transition of medium of instruction from Marshallese to English shall be occurring on a continuum basis" (Title 14, Chapter 2-3b).

Figure 1. RMI MOE Language Policy for Grades 1–8



The RMI's policy for language in education, like that of other Pacific entities, was born out of the "need" for English. In grades 1–3, the MOI is two-thirds Marshallese and one-third English. By grade 4, the MOI is two-thirds English and one-third Marshallese. By grade five, English is the MOI with Marshallese used only in Marshallese and physical education classes. The intent of this transitional program is to gradually increase the amount of time given to English as a MOI; using the local language as the MOI in the early grades is in the service of learning English. As one Marshallese parent shared, "English is the international language. Our children need to learn English for their future." The future of English in the RMI seems assured. What is in question, though, is whether this shift in language use is at the cost of, or in addition to, Marshallese. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argues:

> When people are forced to shift their languages in order to gain economic benefits of the kind which in fact are bare necessities for basic survival, this is a violation of their linguistic human rights . . . Most states participate in committing linguist genocide in education." (p. 374)

An opportunity to review language education policy in the RMI may prevent such a violation.

The Way It Is and the Way It Might Be

While a transitional bilingual program is described in the RMI MOE language policy, many elementary school timetables continue to increase the number of minutes of English instruction in the early grades. The schools are given English reading texts that argue for, and are given, 2-hour language arts blocks. Time in Marshallese language arts is reduced to 50 minutes because of the lack of resources for teachers. The bilingual

benefits of a transitional program are limited at best (Mugler, 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), yet they are lessened even further when such little time is given to teaching (in) Marshallese. We wonder what the language learning consequences are for such a timetable. Does this align with the language hopes of family and community for children in school?

While many agreed English was a global necessity, many differed in their beliefs in regard to the responsibility for teaching English. One high-ranking government official shared his beliefs:

> We learned L1 [first language] and English at the same time—the vernacular was learned at home by asking questions and listening to people use it. By the time children got to grade 4, English was taught. I don't think the public school teachers can teach English well. I went to a private school and we had volunteers from the military base help us learn English. Having a native speaker makes a difference. I want my children to go to private school. I think credentials are the biggest difference between private and public. With a high school diploma you can get a teaching job in the public school. Most of the private school teachers come from the mainland and they have to have a baccalaureate degree. You can learn English and it's a better learning environment.

Marshallese is designated the MOI in the early grades, in recognition of the fact that children entering school are rooted in the oral traditions of their local language, not English. An RMI government official explains, "Marshallese continues to be the language of home, church, and the playground for many children. Although English can be heard in business and government, it is still a foreign language for most children here in the islands." Another offered, "I know the school should be teaching English, but I don't think they do a good job. I speak only English to my kids at home. I want them to learn English. They'll pick up Marshallese in the neighborhood."

Communities expect schools to teach their children not only to speak English but also to be literate. They believe literate English offers a form of secondary socialization into the world of global English (Halliday, 1996). This presents difficulty for many Pacific island teachers who themselves continue to be English language learners in oral L1 contexts. One teacher we interviewed shared a common sentiment:

> English is my second language and I am still learning it. I worry about my pronunciation and grammar. I wonder if I can teach it well enough to my students. That's why I follow the textbook [basal reader] closely.

For many, an economic draw to Majuro Atoll has changed the language experiences of children. One parent explained:

> Every evening after dinner we would sit and listen to stories told by our grandparents and parents. That is the way we learned. Now parents are too busy working and don't get home until late. They have moved into the urban areas. Grandparents are at home on one of the outer islands. They don't see their grandchildren very often. Children spend their time playing video games and watching TV.

Mediated events, such as television, digital entertainment, and the Internet, as well as global migration, are genuinely altering language use and literacy practices in radical ways (Lankshear, 2000). We wonder if they are also perpetuating the need to learn English and how such language practices at home impact the MOI used in the classroom.

Despite deep contradictions expressed to us by community members, many people shared similar concerns about the loss of Marshallese in their community and the role that schools had in either augmenting that loss or maintaining it. As we proceeded to question our respondents about the reasons for language loss, we became aware that they were not merely concerned with the maintenance of their language, but with the deeper implications that the loss of Marshallese has for their ability to perpetuate the values, beliefs, and concepts central to their understanding of who they are as a people. These respondents did not approach language loss from an unrealistic perspective, demanding a nostalgic return to the past, but instead asked for formal education to make room for learning Marshallese, allowing it to flourish beyond its present role of assisting in transitioning students to English. In light of the transitional language policies being implemented throughout the region, they were asking for an opportunity to engage in a conversation about which languages should be the MOI in schools and for what purposes. They were not arguing for the benefits of using one language over the other, but rather asking that schools value and celebrate two languages with their respective world views and allow both to be used as the MOI for learning multiple ways of being in the world.

Struggles in learning Marshallese raise issues of cultural identity for students and adults alike. The significance of learning Marshallese, and its role in maintaining the valued aspects of the culture, was raised by the Public Service Commissioner:

> There are Marshallese language skills one learns in upper grades that are related to Marshallese skills like fishing. If use of Marshallese is not emphasized in upper grades, the language will be lost—what needs to be learned in Marshallese will be lost.

The Commissioner points out the unintended costs of transitional language programs that emphasize learning English in the upper grades. Limiting the teaching of Marshallese in the upper grades to 45 minutes per day curtails students' exposure to higher-level concepts that are central to the culture. The Commissioner elaborates on the loss of Marshallese learning opportunities for children: "4th grade dropouts have nowhere else to learn Marshallese, as churches have stopped teaching Marshallese."

Underlying the voices interwoven in this paper is a call for change; they are asking to engage in a process in which the design of language policies are in response to language(s) in use in local and global contexts, now and in the foreseeable future. In the words of some community leaders and parents, there is a need for stronger English and Marshallese learning opportunities that create the necessary conditions for children to be fully bilingual. How might the RMI MOE respond to such a context-oriented review of the current language question in the RMI? The Secretary of Education called on members of the MOE to join us and form a language policy and

practice (LPP) review team. The team was asked to develop and pilot a process that would take a contextualized language planning approach to the review.

RMI MOE Policy Review Processes

Taking a language planning approach to the review, the team considered context-oriented issues related to corpus, status, and acquisition planning. In discussions of corpus planning, we drew on Haugen's (1983, 1987) contention that the starting point for language planners (and policymakers) is to have in place three dimensions of the language(s) to be used as the MOI:

1. Codify the language (e.g., orthography)
2. Spread the code so that it can be learned and used by the majority of the members of the culture (e.g., provide opportunities for language users to learn the codified norm and use it for authentic purposes)
3. Elaborate its function to meet the language needs of the people who use it (e.g., increase its vocabulary in response to economical, political, technological, and cultural changes)

The Marshallese language has undergone recodification after past missionary attempts to alphabetize the oral language. While the first coding system was based on how English-speaking missionaries heard Marshallese words, the new orthography is based on how Marshallese hear Marshallese words. However, as many shared, new Marshallese codes are not yet firmly implemented in day-to-day communicative events. One Marshallese teacher commented, "People still use old spelling. So, because the spelling is not standardized, it is often difficult to understand how other people spell. Last year's high school graduates were the first group who started in 1st grade with new spelling."

The RMI MOE LPP committee met to consider the current situation of the Marshallese corpus. They made recommendations to complete the Marshallese grammar book project, revise and update the Marshallese dictionary, devise and implement a plan to teach parents the new orthography, translate the Bok-Melele column (a section in the local newspaper that uses a Marshallese title with English text) into Marshallese, and work with churches to promote the Bible that is written in the new orthography. Such corpus planning by the RMI MOE in collaboration with the community may help to stabilize the use of the Marshallese alphabet, improving access to literacy in the language for children and adults alike.

The committee also considered status-planning issues, responding to questions such as which language(s) should be used for the MOI and for what purposes. Framing language status in this way, stakeholders shared which language(s) they valued in different contexts. Consideration was given to the voices of stakeholders while planning for the linguistic future of children in school. The committee reviewed and then agreed to support the language policy. They identified the need to: (a) create a public awareness program about the importance of following the language policy, (b) encourage Marshallese to be spoken by the public and leaders at community events, (c) seek funds to expand knowledge and use of Marshallese, and (d) continue to gather community perspectives on the language question in the RMI. They saw the language policy as crucial in setting the conditions for English to be added to the students' linguistic repertoire.

Community perspectives became an important context for language policy review. For example, one parent who believed language is a right claimed, "Whoever is saying *never mind teaching them in school because they're Marshallese and they'll automatically learn the language*, that's wrong." While Marshallese language arts are accorded 50 minutes a day, the lack of Marshallese materials for teachers and learners sends a clear but unwritten message of its subordinate status, perpetuating a belief that teaching the L1 (a low-status language in terms of schooling) is not a responsibility of the school. Another viewed language as a resource when he offered, "Can't we learn both Marshallese and English well? We can agree that's what we all want." Throughout the review, these perspectives and others announced and reinforced the values the policy needed to address.

The committee also focused on the notion of acquisition planning put forth by Dogancay-Aktuna (1997). This raised difficult and complex implementation questions of pedagogical importance. Improving the quality of language education in school was a focus of the discussion. The committee recognized that teachers lacked curricular materials in Marshallese and grade-appropriate materials in English. They questioned how to construct a bilingual environment for children and talked with teachers and administrators. Teachers focused their questions on how to teach (in) English while extending the learning of Marshallese; administrators were concerned with teachers' competencies in the language(s) selected as the MOI.

Discussion focused on the current context regarding teachers and resources and the committee agreed that many RMI teachers struggle with the new orthography and with using and teaching English oral and print literacy. They also began to understand the consequences of assuming that a person who speaks a language can teach it. The importance of supporting the teachers in their own language learning—in learning how to teach Marshallese and English—was acknowledged. It was also recognized that print resources in Marshallese are very limited, especially for primary grades. As a needs assessment, this information was used to make recommendations to the MOE.

The committee recommended that long-term professional development be offered for various reasons: to provide language learning opportunities for teachers in Marshallese and English; to assist teachers in understanding the language policy, its rationale, and its implications for practice; and to create the conditions necessary for the development of materials supporting the implementation of the language policy.

The RMI MOE is now taking steps to implement the language policy in grades 1 and 2. They agreed to develop grade 1 and 2 resources in Marshallese for math, science, social studies, and Marshallese language arts (e.g., stories). They also agreed to use the math and science texts in English as a guide to develop the Marshallese texts and teaching materials. Providing professional development for grade 1 and 2 teachers in the new orthography is also on the agenda. This is a huge undertaking, but an important step toward the bilingual pro-

gram they envision. They recognize this will take time, manpower, and the will power to provide an educational program that supports children in the bilingual environment described in the current language policy—not at the cost of, but in addition to, Marshallese.

We returned to the RMI 4 months later to work with a school that was piloting new initiatives emerging from the language policy review, including a timetable change to reflect a renewed focus on the Marshallese language in the early grades. A glance at the timetable showed that it was no longer symbolic of what had been agreed to 4 months earlier. Instead, English dominated the timetable, just as it had prior to the review. Is English the panacea for what are viewed as the ills of the RMI? It seems globalizing processes have persuasively secured the "need" for English in RMI schools. However, we wonder how successfully this need for English will materialize and be sustained in the classroom.

We have come to realize that the commitment was to knowledge building, not to immediate or gradual change in teacher practices. While we worked toward action and decision making, their interest was in a deeper understanding of language policy issues in the RMI and elsewhere through dialogue around current research on bilingualism and the impact of global pressures on local practices. Issues other than language have taken priority in the ongoing teacher training and curricular resource allocation in the RMI. And, as time drew near to implement the policy in one pilot school, the principal's adamant belief in English led the school to implement a schedule that made time for English at the cost of time in the local language.

Local Language Policy and Global Legacies

Other places have been struggling with similar issues for some time. Hornberger (2003, p. 315) speaks of 'classroom success but policy failure' in an experimental bilingual program in Puno, Peru, where opposition to use of the dominant language as the MOI contributed to the conditions for L1 use and children's success in school. For the Navajo in the U.S., McCarty (2002, p. 184) writes, "children who learned how to read first in Navajo learned how to read (period). That ability aided rather than hindered their English literacy development." Salvador Gabaldon (2004), an educator and social justice advocate, reiterates the message succinctly when he states, "the language of the home is the most powerful learning tool a child brings to school"

In the Pacific, Lui (1996) tells of Niue education in the 1950's:

> English had become the first language in the homes of educated parents and their children were placed at Monu Primary for the sole purpose of formal English learning. Niuean was considered unimportant in education and had no future for the children outside of Niue. (p. 113)

The children of Niue continue to struggle with language and literacy achievement today (Lui, 1996). Fiji, according to Mugler (1996), exemplifies "the 'minimal' nature of bilingual education" (p. 283). Using Fiji's situation, he raises concerns that an early-exit (transitional) bilingual program does not lead to mastery of either language. Education for many Pacific island nations is framed in transitional bilingual programs similar to Fiji's. Yet, even as we learn repeatedly from research and experience the important role of L1 literacy for mediating literacy in L2 (Cummins, 1989, 2000; Moll & Díaz, 1993; Thomas & Collier, 1995, 2002; Krashen, 1996), transitional programs continue in the Pacific. Perhaps one lesson to be learned is the powerful momentum English carries in society. We realize that this may be a situation in which classroom success is hindered by the dominance of a second language, which works against what the language policy in the RMI aimed to do—maintain and cultivate languages and cultures (Marshallese and English) in order to promote "a healthy and just ecology of language" (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996, p. 447) for the future of the RMI as a nation. The case of the RMI is a reminder of the empowering momentum of a dynamic social environment at play in policy implementation.

While local language policies reflect community interests in additive bilingualism, English continues to increase in status and use across the Pacific. Recently Harris (2004), head of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges team evaluating the College of the Marshall Islands, offered advice to RMI educators, "start teaching English from age three." Global designs persistently fuel the desire for a language viewed as the gateway to the cultural, scientific, economic, and political ideas of the West. Civilizing and modernizing processes have convinced many Pacific Islanders of the benefits of accessing these ideas. In a discussion on the current importance of English for economic development and global trade, Spring (1998) critically asks, "Do the ideas of free trade, individualism, economic competition and democratic republicanism embodied in American and British language and culture provide the best means of ensuring the happiness and well-being of the world's people?" (p. 30).

If English is pursued without consideration of the influence of the Western ideas embedded in it, what are the costs? It seems that the current purpose of education in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific is to prepare students to leave the islands in pursuit of participating in a Western economy. While global expansion is changing the economic landscape at home and increasing the need for English, unemployment—at 30%—continues to be high (Census of Household Population for RMI, 1999). Hence, English, in most cases, is becoming more and more a necessary condition of learning in school. In his comments on Compact I, Hezel (2003) concurs:

> Since Compact 1 went into effect, an estimated 35,000 citizens of FSM and RMI [or 1 out of every 6 citizens] have left home to seek their livelihood and make their life abroad. The portals to the U.S., unlocked through the provisions of Compact 1, remain open. Thousands of others will follow unless they find what they're looking for at home. (p. 19)

Written and unwritten policies that endorse English continue to *carry their own momentum*. Hornberger (2003) shares her concern:

> My sense of urgency about this is perhaps heightened because of recent accumulating events in my own country,

where multilingual language policy spaces seem to be closing up at an accelerating rate and the one language—one nation ideology still holds tremendous sway. (p. 333)

Through their desire for participation in a Western economy, Marshall Islanders have learned to need and, in our view, over-value English. American influences in the Pacific are significant. Contingent and conflictual, such influences intensify the necessity for critical dialogue among those shaping the linguistic future of Pacific island children.

As Hornberger (1997, 2003), Phillipson (2003), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), and others have heralded, language policymakers must address the changing societal conditions under which language learning takes place, creating a dialogic space where community members can query which language(s) should be the MOI in schools and for what purposes. At the same time, policymakers must recognize that in order for the L1 to coexist with English, learners need to acquire linguistic codes that enable them to engage in modes of resistance to English through English, as well as to extend L1 use in "real" and "authentic" contexts outside of school. Wallace (2002, p. 114) reminds us that language policies should assist learners to "deal with ongoing contacts with a world community of intellectuals, most of whom will not be native speakers of English, in the public arena beyond the national boundaries either of their own country or any other English speaking one" without usurping their full participation in local languages and cultures.

The effects of globalizing processes on language policy and practice are complex and locally variable, and their consequences continue to be contested. Language policy review offers the potential to critique, recreate, and reevaluate the links between the world(s) of English and the world that Pacific island students live in.

We end this paper, but not the conversation, with two key questions: Are decisions surrounding language education policy an opportunity for empowerment of the local indigenous community, ensuring that learning (in) any other language becomes a process of additive bi(multi)lingualism? Or, are policy decisions political instances of modernizing processes caught up in a global market drive that demands English at the cost of the local indigenous language? The urgency of the language question in Pacific education context is real; the linguistic and cultural futures of Pacific children and communities are at stake.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of the RMI MOE for their commitment to review and rethink the language education policy and its implications for practice. Their commitment to this process is a difficult but important step toward reaching the linguistic goals for the children in their care. We would also like to thank three anonymous reviewers whose valuable critique led to a much-improved manuscript.

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This document was funded by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED) under the Regional Educational Laboratory program, award number ED01CO0014. The content does not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. ED or any other agency of the U.S. government.

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PB0506