## Chapter 16

### Language learning and Chamorro culture in Guam

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What are the competencies required of a responsible member of a global society, and how will he or she acquire them (see Hinton, this volume)? The answer offered here is explored through non-native language learning. Research by socio-linguists has focused on language and socialisation and tells us that competencies required of a community are passed on through language; hence through learning a second language, one can also learn a new set of competencies. This chapter reviews theories of language acquisition as a basis for pedagogy. It examines the idea of interlanguage, the linguistic system used by learners of a second language, and the idea of an interperspective, the perspective developed through interaction with non-native language and culture. It offers an example of what a curriculum focused on teaching language through culture might look like, using the indigenous language of Guam.

The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this chapter are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the OECD or of the governments of its member countries.

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#### Introduction

"If there is a knower of tongues here, fetch him; There's a stranger in the city And he has many things to say."

Mirza Ghalib, translated by Shamsur Rahan Faruqui

The above quote combines language, perspective and awareness of otherness, which is the goal that I kept in mind while developing this chapter. What do we know about these three abstract concepts, and how can we use this knowledge in a classroom that aims to teach a second language? There have been many theories established since the 1940s and some have since been harshly critiqued; yet the debate over how a second language is learned continues to be at the forefront of modern linguistic studies (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). This chapter seeks to bridge theory and practice. While the theories examined below are taken and understood from the book Second Language Learning Theories by Mitchell and Myles (2004), this chapter is in no way a comprehensive review of said book, but instead focuses on select theories as a basis for a thought experiment on how theory might play out in a Chamorro classroom. In the second half of this chapter, The ABCs of Chamorro<sup>1</sup> will be offered as an example of a language curriculum that teaches language through culture. Chamorro, the indigenous language of the island of Guam, is endangered due to the diminishing population of native speakers and now, more than ever, measures must be taken to secure the future of the language and the culture. A media-based curriculum, the ABCs of Chamorro and its sister curricula, the ABCs of Japanese (Hawaii and Tasmania focused) and the ABCs of French, have had encouraging results in schools across the globe. The crux of the curriculum is its focus on the 21st century learner, keeping in mind brain science and linguistics.

What do we know about second language acquisition and what should we keep in mind while developing teaching pedagogy? The suggestion offered here considers research regarding both the role of a second language learner and the role of a language in shaping a culture. It seeks to twist the emphasis on learning from rote memorisation and consumption of information into creative production of language. In keeping with this goal, it is necessary to teach a language along with all of its cultural baggage: competencies and perspectives cannot be left behind. Teaching a language through culture allows not only more time for learners to internalise grammatical rules, but also sets language in its natural context, offering the learner cultural awareness and improving motivation. Awareness of otherness will prove to be a vital competency in global communities, and language a key vehicle of its success.

#### Behaviourism: Why it failed and what it has taught us

Using behaviourism as its underlying theory, language pedagogy in the 1950s was based on psychological notions of stimulus and response (Watson, 1924; Thorndike, 1932; Bloomfield, 1933; Skinner, 1957, all as cited by Mitchell and Myles, 2004). When

applied to language learning, a particular circumstance will elicit a particular response; if the response is successful and communication occurs, this response will be reinforced; continual reinforcement forms habits. Second language learning, then, entails replacing old habits with new ones, and the more similar the languages are, the easier the task is.

In the Second World War, a "progressive" approach based on behaviourism was used to teach American soldiers about to embark on an undercover mission to Germany (see della Chiesa's "Motivation Vortex", Chapter 1). The success of the soldiers and their lives depended on their ability to learn German quickly and without an accent. The soldiers were successful, but the reasons for this success were misinterpreted: it was the method that received the laurel wreath, while at least one internal factor, motivation, was ignored.

The success of the progressive approach led to decades of the audio-oral and audiovisual approaches, based on a very narrow behaviourist understanding of language learning. However, the approach did not fare as well in schools, where the motivation factor was nowhere near as strong as it had been with the soldiers. Although the theory itself came under scrutiny, these approaches survived deep into the 1970s.

In 1957 Skinner published Verbal Behavior, which applied behaviourism to language learning. Chomsky's critique of the book proved to be revolutionary to the field of psycholinguistics and the study of language acquisition (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Chomsky argued that children do not learn by stimulus and response, but are instead guided by an innate faculty that allows them to discover, internalise and apply rules to language production; his theory is known as generative grammar (ibid.). Piaget's (1978) cognitive development theory also viewed inner driving forces as influential in a child's interaction with the environment (Piaget and Inhelder, 1966, as cited by Mitchell and Myles, 2004). These views of child development and language acquisition were in direct conflict with behaviourist theory, which focused on outward stimuli.

Another offshoot of the behaviourist view of language, Contrastive Analysis (CA), soon came under scrutiny as well. According to behaviourist theory, in learning a second language, old language habits must be replaced by new ones; old habits can either help or hinder the learning of new habits, depending on how closely the first language (L1) and second language (L2) structures resemble each other (for a more detailed explanation of behaviourism and language learning, please refer to Mitchell and Myles, 2004). CA is the study of pairs of languages to identify grammatical, structural and lexical differences, which were then used by teachers of second languages as drilling points for grammar instruction. However, Hernandez-Chavez (1972; as cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004) discovered that although the plural in English is marked in a very similar way in Spanish, Spanish-speaking learners of English still left out plural markers (as cited by Mitchell and Myles, 2004). This and other similar studies proved that CA could not accurately predict errors that second language learners would make. Therefore, instead of trying to predict these errors, researchers began to study what these errors actually were; this became known as Error Analysis - "the systematic investigation of second language learners' errors" (ibid., p. 38). Claims of innate faculty at work and the birth of Error Analysis (further discussed below) moved the study of language and learning away from behaviourist theory, and researchers began to study L1 acquisition in children.

# Breakthroughs in non-native language learning theories: Error analysis and interlanguage

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, researchers such as Klima, Bellugi, Slobin and Brown discovered that in language learning "children all over the world go through similar stages, use similar constructions in order to express similar meanings, and make the same kinds of errors" (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 34). The discovery of this common order of acquisition was revolutionary (see *ibid.*), and in 1967 Corder began research that documented the order of acquisition of second language learners. These researchers studying Error Analysis described the errors of L2 learners, proving that *a)* L2 learners, similar to L1 learners, produce language following an order of acquisition; *b)* that this order is not the same as the order of L1 learners; and *c)* undermined CA, as many of the errors committed in L2 learning did not have to do with the L1 of the learner (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Error analysis brought attention to the language produced by learners of a second language when confronted with utterances of the target language, which Selinker (1972; as cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004) referred to as *interlanguage*.

Interlanguage is based on two fundamental concepts: that "the language produced by the learner is a system in its own right, obeying its own rules; and (that) it is a dynamic system, evolving over time" (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 39). This means that the grammatical mistakes that L2 learners make are not useless errors, but constructive ones that point at the rules of the language that the learner has, or has not, internalised. For example, although a learner has probably never heard the word *eated*, his or her utterance: "We eated pizza" hints that he or she understands that verbs in the past tense take on the "-ed" ending, but has not yet internalised the irregular verb rule. This learner is not merely repeating a response, but inventing one based on an internal developing linguistic system. The fact that learners of second languages produce language in a systematic manner, and that this system evolves independently from the system used to teach language (referring to the order of grammatical structures presented in a classroom) with its own rules points at an innate faculty at work within the learner. If we learned language like we learn other processes such as tying our shoes, then we would follow the steps offered to us. Since this is not the case in language learning, this implies that it is different from other aspects of cognition, as Universal Grammar theorists posit.

Universal Grammar theorists examine language learning from the perspective of language. Because they understand language learning as a separate cognitive ability, Universal Grammar theorists study the linguistic system of interlanguage and how it is constructed (for more on Universal Grammar, see Belmont, this volume). Information about a learner's linguistic system (interlanguage) could have revolutionary results for language pedagogy. No longer should a learner's errors be treated as representative of his or her lacks, but instead as an inescapable part of the learning process. Instead of fighting a complex cognitive function that is yet to be fully understood, curriculum should be informed by the research outlining the task of the learner. Future research could address the following questions: What might a curriculum that follows the second language learner's order of acquisition look like? Would such a curriculum benefit the learner?

While understanding the role of the non-native language learner is vital in developing curriculum and pedagogy, there is another perspective that cannot be ignored: a strand of sociolinguistic research known as language socialisation.

#### Language socialisation

Researchers such as Ochs, Schieffelin and Heath understand that language and culture are acquired simultaneously, each aiding in the development of the other (see Broad; Lizárraga, both this volume; Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Socialisation, according to Schieffelin and Eisenberg (1984), is the lifelong process that individuals undergo while becoming "competent" participants in a society. According to Schieffelin and Eisenberg, language acts as a means and result of socialisation, so not only does a child learn what words mean and how to use them, he also learns about himself and the world around him through language. There are many skills, behaviours, and cultural competencies (Ochs and Capps, 2001; B. della Chiesa, personal communication, 2009) that a child learns through language and without learning these culturally accepted norms and values, a child could easily become Hymes' (1967; as cited by Schieffelin and Eisenberg, 1984) "cultural monstrosity" – capable of speaking but culturally incompetent (as cited by Schieffelin and Eisenberg, 1984).

In addition, proper grammar alone is not enough to ensure smooth communication; Pan and Snow (1999) point out that acquisition of language requires much more than linguistic competence, and includes a "body of knowledge speakers of a particular speech community acquire about how to use language effectively to achieve communicative goals" (p. 229). A visitor to a new country who wishes to make friends, for example, must be aware of this new body of knowledge that accompanies the language and culture. While speech communities abound and it is impossible to teach all of the competencies that accompany Spanish, for example, it is possible to give students the opportunity and skills necessary to become aware of the existence of cultural differences, by studying these differences between the learner's mother culture, and another culture.

The processes of language acquisition and socialisation are fundamentally intertwined, however, and to separate the two could only be done heuristically. Hence, in order to understand either process completely, the study of one must be done in consideration of the other. Therefore (and here we begin to tie all of the above mentioned concepts together), I posit that language teaches culture, and conversely, language can be taught through culture (see della Chiesa, Chapter 25, this volume). As Mitchell and Myles (2004) pointed out, Error Analysis proved that a) no matter the context (classroom, naturalistic, mixed), the system used by L2 learners is similar regardless of the language, and b) this system is both similar and different from the system used by children learning L1. Variations across languages are not so great so this task is possible, (ibid.) but the question of motivation must play an influential role here. What could motivate a learner who already speaks a language to learn another one?

Since research presented above claims that language and socialisation are interrelated, and that language learning is a distinct aspect of cognition, the question arises: is socialisation part of this distinct language aspect, a result of it, or something else completely? Furthermore, how does interlanguage relate to socialisation? I would hypothesise that learning a new language generates an interperspective, or an inter-identity, that evolves through interaction with other cultures.

The more one learns about another culture, the more he or she would have access to foreign perspectives which one could choose to accept or reject. Either way (rejection or acceptance) these types of interactions cause a person to think deeply about his or her own values and perspective, which is undoubtedly a good thing in a world where it is becoming increasingly common and crucial to communicate with people from different cultures. Much like an interlanguage, an inter-identity would be one's perspective formed by comparing two or more cultures; the learner begins to choose values, competencies, etc. and in doing so, defines the rules for his or her own system of beliefs, or identity. This comparison becomes more acute over time, as well as more metacognitive, and is as dynamic as his or her developing language system.

What does socialisation to a global world entail? At this point I would hypothesise that understanding and awareness of otherness are crucial in patching misunderstandings that result from cultural differences, but surely this is an important question for future research to address. Moreover, I would argue that the inter-identity or interperspective is a competency that will be required of members of a globalised world.

#### Teaching a second language through culture

I believe that at the low and intermediate levels of language learning, the focus should be on comprehension, conversation and communication. Errors are a natural and inescapable part of the learning process and may be beneficial in a learner's construction of a linguistic system that he uses to communicate. In my experience teaching Spanish and ESL, I have learned that most students are uninterested in grammar and it is extremely difficult to motivate them to study it. They do, however, enjoy learning about cultural practices that differ from their own; these differences can be observed in examples of culture such as sports practices, traditions, forms of entertainment, youth's use of new media, movies, music, fashion, etc. By providing students with the tools and examples that lend themselves to the study and discussion of cultural differences, youth can have exposure to the target language and enjoy learning about things that they are intrinsically interested in. When students are engaged in an activity they naturally ask questions about grammar which a teacher can then expand on, creating supplementary activities to offer practice and explicit instruction. It is almost as if for adolescents, grammar is like medicine: it goes down smoothly if embedded in a tasty treat. To extend the metaphor even further, grammar, like medicine, has patching powers; it can make poorly expressed ideas concrete and once students realise that grammar instruction can make their communication clearer, they will ask for it by name.

In learning about cultural products and practices, students can form perspectives about other cultures and develop an awareness of otherness. This awareness may prove vital in this global era, which requires that people from different cultures frequently come in contact with one another. Not only might a heightened awareness of differences be beneficial in interactions with people from different cultures, it might also serve to prevent conflict between people of the same culture, as differences, or otherness, exist across all individuals. Hence, language pedagogy that teaches language through culture could potentially serve two purposes: it could increase students' motivation to learn another language by focusing on topics that are of more interest and relevance to students than grammar alone; and it could develop students' perspectives and awareness of otherness, which could result in smoother interactions with other people. Students may learn to inquire before acting in order to resolve misunderstandings that arise in interactions.

#### Thought experiment: A Chamorro classroom

#### Why Chamorro? Why Guam?

Chamorro is a language unique to the Mariana Islands, a volcanic archipelago east of the Philippines and South of Japan. In its present form, it is an amalgamation of Spanish, English and the native tongue of the Marianas, of which Guam is the southernmost island. The language is in danger of becoming extinct because of the diminishing population of native speakers, the post-World War II Americanisation of those natives, and its replacement by English as the common language for all residents, many of whom come from other countries. During the Americanisation of Guam, youths in western-style public schools were prohibited from exercising their language and culture (J. Bollinger, personal communication, 2009). If a language disappears, how long before the culture follows?

Presently, Guam is facing a situation that will dramatically alter its future. It is a territory of the United States, home to two strategic military bases. The Department of Defense is relocating more than 8,000 marines and their families from a base in Okinawa, Japan (PBS, 2009). This expansion will place a heavy burden on the already stressed and outdated infrastructure of the island, its environment, and its people. Currently, the Chamorro people make up 40% of the total population of the island (*ibid*.). Immigrants from the Philippines, Asia, and other islands in Micronesia constitute a large portion of the rest of the population. The public schools are overcrowded and violence is an increasing problem. Now, more than ever, the island's education system needs to assume a leading role in teaching awareness of otherness and cultural acceptance. However, aside from the pending military build-up, Guam's situation is not so different from that of numerous diverse communities, where the example offered can be applied to teaching second languages in this global era.

#### Hypothetical culture class: weeklong lesson plan for 6th grade intermediate level

Sometimes there is a disconnect between the culture of the teacher and the culture of the student. While we as teachers want our students to be able to perform on tests that reflect what we expect them to get out of the material, different students may use different tools or topics to learn similar or different things. A curriculum that offers students a way to show what they have learned without expectations that they have learned the exact same thing as every other student is a curriculum that allows more students to shine. Piaget (1978) was mentioned earlier in this chapter, and his ideas that a child's inner forces are what guide his interaction with the environment are taken seriously here. Giving students space to explore different topics gives students a chance for creativity, self-expression and developing deep thinking skills.

The yearlong project for this Chamorro culture class is taken from Rolbin's framework of the ABC's of Japanese. Students are expected to create the ABC's of Chamorro, in which each letter of the Chamorro alphabet is the first letter of a Chamorro practice, product, perspective or experience. For example, A could stand for Ayuyu, a large coconut crab found on the island that is considered a delicacy. The students would then be expected to give information detailing the habits of the ayuyu, physical characteristics, cooking style, etc. This can either be done in essay form, as a presentation to the class, or as an online webpage.

As a precursor to its use in schools, Rolbin and I, with the support of the Micronesian Language Institute at the University of Guam, have been working with Chamorro language teachers to create an ABCs of Chamorro. Our version will act as an example and a source of topics for students who will study the language used in the videos, before creating their own.

The classes therefore, will be presentations on Chamorro culture and practices, legends, myths, folklore, cooking classes etc. always offering exposure and interaction with the language, including structured vocabulary and grammar frameworks. This will come in the form of mini activities where students have to create their own versions of a myth (for example) or complete an activity about question words (*hafa* means "what", students will recognise this word in the common greeting of the island: *hafa adai*, meaning "what's going on"). Students will choose which words or phrases representing cultural practices and experiences stand out to them, and that they think are worth sharing with others. The result would be a variety of presentations on a wealth of subjects, as different things will stand out for different students, much like different parts of this lesson plan presented will stand out for the different readers.

The first day of the week will be devoted to the introduction of the topic. During this day, the students receive in Chamorro the context in which the vocabulary and grammar will be set. They will also receive substantial interaction with the language itself, both as listeners and participants. Please note that while the example here is taken from an informational video, it is imperative that the material be presented in a variety of forms: narratives, informational texts, historical perspectives, etc. This allows students access to a variety of topics and ideas, perspectives and focal points, which they can then expand on.

#### Monday/lunes: E para E'guihan (E for Fishing)

Estorian donkalun guihan yan y talaya (Stories of big fish and nets)

Teacher introduces the theme of the week and vocabulary with visuals:

Gaputulo – hair guihan – fish donkalu – big

Koni – to catch a fish Talaya – a net used to catch fish eskapa – escape

Students watch the two and a half minute clip on fishing, then the teacher hands out the script with the vocabulary words missing. As a class, student work to make meaning out of the sentences, guided by the teacher's questions: "What do you notice?" And "What puzzles you?" (These questions are taken from Eleanor Duckworth's approach, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 15 January 2010). The teacher should also ask questions about how the students figured out sentences, making the process of deciphering a language an external process, capable of being reflected upon.

Afterwards, in pairs the students work on comprehension questions and vocabulary worksheets to reinforce their learning.

#### Tuesday/mattes

After a warm-up and recap of the previous day, the second day will focus on the language structure chosen from the video. In this topic, the structure is "E'guihan kumeke ilek-na 'go fishing' gi fino ingles" (E'guihan means to go fishing in English). In pairs, students will practise the structure by naming pictures in Chamorro (Haggan means green sea turtle in English), playing short games of charades, and by choosing a topic for their ABCs that begins with the letter "E". They may also begin to write a five to ten sentence description of their topic in English, which they will later translate.

#### Wednesday/metkules, Thursday/juebes

This is the production stage of the class. Students begin researching and describing their topics. This includes a making a storyboard with visuals. The teacher and teacher's aide walk around and help students write out their topics. They must decide what images are appropriate and translate their sentences into Chamorro. On the last day they present their stories and boards to the class in Chamorro.

The focus of these two days is on giving students a chance to use the words and structures that they have at their disposal to produce their own explanations of topics. This means that there will be mistakes, and the teacher needs to acknowledge these mistakes as a valid part of the learning process. Teachers should be aware of which grammatical structures their students are constantly relying on or asking for, and they should support this inquiry with appropriate lessons on these points. Here, the teacher plays the role of teacher-researcher, studying and trying to understand the students' ways of forming meaning, much like she asks them to study and consider another culture.

#### Friday/betnes

Students take a field trip to Gef Pago, a Chamorro cultural centre/village located in the southern part of Guam. They watch a demonstration of a fisherman using a talaya, and take a tour of the village where they observe men and women working together to make a talaya, fish, cook and clean. They are told the legend of the fish who tried to eat the island: The island of Guahan was in trouble; a giant fish was eating away at the middle of it. The men tried to kill the fish but it was too big for their spears. The women and men sat together and devised a plan to trap the fish. The women used their long hair to weave a net. They sang to attract the fish and the men trapped it and pulled the fish in.

Afterwards, students and teacher discuss the meaning of the story and what cultural values are reflected in it, while they enjoy lunch.

The focus of this final day of close interaction with both the culture and language is for students to think deeply about a cultural practice that may or may not be similar to one that they are familiar with, and have the opportunity to see how the language can come alive. This is done in hopes that the students will begin to form an interlanguage (their own linguistic system and way for them to express themselves) and an inter-identity (another way for them to see themselves as participants in a larger world).

This weekly lesson plan works under the assumption that the students are familiar with the method and types of questions. It requires that the students work together and support each other, and there is less focus on individual accomplishment or perfection. Instead, students are encouraged to communicate their ideas by creatively using the tools at their disposal. As an ongoing project, the students create their own videos, taping themselves in front of a green screen, and adding visuals and live footage behind them. The final product will be uploaded to a blog or website, where their work can be shared with the world.

#### **Conclusions**

Second language learning is an increasingly important field that holds many possibilities for future research. The perception of language acquisition needs to be expanded from a focus on facility with grammar to include an understanding that with language come cultural competencies, perspective and an awareness of otherness. The tools used in the instruction of a second language are limitless, as language can be used in any context. The process of second language learning needs to be seen as a timely and highly complex process involving many factors such as motivation, engagement and the development of cultural competencies; flawlessness should not be the goal of beginning and intermediate levels, and the students' imperfect production of language must be respected and encouraged as an integral part of acquisition. Moreover, focusing on communication validates students' interlanguage, and gives them more opportunities to gain confidence and practice. Globalisation requires of present and future generations global competencies, and teaching language through culture is one way to broaden perspectives, a first step in establishing diplomatic relations.

#### Box 16.1. What kind of cultural competence should students aim to achieve?

I spent four years teaching at a Jewish Day School in New York, where half of each school day is devoted to secular studies (taught in English), and the other half is devoted to Judaic studies (taught in Hebrew). I was a Judaic Studies teacher, so I was expected to conduct all my classes in Hebrew. I learned Hebrew at a similar Jewish Day School in Canada. I am not a native speaker, nor have I lived in a Hebrew-speaking community for longer than a summer. My Hebrew is good enough that I can understand Israeli news anchors who face the screen, speak slowly, and avoid slang, but not good enough that I can understand Israeli sitcoms without subtitles.

As a teacher, I often worried that I was doing a disservice to my students by conducting my classes in a language that I do not know perfectly. I became even more worried when I encountered the idea that "knowing" a language requires both linguistic competence and cultural competence; I realised that my cultural incompetence might have been a worse problem than my flawed technical skills. The Hebrew I taught my students was riddled with North American doxa (to borrow Bourdieu's term for cultural habits we mistakenly assume to be rules of nature). For example, I often told my students – in technically correct Hebrew – to "raise their hands". Handraising is what North American students do to signal that they would like to speak. Israelis, however, do not raise their hands in class; they point one finger in the air, and they refer to it as "pointing", using the same word as the one they use for "voting". It did not occur to me that the custom of requesting permission to speak by raising an entire hand in the air was simply a construction of my culture and not a rule of nature.

I became nervous that it might have been presumptuous of me – a teacher deeply rooted in North American doxa – to think I could (or should) conduct a Hebrew-immersion class for American students. Two ideas helped allay this concern.

First, I reminded myself that my goal as a teacher was not to prepare my students for seamless integration into Hebrew-speaking society. Rather, my aim was to enable them to participate fully in Jewish religious and cultural life, which requires a certain skill set. According to the vision of our school – a Modern Orthodox, Zionist institution – that skill set might include the ability to read and understand Hebrew texts such as prayer books, the Bible, and rabbinic literature, and the ability to communicate in Hebrew during visits to Israel. I am not qualified to prepare students for transplantation into an Israeli classroom, but I am reasonably qualified to prepare students to participate fully in their Jewish communities.

The second idea came from my friend Karen, an Orthodox Jew who teaches Islamic Studies at a Catholic college. She pointed out that I was regarding Hebrew as the property of the modern state of Israel. She reminded me that Hebrew was the language of the Jewish people long before it was the language of the modern Jewish state, and that Hebrew is not the property of the Israeli teacher who instructs her students to point their fingers, any more than it is the property of the North American teacher who instructs her students – in Hebrew – to raise their hands.

My reflections on this topic have left me with a lingering question. If "knowing" a language requires both linguistic and cultural competence, what kind of cultural competence should students of Hebrew rooted in the Jewish Diaspora aim to achieve?

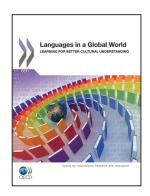
Amy Newman, Canada – United States

#### Note

1. The ABCs of Chamorro is a language curriculum being designed at the University of Guam by Simone Bollinger and Cyrus Rolbin, with teachers of Chamorro. It is an adaptation of the ABCs of Japanese, by Rolbin.

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