

Language Shift and Language Accommodation across Family Generations in Taiwan

Todd L. Sandel and Wen-Yu Chao

Department of Communication, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA

Chung-Hui Liang

Center for General Education, National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu, Taiwan, Taiwan

This study explored language shift and accommodation among bilingual Mandarin and Tai-gi (also called Hokkien, Holo, Tai-gu, Taiwan Min, Taiwanese) families in Taiwan. From the 1940s until the 1980s the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) on Taiwan promoted Mandarin Chinese. Recent years have witnessed a shift in policy: since 2001 elementary schools throughout Taiwan offered mother-tongue education as a way to preserve and maintain Taiwan's mother tongues. This paper is based upon interviews with 58 parents who lived in both urban and rural locations and whose children were enrolled in mother-tongue classes. Interview responses were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis found significant language shift occurring from Tai-gi to Mandarin among parents and children, and a faster shift in urban versus rural environments. Qualitative analysis examined the perceived processes and meanings of language shift. Many parents spoke of accommodation as affecting language shift: they spoke Tai-gi to elders, mixed Tai-gi and Mandarin to peers, and Mandarin to children. Most parents perceived Tai-gi as more intimate than Mandarin and the source of tradition, while Mandarin was the language of public discourse. The perceived link between language and identity varied across location as most rural parents linked Tai-gi with a Taiwanese identity while urban parents did not.

Keywords: language shift, Taiwan, accommodation, mother tongue education, identity, language ideologies

One of the many effects attributed to globalisation is language loss. It is estimated that every two weeks an indigenous language is lost, and of the Earth's 5000 spoken languages, half will be lost by the end of this century (Dalby, 2003). Quite often indigenous languages are replaced by national languages, such as Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea (Kulick, 1992, 1998), or increasingly by English, the world's international language. This trend, however, is resisted in some parts of the world (Fishman, 1991). In places such as Wales and French-speaking Canada, local governments support the use of minority or indigenous languages in public life and education. In other regions, such as Ireland and Kurdish-speaking areas of Iraq and Turkey, dissenting political groups claim 'language rights' as playing an important role in their struggle for self-government and local autonomy. These efforts

indicate that while language shift is widespread, it is not in every instance unresisted.

Taiwan is one place where language shift and the struggle to prevent language loss are prominent issues. During the first half of the 20th century Taiwan was a colony ruled by Japan and through the public systems of education, media and government, the colonial language was promoted as part of an effort to instil in the local populace a Japanese identity (Ching, 2001; Lamley, 1999). Unlike most other places, however, following the end of colonial rule independence and autonomy were withheld (see Kerr, 1965; Shackleton, 1998). After losing to the Chinese Communists on the mainland, in 1949 the KMT (Kuomintang) or Chinese Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan and made the island its temporary base until it could reclaim the mainland from the Communist 'bandits'.¹ The KMT, like their Japanese predecessors, viewed language policy as a way to inculcate in the populace a 'Chinese' identity (Hsiau, 1997). Hence, the national language, Mandarin Chinese (also called Beijing dialect) or *Guoyu*,² was promoted and used in the public spheres of education, media and government. All other languages, spoken by 85% of the populace, were defined as '*fangyan*' or 'local dialects'. Their use was severely sanctioned.

The situation changed in the latter decades of the 20th century. In 1987 former President Chiang Ching-kuo (Chiang Kai-shek's son) lifted martial law and legalised opposition political parties. That year also marked an end to the practice of punishing 'dialect-speaking' students – they were fined, hit or forced to wear a placard that said 'Please speak the national language' – when the provincial bureau of education ordered teachers and school administrators to cease this practice (Huang, 1995; Sandel, 2003). Under the leadership of his successor, President Lee Teng-hui, and pushed by the newly legalised opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), efforts were made to promote and teach these formerly forbidden 'dialects', which from that time forth were referred to as '*muyu*' (mother tongues) or '*bentu yuyan*' (local languages). In 2000 the KMT's five decades of rule came to an end with the election of the DPP's Chen Shui-bian as President; and in the fall semester of 2001 first-grade elementary students throughout Taiwan began receiving one hour instruction per week in a 'mother tongue', most learning Tai-gi (also called Taiwanese, Tai-gu, Southern Min, Taiwan Min, Hokkien),³ others learning Hakka or one of a number of Aboriginal languages. Thus ended a nearly 100-year effort by two successive governments to change the speaking practices of the majority of Taiwan's residents.

What impact have language policies of the past hundred years had upon speaking practices in Taiwan? Based upon census data collected in the 1990s from the Taiwan (ROC) government, Huang (1995, 2000) described the ethnic composition of Taiwan's residents as falling under four categories: Aborigines were the smallest group (1.8%), Hakka next (12%), Chinese Mainlanders, also known as '*Waishengren*' in Mandarin or '*Goa-seng-lang*' in Tai-gi – people who came to the island from China in 1949 with Chiang Kai-shek, and their descendants – were next in size (13%), and the largest group was the Minnanese, also known as Taiwanese or '*Benshengren*' in Mandarin or '*Pun-seng-lang*' in Tai-gi (73.2%). Traditionally members of the Hakka and

Benshengren (Taiwanese) groups spoke one distinct language or 'dialect' (Hakka and Tai-gi respectively) while Aborigines spoke one of a variety of Malayo-Polynesian languages (see Ferrell, 1969) and Mainlanders spoke one of many Chinese dialects, depending upon which region of China they came from (see Young, 1988). However, surveys conducted in the 1980s and 1990s found a shift among the young: they were less likely to speak their mother tongue and more likely to speak Mandarin (Huang, 1995; Tse, 2000; Young, 1988). Concomitant with a shift in speaking practices came a shift in attitudes associated with these languages: many people educated in Mandarin – when 'dialects' were severely sanctioned – believed Mandarin to be high class while Tai-gi and other languages were low-class (Hsiau, 1997; Sandel, 2003). These historical developments lead to the focus of the present study: to assess language shift and attitudes about language(s) at a time when mother tongue education – intended to reverse language shift – has just begun in Taiwan.

A number of theories and perspectives inform this study. One is Fishman (e.g. 1966, 1991, 1999) who has examined the process of language shift, focusing mainly upon immigrant groups to the USA. The commonly observed pattern is mother tongue loss by the third generation: immigrant grandparents are monolingual speakers of the mother tongue (also called heritage language), parents are bilingual speakers of the mother tongue and national or common language (e.g. English in the USA), and children are monolingual speakers of the national or common language. Often linked to these changes is a shift in the perceived link between ethnicity and language: as language shifts, members of X ethnic group increasingly believe the ability to speak X language is no longer a necessary criterion to be called X-ish (Fishman, 1991).

A second perspective comes from the work of Giles *et al.* (1977: 308), who coined the term 'ethnolinguistic vitality', and defined it as 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations'. They endeavoured to measure the 'objective' or sociostructural factors which determine an ethnic group's continued linguistic existence within a larger, heterogeneous society, organising them under three main headings: the language's status, demographic scope and institutional support factors. Bourhis *et al.* (1981: 148) later expanded upon this research by measuring how members of an ethnolinguistic group 'rate their own group relative to a salient outgroup on important vitality dimensions', which is referred to as a measure of 'subjective' vitality. Some studies have found correlations, or 'realistic' assessments, between high vitality scores on both objective and subjective measures (e.g. Bourhis & Sachdev, 1984; Florack & Piontkowski, 1997; Ytsma *et al.*, 1994), while others have found low correlations between these measures; in some cases there is a perceptual bias in favour of ingroup vitality (e.g. Giles *et al.*, 1985; Yagmur & Kroon, 2003) and others favour outgroup vitality (Sachdev *et al.*, 1987; Young *et al.*, 1988). Harwood *et al.* (1994) claimed differences between subjective and objective measures may be due to the presence or absence of sociopolitical or economic instability, which in turn interacts with a number of other factors such as an individual's network of linguistic contacts, the increase or decrease of such contacts, the salience of vitality concerns, etc.

A third approach which informs this study is language ideologies, initially defined as beliefs about language 'articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' (Silverstein, 1979: 193). This view departed from an earlier paradigm which claimed only the outside expert – linguist or anthropologist – could consciously articulate the structure of the language natives could speak but not describe (Boas, 1911/1995). Recent studies of language ideologies (Kroskrity, 2000; Schieffelin *et al.*, 1998) have expanded the notion in two ways, claiming ideologies encompass: (1) perceptions of how a language is *true* or *good* for society, and (2) divergent perspectives within the same sociolinguistic group. Likewise, language ideologies interact with features of discourse in an unstable dialectic.

Empirical studies of bi- and multilingual societies find that ideologies play a major role in family communication, influencing a parent's decision about which language to speak to her young child. Kulick (1992, 1998) found none of the young children in the community he studied in Papua New Guinea could speak the tribe's mother language: parents believed the language is hard for children to learn, and associated with backward, pagan practices, unlike the progressive, Christian national language, Tok Pisin, which they spoke to their children. Kulick (1992: 214) also found the pragmatic 'convention of accommodating to the language of other speakers in their own choice of language [resulted in the parents'] switch to Tok Pisin even more systematically when they talk[ed] to their children'. Children's discourse practices influenced parents' discourse practices, which in turn influenced ideologies associated with each language. Silverstein (1985/1995) found a similar process of language shift happened in the 17th century when Quakers' exclusive use of thou/thee for the second person pronoun, for ideological reasons, led to the loss of these forms as other English speakers (non-Quakers) rejected the use of thou/thee on ideological and pragmatic grounds.

Ideologies, however, can also explain why minority languages are maintained in the face of hegemonic pressures. For example, as Woolard (1985) found with Catalan speakers in Spain, and Gross (1993) with Walloon speakers in Belgium, the minority language is preferred and passed from parent to child. Thus in multilingual communities, even where one language is promoted by the state over all others, 'the process of language shift is not a smooth downhill slope toward oblivion' (Gross, 1993: 177).

A fourth and final approach that guides this paper is Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT; see Giles & Noels, 1997). The theory claims that in face-to-face encounters speakers often accommodate their speech to match the other person's speaking rate, manner, style and language in order to gain the approval of the other person, or to display social solidarity. Studies of intergenerational communication, however, find accommodation operating in a different direction: people of different generations (e.g. young adults versus older adults) perceive communication as difficult and dissatisfying (see Coupland *et al.*, 1991; Giles *et al.*, 2001) and may resist accommodation. Likewise, people of different generations perceive communication within their own group as more satisfying (e.g. Noels *et al.*, 1999), resulting in greater accommodation.

In the case of Taiwan, where language shift may be occurring, CAT could inform what happens to intergenerational communication within bi- and multilingual families. If family members accommodate to the speaking practices of the elder generation, one can predict language shift (and preservation of the mother tongue) will be less. But if family members accommodate to the speaking practices of children, greater language shift can be predicted. Accommodation could also be affected by the larger context of the community and speaking environment. Many people in Taiwan perceive mother tongues (e.g. Tai-gi, Hakka) to be spoken more often and in a wider variety of situations in rural areas than urban ones. Likewise, the presence of mother-tongue-speaking grandparents living in an extended family with adult children and grandchildren could affect speaking practices. Children growing up in extended families would be more likely to accommodate to their grandparents, hence, speak the mother tongue, than would children growing up in nuclear families.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the language situation in Taiwan both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative part of this study will examine the following hypotheses:

- H1: Regardless of location and household arrangement, language shift is happening from a mother tongue (Tai-gi) to the national language (Mandarin) among parents and children.
- H2a: Parents in urban areas speak more Mandarin than parents in rural areas.
- H2b: Parents in urban areas speak less mother tongue than parents in rural areas.
- H3a: Children in urban areas speak more Mandarin than parents in rural areas.
- H3b: Children in urban areas speak less mother tongue than children in rural areas.
- H4a: Parents in nuclear households speak more Mandarin than parents in extended households.
- H4b: Parents in nuclear households speak less mother tongue than parents in extended households.
- H5a: Children in nuclear households speak more Mandarin than children in extended households.
- H5b: Children in nuclear households speak less mother tongue than children in extended households.

Qualitatively this study will examine the following research questions:

- RQ1: Is there a difference in perceptions of the subjective value and worth of mother tongues across rural and urban homes or nuclear and extended families?
- RQ2: Does accommodation play a role in language shift? And if so, do younger family members accommodate more to older, or older to younger?

Method

Participants

The study involved 58 parents (48 mothers, 7 fathers, 1 guardian, 1 aunt and 1 uncle) of elementary school children (1st through 3rd grades) who had completed or nearly completed one or more years of mother-tongue instruction. The children of two participants studied Hakka and the rest studied Tai-gi. Slightly less than half, 23 (40%) of the participants, lived in smaller towns in rural areas (Chang-Hua County or Taichung County) and slightly more than half, 35 (60%), lived in cities located in urban areas (Taipei or Taichung City). More than half, 33 (57%), lived in nuclear families and less than half, 25 (43%), lived in extended families. Finally, 27 (77%) participants in urban areas lived in a nuclear family arrangement and the remaining 8 (23%) in an extended family. Among participants in the rural community, 6 (26%) lived in a nuclear family and 17 (74%) in an extended family. Participants' self-identified ethnicities included: Minnan – hereafter referred to as *Benshengren* – 49 (84%), Hakka 3 (4%) and Mainlanders – hereafter referred to as *Waishengren* – 6 (10%). Comparing this sample with Huang's (1995, 2000) estimates of Taiwan's ethnic groups, this sample slightly over-represents *Benshengren* and under-represents Hakka and *Waishengren*. It also does not represent Aborigines.

Procedure

Parents responded to a semi-structured interview administered by two researchers during the period of June 2002 to January 2003. Participants were recruited through personal contacts and/or through mother tongue teachers employed at two elementary schools, one located in an urban area and the other rural. All participants had one or more child in the 2nd or 3rd grade who studied a mother tongue (all but one studied Tai-gi) in elementary school for more than one year.

Interview questions were based upon protocols developed by Young (1988), Sandel (2003) and Huang (1995) exploring issues of language, identity and language shift across the generations. In addition to eight demographic questions, participants were asked to respond to a list of 24 questions. First they were asked to report on their own speaking practices: which languages do you speak? Which language(s) do you speak when talking to elders, peers, children? Where did you grow up? What is your ethnicity? Participants were then asked to report on their child's speaking practices: which languages does your child speak? Which language(s) does he/she speak when talking with elders, parents, peers (siblings and/or classmates)? Participants were then asked a series of open-ended questions designed to probe the attitudes, beliefs and/or ideologies associated with these languages. Some questions probed participants' past experiences of language learning: when and under what circumstances did you learn X language? Did you ever experience or witness children punished at school for speaking X language? Other questions probed their present speaking experiences: when speaking X language do you sense more or less intimacy with the other person? How do you decide which

language(s) to speak with an elder? Peer? Child? Other questions probed the language learning expectations or goals they have for their children: which languages do you hope your child learns? Why? Another set of questions asked them to comment on their opinion of mother tongue instruction in Taiwan. A final set of questions probed how speaking practices linked to their sense of identity and/or the identity of their child.

Following data collection, interviews were transcribed verbatim in the original language (or languages, many participants spoke both Mandarin and Tai-gi during the interview) and checked for accuracy by a second person. Interviews were then analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively by the authors. Excerpts presented in this paper were later translated into English by the authors.

Results: Quantitative Data

This investigation employed a 2 (urban or rural) \times 2 (nuclear or extended) factorial design. Dependent variables were language choice (mother tongue, mixed mother tongue and Mandarin, or Mandarin) in three different situations: (1) parents or children speaking with elders/grandparents, (2) parents or children speaking with peers/parents, and (3) parents or children speaking with children/peers. Responses were coded as ordinal values such that reported mother-tongue-only speech (Tai-gi and/or Hakka) was assigned a value of 1, mixed mother tongue and Mandarin was assigned a value of 2, and Mandarin only (or in some cases Mandarin and a non-mother tongue such as English) was assigned a value of 3. (Participants were not asked to rank the percent X language was spoken, rather they were asked to report if in a given situation X language was spoken or not.) Participants (parents) were asked to report on both their language choice and the language choice of their children. Means were computed by averaging the sums of participants' responses for each situation. For example, an average sum of 1 meant that in X situation participants' choice of language was a mother tongue, an average of 2 meant mixed mother tongue and Mandarin, and an average of 3 meant Mandarin.

Language shift toward Mandarin

To test for language shift, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted twice, once with parents' reported language choice, and a second time with children's reported language choice, to test for the effect of situation on language choice. Results were significant in the predicted direction for both parents' language choice (Wilks = 0.174, $F(2,53) = 126.206$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.826$) and children's (Wilks = 0.483, $F(2,53) = 28.403$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.517$). Next, to look at the interaction of location and household arrangement on language choice, a 2 (urban or rural) \times 2 (nuclear or extended) MANOVA was computed with language choice in three different situations (speaking to elder, parent/peer, or child) as the dependent variables. The test was run twice, first with reported parents' language choice and then with reported children's language choice. Multivariate effects were significant in the predicted direction for parents' language choice by location (Wilks = 0.791, $F(2,53) =$

Table 1 Independent samples *t*-tests with language choice as dependent variable

	<i>Location</i>		<i>Family composition</i>	
	<i>Urban n = 35</i>	<i>Rural n = 23</i>	<i>Nuclear n = 33</i>	<i>Extended n = 25</i>
Parent to elder	1.09 (0.28)	1.13 (0.46)	1.09 (0.29)	1.12 (0.44)
Parent to peer	2.14 (0.49)	2.00 (0.43)	2.06 (0.50)	2.12 (0.44)
Parent to child	2.77 (0.49)	2.13 (0.81)***	2.64 (0.65)	2.36 (0.76)
Child to elder	2.14 (0.85)	1.52 (0.90)**	2.12 (0.86)	1.60 (0.91)*
Child to parent	2.74 (0.44)	2.04 (0.77)***	2.61 (0.61)	2.28 (0.74)
Child to child	2.86 (0.36)	2.22 (0.80)***	2.76 (0.50)	2.40 (0.76)*

Differences in means were measured comparing location (urban versus rural) or family composition (nuclear versus extended).

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

4.568, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.209$), but not family composition. They were also significant for children's language choice by location (Wilks = 0.973, $F(2,53) = 5.783$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.250$), but not family composition.

The next set of tests looked at language shift comparing language choice means across different contexts. Independent samples *t*-tests (two-tailed) were computed with language choice in each situation (speaking to elder, parent/peer or child) as the within-subjects factor and location (urban versus rural) and family composition (extended versus nuclear) as the between-subjects factor. Table 1 shows effects were significant in the predicted direction for location (urban versus rural) only in the situation of reported parent to child language choice ($t = 1.136$, $df = 56$, $p < 0.001$), but not for family composition. Table 1 also shows effects were significant for location in all three situations of reported child's language choice: child to elder ($t = 2.671$, $df = 56$, $p < 0.01$), child to parent ($t = 4.399$, $df = 56$, $p < 0.001$) and child to child ($t = 4.181$, $df = 56$, $p < 0.001$), and for family composition in two situations: child to elder ($t = 2.230$, $df = 56$, $p < 0.05$) and child to child ($t = 2.149$, $df = 56$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion of Quantitative Data

The purpose of this study was to: (a) compare language choice in different situations (speech with elders, with parents/peers and with children) and investigate whether language shift was occurring; (b) compare language choice across urban and rural locations, and nuclear and extended families, to find if the rate of language shift differed across these contexts.

Consistent with the results of earlier studies, and thereby confirming Hypothesis 1, language shift from a mother tongue to Mandarin Chinese was occurring among parents and children in this study. As participants spoke with younger age cohorts, reported mother-tongue speech decreased and

Mandarin increased. This effect was significant when looking at language choice across the three situations regardless of location and family composition.

Further analysis comparing means across the three situations, when separated according to location and family composition, found parents in urban areas choosing more mother tongue and less Mandarin than parents in rural locations. When broken down by situation, significant differences were found in parent to child speech, but not any other, providing some support for Hypothesis 2. The lack of a significant difference for other situations indicates parents in both urban and rural locations followed similar practices in regard to their choice of language when speaking with other adults. Perhaps this is because their backgrounds were similar. Indeed, when asked which language or languages they can speak, all parents claimed they are able to speak both Mandarin and Tai-gi, and nearly all said they first learned to speak Tai-gi at home when young, and then learned Mandarin at school. This indicates past speaking practices, vis-à-vis mother tongue and Mandarin acquisition were quite similar. However, for children growing up today the situation differed across locations. While parents in both locations claimed their children could speak both Mandarin and Tai-gi, more parents in urban than rural locations reported their child's Tai-gi ability was inferior to their child's Mandarin – they could speak only a few phrases of Tai-gi and/or could understand but not speak it.

Examining reported language choice for children found means higher for children in urban areas – indicating less mother tongue and more Mandarin speech – than children in rural areas. This difference was significant across all three situations, providing strong support for Hypothesis 3. Noteworthy is the language choice of children speaking to other children in urban areas. The mean was 2.86 (3.0 = Mandarin only), indicating that among this age group few children speak a mother tongue with their peers. Also, the standard deviation was 0.36, indicating little diversity. In contrast, children in rural areas were more likely to speak a mixture of Mandarin and a mother tongue (mean = 2.22, 2.0 = mixed). The standard deviation was much higher (0.80), indicating a greater range of speaking practices. This indicates children in rural areas were more likely to speak a mother tongue and meet peers with a greater range of ability (or inability) in a mother tongue than their counterparts in the city. When compared with parents' reported speaking abilities, this indicates a shift from the past when mother-tongue ability was widespread across the population, to the present with mother-tongue ability varying across urban and rural contexts.

Hypothesis 4 examined parents' reported language choice across nuclear and extended families. There were no significant differences in reported language choice for parents in either type of family, indicating no support for Hypothesis 4. Family composition, i.e. the presence or absence of grandparents, apparently had little or no effect on parents' language choice.

Hypothesis 5 investigated children's reported language choice across nuclear and extended families. For all reported means children in nuclear families spoke more Mandarin and less mother tongue than children in extended families. Significant differences in language choice were found in the

situations of child to elder and child to child speech. Hence, Hypothesis 5 received moderate support. These findings indicate the presence (or absence) of a grandparent in the household affected the child's language choice when speaking with grandparents (and other elders) and other children, but did not affect child to parent speech. Apparently, when speaking to their parents, the presence of grandparents in the household had little impact on a child's language choice.

To understand the rate and direction of language shift, *post hoc* analyses were computed with paired samples *t*-tests (two-tailed). Tests compared differences in means of parents' reported language choice across the three situations (with elders, peers and children), children's reported language choice across the three situations (with elders, parents and children), and interactions between the two (e.g. language choice of parent to elder versus language choice of child to elder). As we see in Table 2, effects were significant on all but four pairs. Looking down the first column, comparing the mean of language choice when parents speak to elders against other situations, we found parents choosing a mother tongue significantly more often than all other situations. When parents spoke to elders they were more likely to choose a mother tongue than when they spoke to peers (difference = -0.98, $t = -15.682$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$), than when they spoke to children (difference = -1.41, $t = -4.665$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$), than when children spoke to elders (difference = -0.79, $t = -0.569$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$), than when children spoke to parents (difference = -1.36, $t = -1.180$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$), and than when children spoke to children (difference = -1.50, $t = -16.155$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, parents chose a mother tongue more when speaking with peers than when speaking with children (difference = -0.43, $t = -4.665$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$), than children speaking to parents (difference = -0.38, $t = -4.005$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$), and than children speaking to children (difference = -0.52, $t = -5.387$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.001$). The general pattern among parents was greater choice of a mother tongue when speaking with a member of an older generation, and the choice of Mandarin increased (mother tongue decreased) when speaking with a member of the peer or younger generation. Likewise, children chose Mandarin less when speaking to elders than when speaking to parents or other children. Finally, perhaps what is most interesting is language choice involving parents and children. In these situations significant differences were not found. These results indicate parents' language choice (more Mandarin and less mother tongue) may be driving language shift among children. That is, parents could choose to speak either a mother tongue or Mandarin, much as they did with their peers, but more often they chose to speak Mandarin. Ostensibly children in turn followed their parent's lead more than their grandparent's when speaking with their parents and other children.

A final set of *post hoc* tests (paired samples *t*-tests, two-tailed) were conducted to test communication accommodation between parents and children as measured by language choice (see Table 3). When comparing all parents with children it was found that parents accommodated to children more than children accommodated to parents (difference = 0.29, $t = 2.293$, $df = 57$, $p < 0.05$). This was computed by subtracting the difference of two sets of means. First, the mean of parents' language choice with children was

Table 2 *Post hoc* analysis of rate and direction of language shift across generations

	<i>Parent to elder</i>	<i>Parent to peer</i>	<i>Parent to child</i>	<i>Child to elder</i>	<i>Child to parent</i>	<i>Child to child</i>
Parent to elder	–					
Parent to peer	-0.98 (0.48) ^{***}	–				
Parent to child	-1.41 (0.73) ^{***}	-0.43 (0.70) ^{***}	–			
Child to elder	-0.79 (0.85) ^{***}	0.19 (0.95)	0.62 (0.79) ^{***}	–		
Child to parent	-1.36 (0.69) ^{***}	-0.38 (0.72) ^{***}	0.05 (0.47)	-0.57 (0.68) ^{***}	–	
Child to child	-1.50 (0.71) ^{***}	-0.52 (0.73) ^{***}	-0.09 (0.63)	-0.71 (0.77) ^{***}	-0.14 (0.54)	–

A negative difference in means indicates greater choice of mother tongue.*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3 *Post hoc* analysis of language choice between parents and children by location and family

	<i>Parent to peer minus parent to child</i>	<i>Location</i>		<i>Family Composition</i>	
		<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Nuclear</i>	<i>Extended</i>
Child to child minus child to parent	0.29 (0.97)*	0.51 (0.70)***	-0.04 (1.22)	0.42 (0.94)*	0.12 (1.01)

A positive difference in means indicates greater choice of Mandarin. * $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$.

subtracted from parents' language choice with peers, then the mean of children's language choice with parents was subtracted from children's language choice with other children, and finally the latter difference was subtracted from the former. These results indicate that in general, when compared with language choice with peers, parents chose Mandarin more when talking down one generation to children, than children chose a mother tongue when talking up one generation to their parents, as computed against children's language choice when talking with other children. Or put simply, parents' choice of language varied more across these generations, and children's less. This same test comparing means was computed four more times separating participants first according to location (urban and rural), and then by family composition (nuclear and extended). Here interesting differences emerged. In urban locations parents' choice of language changed more than children's ($t = 4.336$, $df = 34$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, in nuclear families parents' language choice changed more than children's ($t = 0.4242$, $df = 32$, $p < 0.05$). However, there were no significant effects for rural locations or extended families. These data indicate shift toward Mandarin among children is not as fast in rural and/or extended families. Furthermore, location may have a greater impact on language choice than family composition, as the significance level was greater for the former, and compounded by more nuclear families present in the city than country. The implication is that in future generations there may emerge greater differences in language choice across urban and rural locations than existed in the past and present.

Results and Discussion: Qualitative Data

Examining interview data qualitatively brought to light the meanings participants attached to their mother tongue and language choices. These data reveal paradoxes, inconsistencies and a range of opinions on various topics. A qualitative examination also shows how language practices and meanings are not simply defined, simply chosen based upon a set of static notions of what is a language and when and how to use it. Rather, participants dynamically make language choices based upon a range of meanings and understandings, which help us see language shift as an emergent process. The following will present these data thematically, demonstrating both views common across

urban and rural contexts, and views that differed across contexts. The first topic discusses participants' understandings of their mother tongue; the second examines why mother tongues should be supported and taught to the next generation; the third examines participants' understandings of accommodation; the last looks at how language is linked to identity.

All participants were asked to name their mother tongue. Ostensibly this was a simple question, equated with the language they first learned at home from their mother and family. For most it was, as one mother when asked how she learned to speak Mandarin and Tai-gi replied: '[I learned Mandarin] when I went to school. Tai-gi is my mother tongue'.⁴ Most of the participants (40) said Tai-gi was their mother tongue and a few (3) said Hakka. But for others the question was not easily answered. One mother, who like most others said she first spoke Tai-gi at home as a child and then learned Mandarin after starting school, said her mother tongue was 'Mandarin because we speak it more'. One participant could not come up with a clear answer: 'Mother tongue? I'm not clear. These two languages [Mandarin and Tai-gi] are both important; one is [a language] for communicating [with the generation] above, the other is [a language] for communicating [with the generation] below'.

When comparing participants' responses across urban and rural contexts, an interesting pattern emerged. While all could speak both Mandarin and Tai-gi (some also Hakka), and while nearly all learned Tai-gi as their first language at home, more who lived in an urban context called Mandarin their mother tongue (8/35) than those in the country (2/23). In addition, five participants in the city said both Tai-gi and Mandarin were their mother tongue, while none of the rural participants claimed likewise. Apparently the linguistic environment affected how one understands and defines one's mother tongue.

Next we examine reasons for supporting and teaching a mother tongue. Parents in both urban and rural locations claimed it important their children learn to speak Tai-gi (a few also said Hakka was important). There were few differences across these contexts. For example, Mrs Koei (all participants are referred to by pseudonyms) said: 'I feel that Tai-gi ought to be our hometown, hometown mother tongue. Should not forget it. I feel that kids, I just feel that it should be that the mother tongue of our hometown should be passed onto the next generation, it shouldn't be that it is broken or something'. Many participants described Tai-gi as a language more intimate than Mandarin. Mrs Ho succinctly explained: 'I feel that to use Tai-gi when speaking is very intimate, very genuine, enables you to pull a shared relationship closer'. Mr Chang discussed the role Tai-gi plays in the business environment:

I feel that when speaking Tai-gi or speaking Mandarin, there are two standards. Like me, I've had this factory here for 20 years, I'm the boss, been the boss for 20 years. Over here if you do business, when you speak Tai-gi, the feeling is more intimate, and you will be more successful in business. If you speak Mandarin, people won't accept you, because we here after all still have this kind of ethnicity complex, still have it, and will reject [those who speak Mandarin].

Likewise, Mrs Li of Taipei explained: 'When speaking Tai-gi, it has some nouns, and has some of those, that can describe things very suitably, can

describe some kind of thing very suitably, unlike Mandarin which is very rigid and wooden. And also when speaking Tai-gi it has a bit of a feeling of intimacy. Right, when communicating with people’.

Support for Tai-gi as a language, however, was qualified by some parents. Some said Mandarin and Tai-gi were equally intimate: ‘If you speak Mandarin or Tai-gi both are very intimate’. Mrs Sia said Tai-gi was her mother tongue, but because she grew up next to a military community where many *Waishengren* lived, she also learned Mandarin as a child. Since marriage she learned some Hakka because her husband and his family speak Hakka, and she has some aboriginal blood in her family. Mirroring this complex personal identity was her complex view about Taiwan’s various languages. On the one hand she said: ‘To us Tai-gi is, it should count as a kind of culture. We ought to preserve it’. But on the other not all languages ought to be preserved; nor should children be forced to learn them:

Like aborigines, in order for them to survive, they had to let go of their mother tongue, and learn Mandarin. I feel that the most important languages, some things we can preserve, but we should not force kids to learn them. Like I don’t like English. My parents in the past during the Japanese period, they accepted Japanese education. . . . That generation, people in their 60s or 70s were all like that. I feel that language, this thing, don’t put it in the curriculum, or don’t list it on the grade report. You can make it something that is extracurricular. . . . Don’t force them [children] to learn it.

While parents in general supported the teaching of a mother tongue, they found the way it was taught often confusing and differed from how they thought it should be taught. They believed Tai-gi should be learned naturally and not forced on children. When asked if she felt mother tongue education was necessary, Mrs Diu replied: ‘I feel that it is not very necessary. Because we naturally pass [the language] to the next [generation]’. When reflecting on the way he learned to speak Tai-gi as a child, Mr He described the process as follows: ‘Then our parents at home spoke only Tai-gi, and when I was young my grandfather and grandmother lived with us children. It was a big [extended] family. My grandparents and elders they spoke Tai-gi and my parents also spoke Tai-gi and so we were just imperceptibly influenced by what we saw and heard’. As for his daughter’s language learning, Mr He said that she naturally learned to speak Mandarin from him and his wife, and Tai-gi from her grandparents. He opposed forcing her to learn a language taught from a book. Many found the pronunciation system (a combination of Romanisation, characters and modified Mandarin Phonetic Symbols) confusing and could not understand it, and believed it to be a reason for their child’s poor pronunciation.

The third topic, accommodation, was discussed at length by many participants. Most participants said they spoke Tai-gi in the presence of elders. For example, Mrs Ong, when asked if she speaks Tai-gi or Mandarin with her friends, replied: ‘Half and half. . . . Because we here, in the country, sometimes if you’re talking to elders they don’t understand, you have to speak Tai-gi to accommodate them . . . At home I speak mostly Tai-gi, because of my

grandma and my mother, they're older... If you speak Mandarin they don't understand'. Mr Chiu explained how he accommodates people at work. When asked if he speaks Tai-gi or Mandarin at work, he answered: 'Both. Because I look at the other person. We are free at our work. Look at the customer. If he speaks Mandarin then we just speak Mandarin to him; if he speaks Tai-gi, then we just speak Tai-gi; see it's a senior citizen, just use Tai-gi; see it's a young person, then use Mandarin'. These comments nicely illustrate why language choice across situations differs, as discussed previously when analysing quantitative data.

Accommodation also emerged as an explanation for language choice in talk between parents and children. Mrs Ng was asked if the way children today learn to talk differed from the way she learnt to talk.

In the past the one who taught us was our mom, who would just talk with us and then we'd learn it [Tai-gi or Mandarin]. Right. But now maybe it's that our kids, imperceptibly it's that what we're teaching them to speak, it's that they watch TV, watch a lot of it, and then imperceptibly it's Mandarin, they speak only Mandarin. Then we just speak Mandarin with them, like that. Now my brother-in-law will correct me, telling me that if I correct them, they'll listen to me... So I'll tell them to speak Tai-gi, just like that. But they won't pay any attention to me.

The above reveals the many factors at work in language shift. One is television: today's children watch a lot of television, the majority of which is in Mandarin – notably children's cartoons. This in turn influences the child so she speaks Mandarin. Then, the mother 'imperceptibly' accommodated to the child's discourse practice and spoke Mandarin. Whenever she tried to speak Tai-gi her child would not respond: 'So I'll tell them to speak Tai-gi, just like that. But they won't pay any attention to me'.

The final topic explored in this paper is the perceived link between language and identity. Fishman (1991: 16) claimed 'the longer the process of language shift away from Xish [X language, such as Irish, Spanish, Yiddish] has gone on, the longer the phenomenon of Xmen [a group that sees its identity as isomorphic with X language, such as Jews speak Yiddish] who do not speak or even understand Xish has existed'. That is, over the course of time people of X group come to believe, for example, one does not have to speak Irish to be Irish. The decoupling of language and identity is one of the early indicators of language shift. Parents' views about this issue differed greatly across urban and rural locations.

Parents across both locations were asked if they believe the ability to speak Tai-gi meant someone was more 'Taiwanese'. This question was asked in the context of other questions about their children's speaking practices. A majority of parents in rural locations claimed Tai-gi marked a person as Taiwanese. For example, Mrs Lim said: 'It ought to be. I feel that it is this way. Just like foreigners speak their foreign language, this means the same thing'. Mrs Ho articulated the sensitivity of this issue. When asked if her daughter's ability to speak Tai-gi manifested her identity as Taiwanese, she replied: 'This is a very sensitive topic... [But] because she is born here, she should be able to speak

this [Tai-gi] language'. Later in the interview the researcher asked Mrs Ho if she knew of any children in her town who spoke Tai-gi with a poor accent, one which could mark someone as a Goa-seng-lang (*Waishengren* or Mainlander). In response, she asked her daughter (in Tai-gi) about the students in her first grade class.

Mrs Ho: In your class are there any [children] whose mommy and daddy are Goa-seng-lang?

Daughter: What is a 'Goa-seng-lang'?

Mrs Ho: Goa-seng-lang means someone who speaks only Mandarin, can't speak Tai-gi.

Ostensibly this mother defined for her daughter the meaning of a Goa-seng-lang: people who speak Mandarin only are Goa-seng-lang, whereas those who speak Tai-gi are not.⁵ To these participants language marked one's identity.

Nearly all the parents in urban locations, however, said the ability to speak Tai-gi does not define one's identity as Taiwanese. Mrs Ng reported her son speaks Mandarin and only a few phrases of Tai-gi. When asked if her son's ability to speak Tai-gi meant that he was Taiwanese, Mrs Ng replied: 'No. Because he himself just is Taiwanese. Right. For example, his mother tongue, I don't specially identify it saying that he speaks Tai-gi and that is what it is, defining it there. I don't. Yeah, [just] because the popular trend is like that. [Instead] it should be that you speak two languages, this is better'. A father, Mr Chng, said there are four ethnolinguistic groups in Taiwan: *Bensheng*, Hakka, *Waisheng* and Aborigine, and speaking any one of them does not mean that one is more or less Taiwanese. If people learned each other's languages it would promote harmony and strengthen Taiwan. He objected to the politicisation of Taiwan's languages and said the purpose of language is communication, fostering relationships between different people and different groups.

The most poignant example of a parent who decoupled Tai-gi with being Taiwanese came during an interview conducted with Mrs So. Most interviews were conducted inside the participant's home; this interview, however, was conducted in a public place, at a street-side noodle shop. Before formally beginning the interview the researcher chatted with both the mother and a neighbour woman, called 'A-Koei'. The researcher assumed A-Koei was a *Benshengren* because she spoke fluent Tai-gi. After she left the researcher began the interview with Mrs So. About half way through the interview the researcher asked Mrs So if she could recognise the accent a *Waishengren* has when speaking Tai-gi. This led to the following exchange including the researcher, Mrs So and Mrs. Hong, the owner of the noodle shop:

Mrs So: Like that A-Koei who was just here, you know?

Researcher: Yeah.

Mrs So: She's a *Waishengren*.

Researcher: Oh, really!

Mrs Hong: When she's talking she sounds just like [a native speaker of] Tai-gi.

- Researcher:** Maybe she's a Fujian person [the province in China where people speak Hokkien, very similar to Tai-gi]?
- Mrs So:** No, she's not. [We] live together, and so it's changed into a blend... She's a *Waishengren* ... [But] her accent is just like that of a Taiwanese.
- Mrs Hong:** When you see her again, you'll see that she doesn't like to speak Mandarin; she'll always speak Tai-gi.
- Mrs So:** One time I was talking about what *Waishengren* are like. Then her son said ... 'The people you are saying bad things about have one who is sitting right here'! Oh, then I knew that she is a *Waishengren*.

When contrasting the above exchange with the conversation between Mrs Ho and her daughter, we see the dynamic nature of culture and identity formation. While Mrs Ho recontextualised for her daughter the dichotomous definition that *Benshengren* speak Tai-gi and *Waishengren* speak Mandarin, Mrs So, upon learning that her Tai-gi-speaking neighbour, A-Koei, was a *Waishengren*, found the definition problematic. Instead, Mrs So (and presumably many others living in urban locations) constructed a new definition, that Taiwan was a 'blended' society where *Benshengren* children may speak little or no Tai-gi and *Waishengren* adults may speak fluent, unaccented Tai-gi.

Conclusion

Based upon survey data collected in Taiwan in the mid-1980s, Young found substantial language shift toward Mandarin among the island's various ethnolinguistic groups. He predicted that in the future, if the government continued to suppress local mother tongues, 'group members will fight to resist those forces threatening it' (Young, 1988: 337). The Taiwan government no longer suppresses local mother tongues and instead has instituted a plan to preserve them. However, these data collected nearly 20 years after Young's study indicate that as mother-tongue education has begun, language shift toward Mandarin is continuing and is faster in the city than countryside. To better understand the picture painted by this study and understand what may happen in the future, we now turn our attention to the four perspectives discussed at the beginning of this paper.

Fishman (1966, 1991, 1999) found among immigrant groups to the USA that language shift from mother tongue (or 'heritage language') to national (or common) language often occurs by the third generation. These data indicate language shift occurring rapidly in Taiwan so that the mother tongue, Tai-gi, may be lost by this present generation of children, notably in urban areas where Tai-gi (and presumably other mother tongues such as Hakka) has been decoupled from identity. Fishman (1991) developed an eight-stage scale to assess the vitality of a language, with 8 being most threatened and 1 least. If we map onto this scale what these data say is happening in Taiwan, it appears that in rural areas (and extended families) Tai-gi is at stage 6, where 'Xish [Tai-gi] is the normal language of informal, spoken interaction between and within all three generations of the family, with Yish [Mandarin] being reserved for

matters of greater formality and technicality than those that are the common fare of daily family life' (Fishman, 1991: 92). Fishman claims stage 6 is crucial as it is at this level languages may continue and be passed onto the next generation. When dropping to the next stage, however, quite often it is very difficult to stop language shift. These data indicate that in urban areas Tai-gi is at stage 7, where elders continue to speak the language and maintain an active presence in the community. However, interaction between these old folks and children is limited, and children are not speaking the language fluently with their peers, nor are parents speaking it with their children.

Giles *et al.*'s (1977) theory of ethnolinguistic vitality claims three socio-structural factors determine an ethnic group's continued linguistic existence: the language's status, demographic scope and institutional support factors. When Young (1988) conducted his survey in the 1980s, Tai-gi had great demographic scope as the majority language, but no institutional support – on the contrary it was suppressed in the spheres of media and education (see Huang, 1995, 2000; Sandel, 2003). Sandel (2003) spoke with adults who attended elementary school from 1949 until 1987 and found many recalled being punished at school for speaking Tai-gi and other 'dialects'. Participants in this study were asked if they were punished or witnessed such punishment and most replied affirmatively. The most frequently reported punishment was a fine. Others recalled such punishments as being hit on the palm of the hand, forced to stand at attention, told to write a hundred times, 'I will speak Mandarin' or made to wear on their chest a placard with the phrase, 'Please speak Mandarin' written on it. One participant recalled that offending students' mouths were taped shut. The present situation contrasts greatly. One parent ironically remarked that in the past students were fined for speaking Tai-gi; today they are rewarded and given candy. These data, however, found concomitant with increased institutional support a decrease in demographic scope, language shift from a mother tongue (Tai-gi) to Mandarin among both parents and their children. Hence, the change in the second major factor that predicts ethnolinguistic vitality points to decreased vitality. Will these factors cancel each other out? Will school-based mother tongue instruction reverse language shift? Or will demographic trends – decreasing mother tongue speech – continue? Future research should watch these trends.

The third perspective, language ideologies – beliefs about language 'articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' (Silverstein, 1979: 193), emerged when analysing data qualitatively. Participants across both urban and rural locations supported the teaching of mother tongues. Many said their mother tongue (Tai-gi) is a language of their heritage and conveys a sense of intimacy not conveyed by Mandarin, and Tai-gi is a language they learned 'naturally' at home in the context of conversations and interactions with family members and friends. However, paradoxically these beliefs associated with Tai-gi can become an obstacle to its preservation. As fewer of today's children learn Tai-gi (and other mother tongues) naturally, and in the context of the home, the sense of what the language means may shift. Evidence for such a shift emerged when examining how participants defined their mother tongue. More folks who lived in an urban context defined Mandarin as their mother tongue. Likewise,

many children today learn their 'mother tongue' at school, an 'unnatural' context. It seems unlikely the next generation will perceive Tai-gi the same as previous generations.

The final perspective examined by this study is CAT. Data examined qualitatively found the most common pattern was to speak a mother tongue (Tai-gi) to elders, mixed Mandarin and Tai-gi to peers/parents, and Mandarin (or mixed) to children. This was the perceived pattern found in both urban and rural contexts. However, a slightly different pattern emerged when examining data quantitatively. Means of language choice decreased (indicating more mother tongue) as participants reportedly spoke to higher generations, and this pattern was found in both urban and rural contexts. However, when looking at parent to child language choice, there was a difference between urban and rural contexts (also to a lesser degree nuclear and extended families). In urban and/or nuclear families parents accommodated to their children by speaking more Mandarin, while children accommodated to their parents by speaking more mother tongue (Tai-gi). Furthermore, parents accommodated significantly more than children. However, there were no significant differences between the means of parents and children's language choice among rural and/or extended families. Reasons for these differences are unclear. They do, however, point to the importance of linguistic context and/or grandparents in the home.

Future studies of this topic should include grandparents' perceptions. To what extent do they accommodate (or can they accommodate) to the language abilities of their children and grandchildren? In addition, it would be informative to collect more data from other populations including Hakka, Aborigines and *Waishengren* (Mainlanders). Is language shift occurring as quickly among these other groups (i.e. Hakka and Aboriginal)? Is mother tongue education perceived the same or differently?

As other nations throughout the world confront the issue of language shift and mother tongue education, scholars and educators should pay attention to Taiwan. It is a place where language policies have changed dramatically in recent years and have been the attention of much debate. While this study does not offer concrete solutions to the issues raised, hopefully it sheds light on what is happening among families in Taiwan and demonstrates the complexities and dynamic nature of this topic. Future studies hopefully will present a more complete picture and offer reasons for how and why mother tongues can be saved.

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Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Todd L. Sandel, Department of Communication, University of Oklahoma, 610 Elm Avenue, Room 101, Norman, OK 73019, USA (tlsandel@ou.edu).

Notes

1. During the period of martial law, the KMT labelled anything that came from the Communist Mainland, be it smuggled goods, propaganda, or even publications about China from the USA, as 'fei' or 'bandit'. For example, in 1987 I purchased in Taiwan a copy of *China: Tradition and Transformation*, a book about China by the prominent American Sinologists John Fairbanks and Edwin Reischauer. In this reprinted book the last chapter, discussing events since 1949 under the People's Republic of China, was taken out by the censors and labelled as 'bandit' material.
2. Mandarin Chinese words are represented in pinyin without tone marks and italicised in the text. Tai-gi (see note 3 below) words are represented in the romanised orthography of Taiwan's Presbyterian Church, minus tone marks, and underlined.
3. The issue of what to call the language (other than Mandarin) spoken by the majority of the people in Taiwan is controversial. Most people simply call this native language of Taiwan 'Taiwanese'. However, some argue that this implies that the other native languages of Taiwan – Hakka and the Aboriginal tongues – are somehow not 'Taiwanese'. We find this argument persuasive. Another term commonly used is 'Hokkien'. That solution has its merits, given that it is the term used by Chinese in many communities throughout Southeast Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines) who speak a language very similar to that spoken in Taiwan. However, one problem is that the 'Hokkien' spoken in Taiwan – with its many Japanese loanwords – differs from the Hokkien of other places. Hence, this term glosses over regional differences. Another alternative is to call the language 'Tai-yü' (Hsiau, 1997), but the biggest drawback is that Tai-yü is a Mandarin term. Hence, the solution we offer is to call the language 'Tai-gi', which is taken from the language itself and is an emic term that indexes Taiwan alone.
4. Note that excerpts presented in this text are not verbatim translations of the original speech, rather they are presented in a style of conversational English, meant to convey the tone and style of the speaker in the original. For those interested in seeing the excerpts in the original languages, contact the first author.
5. The reason for the daughter's question is unclear. Had her mother said *Waishengren* (Chinese Mandarin for Mainlander) instead of *Goa-seng-lang* (Tai-gi), the daughter may have understood her mother's meaning. Regardless of the daughter's intended meaning, the question provided an opportunity for the mother to express her beliefs about language and identity.

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