Changing second language targets in Taiwan: 
The case of Paiwan and other minorities

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1. The Formosan language situation

The present language situation in Taiwan is a complex one. Those who are familiar with patterns of language use elsewhere in Asia will notice similarities with the case of Taiwan; whereas those who are unfamiliar with this area may be surprised by certain facts. Today's report is based on my own field research in 1993 and 1994. Although scholarly histories¹ provide details about the early European and Chinese colonization of Formosa² and its surrounding islands, the more recent history which I describe is based on eyewitness accounts and on the oral histories of "Formosans", by which term I refer to the area's autochthonous Austronesians.

Before 1895, the Paiwan and other Austronesian language groups of southern and eastern Formosa were relatively isolated. Except for certain border interactions with other Austronesians and some occasional contact with Chinese, there was very little contact between Formosans and foreign speech communities. Today, however, the Paiwan community is divided by a complex pattern of multilingualism, the result of historical development and changes of foreign suzerainty. During the period of Japanese administration, from 1895 to 1945, a classic substrate-superstrate situation developed as Japanese educators, missionaries, and engineers moved into the non-Chinese highlands of Formosa. This half century of Japanese development resulted in widespread literacy and bilingualism in Japanese and indigenous languages. For example, among the Paiwan people of southern Formosa, it became common to speak Japanese at school and in government offices, while speaking the Paiwan language at home. Since 1949, when Formosa became the largest land mass controlled by the Republic of China (ROC), the indigenous minorities (as well as the Sinitic majority) have been forced to learn Mandarin as a means of socioeconomic advancement. In addition, throughout the past century, the increasing urbanization of Paiwan and other indigenous communities has resulted in widespread contact with native speakers of Holo. Given the change of superstrate and the added complexity of a rival lingua franca, the Paiwan are now faced with a language situation which presents second language learners with many difficult choices. The ethnic Paiwan must decide whether (and, if so, when and where) to speak Japanese, Holo, and Mandarin within

¹ English language accounts include Davidson (1903), Campbell (1903) for the Dutch era, Meskill (1979) for the rise of Chinese gentry, and Gordon (1970) for the establishment of Japanese suzerainty. The patterns of Paiwan cultural loss described by Tung (1995) are in the main valid for other Formosan groups.

² The terms "Formosa", "Taiwan", and "Republic of China" are not synonymous. "The Republic of China" is the English name of a sovereign state recognized as such by foreign governments. Taiwan is a province of China, which is recognized as such by both of the governments which lay claim to it, namely, the ROC and the PRC (People's Republic of China). The territory of Taiwan consists entirely of islands, of which the largest is Formosa. In English-language writing and speech, both Chinese governments use the name "Taiwan" ambiguously, referring either to the province 台湾省 or to its primary island, Formosa 美麗島.
the Paiwan community. The various rates of second language proficiency are changing, and the pattern of multilingualism is affecting the community's social structure. Sociologically emblematic language usage has arisen, and in this and other regards there are parallels with other Formosan speech communities.

2. Bilingualism in Japanese

As part of Japan from 1895 to 1945, Taiwan was an area of great linguistic diversity. Two Sinitic languages had great currency. Collectively known as Holo 福佬語 are the varieties of Fukienese spoken by the Hoklo Chinese, descendants of immigrants from Fukien 福建. The principal Fukienese variety is Min Nan 閩南語 which is also known in Taiwan by the English names Southern Min, Southern Fukienese, and Hokkien. The other important Sinitic language, Hakka 客家語, was spoken by many of the Hakka Chinese, who were also descendent from mainland China immigrants. In addition, several autochthonous Formosan languages were spoken, most notably: Amis 阿美語, Atayal 泰雅語, Saiset 賽夏語, Tsou 蕃語, Bunun 布農語, Puyuma 卓南語, Paiwan 排灣語, Rukai 魯凱語, and Yami 雅美語.

For the Formosans, Japanese administration proved to be an era of comparative enlightenment. The impact of the Dutch and other European settlements, if not benign, had been short-lived. The long period of Chinese rule which followed the expulsion of the Dutch was exploitative and destructive; by the end of the era of Manchu administration, Formosan language use in the lowlands was all but extinct. By setting Japanese up as the official language, the government placed the Chinese and the Formosans on more equal footing. Moreover, the Japanese opened roads, schools, and churches in the highlands, providing hitherto isolated Formosans access to the fruits of a modern economy. Formosans did not have to forswear their cultural heritage completely and become Chinese in order to modernize; under Japanese administration, a population of modern, industrial age Formosans began to grow. Except in those few areas which resisted Japanese encroachment, rural development also fostered contact between the various Formosan groups, which helped to end Formosan ethnic warfare and thus planted the seeds of pan-Formosan indigenous solidarity. Of course, when the Japanese brought the highlands under their effective administration, they also improved certain material standards of living for the resident Formosans. Older Formosans, who first experienced literacy, electricity, and modern medicine as gifts from a cadre of paternalistic Japanese teachers, engineers, and doctors, are today nostalgic for the days of Japanese rule; they are quite happy to speak Japanese whenever they encounter strangers, and they prefer to use Japanese hymns in church. As Japanese education programs became increasingly comprehensive, although Holo use remained widespread among the Chinese, Japanese became the lingua franca of communication between highland Formosans and lowland Chinese.

During the Japanese era, although the Sinitic population was able to continue to use Holo and written Chinese as languages of instruction in their schools for a long time after the Japanese assumed control\(^3\), the schools which the Japanese established to serve the Formosan population used Japanese as the primary, and typically sole, instructional medium. The significance of Japan’s “kominka” policy of turning Formosans into children of the emperor should not be underestimated. By one Formosan account, this “attempt to assimilate a subjected people to the master race

\(^3\) The description of Japanese administration on the Chinese relies heavily on Gallin 1966 and Harrell 1982.
and culture had no precedent among the colonial powers in Asia" (Tung 1995: 106). Access to education in Japanese permitted the Formosans a route to modern industrial society which did not automatically sinicize them. By 1927, well over a quarter of the Paiwan could speak some Japanese, and the early 1930s saw a rapid increase in school enrollment (ibid.: 90). Assimilation of the Paiwan was sufficient by 1935 for their reclassification as regular subjects of the emperor. By the late 1930s, the Paiwan were compelled to take Japanese names. Acculturation progressed even to the point where Formosans volunteered for Japanese military service (ibid.: 87).

The Japanese language was used throughout Taiwan's schools as the medium of instruction during the later fascist period, which, while undermining traditional Chinese literacy, significantly equalized the educational levels to which both Formosan and Sinitic Taiwanese could aspire. Indeed, successful Formosan students even received higher education and professional training. Of course, the more rural and isolated highland Formosans remained at a disadvantage, but the opportunities afforded by education, which was free at all levels, became clear to the general Formosan population during this period. One wonders what might have transpired had Japan retained Formosa at the end of World War Two; for example, if it had been placed under temporary U.S. administration as was Okinawa. Certainly, Japanese language use in the schools would have become more thoroughly entrenched. We can even imagine the development of the kind of stable and widespread diglossic situations characteristic of India, and such a situation would have afforded the Formosans a measure of protection from Chinese linguistic hegemony. As it turned out, however, the Cairo Declaration was formulated without representation of nor consultation with Formosan interests, and the transfer of Taiwan to Chinese suzerainty ensured that the Formosans would occupy the lowest rung of the Taiwanese sociolinguistic ladder.

3. Shift to Mandarin

The flight of the ROC (Republic of China) to Taipei radically changed the demographics of Taiwan. In the four years following the "restoration" of Chinese rule, over four million Chinese immigrants came to Formosa, nearly all of them with the ROC government in 1949. The Taiwan population increased by about half. The language of these new immigrants was overwhelmingly Mandarin, commonly called Kuo-yu 國語 in Taiwan. Though it had been the official language of China since 1928, Mandarin was not widely used in Taiwan. Except for the Mandarin-speaking provincial officials who replaced the Japanese in 1945, the Chinese of Taiwan spoke either Holo or Hakka.

As Formosa became the ROC's fortress, much of the rugged highlands was designated for military use only, and the autochthonous Formosans living in those areas were forced from their homes. Elsewhere, Formosans were permitted to remain in their highland villages, but access to those villages became restricted, hindering travel by Formosans between neighboring villages. Although many Formosans have

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4 The situation of the Ainu vis-à-vis the Japanese was in many ways similar, though their long history of contact is marked by dramatic changes in the Ainu-Japanese relationship (DeChicchis 1995).

5 The rate of assimilation was not everywhere the same. The experience of individual villages varied according to their particular geographic and social circumstances. In general, the Amis and Puyuma cases were similar to the Paiwan. On the other hand, the Atayal and the Bunun of the hinterland resisted Japanese encroachment and acculturation longer. The Yami people, by virtue of their island home being designated an anthropological reservation, were uniquely insulated from the Japanese.
continued to live in these restricted villages, over the years there has been a sizable exodus of Formosans to the lower unrestricted zones. Formosans, who had long been able to maintain their language and customs in the highlands, came under pressure to assimilate to the Chinese culture of the lowlands. This rapid and extensive assimilation resulted in indigenous cultural loss. Although very recently the Formosan churches have been leading efforts to revive and maintain important Formosan traditions, the cultural loss has often been so great that recovery is impossible. The loss of land and the physical dislocation of Formosan settlements caused by military operations has been the largest single factor in the loss of highland Formosan languages and customs.

The ROC transformed Taiwan from a fishing and agrarian province into a diversified economic powerhouse. The resulting urbanization of the population also threatened the Formosans, who found themselves at a distinct disadvantage among the Chinese who dominated the cities. Rapidly, the urban populations became stratified along linguistic lines. At the top were the Chinese speakers of Mandarin, especially the mainland-China born “extra-provincials” 外省 who immigrated with Chiang Kai-shek; they controlled both the ROC government and the provincial government, as well as the various government-sponsored social and commercial organizations. Next, the Chinese speakers of Holo derived their status by virtue of being a majority of the populace. In third place were the Chinese speakers of Hakka, a small minority which benefitted from their Sinitic cultural traits. At the bottom were, and still are, the unassimilated Formosans.

Forced from their highland sanctuaries by both military and economic policies, Formosans began to see the acquisition of Chinese language skills as a prerequisite for a better life. After the ROC’s relocation, Taiwan’s educational system was improved in terms of both quality and access. As a result, ninety-four percent of Taiwan’s present population can speak Mandarin, either as a first or second language, making Mandarin the most widely known of any language spoken in Taiwan. Formosan languages, such as Paiwan and Amis, which once had some currency as regional linguae francae, now rarely serve that function. Japanese is now used only by older Formosans. Now, when a native Paiwan speaker encounters a native Bunun speaker, they are almost certain to speak Mandarin with each other. Moreover, since Holo and Hakka speakers have also learned Mandarin, knowledge of Mandarin suffices for communication with all of the Sinitic groups in Taiwan. Knowledge of Mandarin has afforded Formosans the same educational opportunities as enjoyed by the Chinese in Taiwan, and it is now spawning an educated elite of young Formosan scholars, with foreign language skills in English and Japanese as well.

Equal educational opportunity has not been matched by equal employment opportunity, and the Formosans continue to be the poorest segment of Taiwan's population. One benefit of their relative poverty has been the greater social insulation of Formosan villages, which act as sanctuaries of Formosan language use. Because of continuing discrimination, some of the individuals who have been among the most successful in Chinese business and scholarly circles are now returning to their homes to promote Formosan language preservation. The Presbyterian Church has been especially active in this regard, its ministers and seminarians encouraging their peers to develop their villages and urban churches as havens of Formosan culture. Church services are routinely conducted in Paiwan, and Paiwan language hymns are very popular. To be sure, Mandarin translations of the Paiwan sermons are necessary in order to reach some of the younger worshippers; however, it is important to note that most of them are rather embarrassed by their lack of indigenous language skill. In contrast, there is a sizable group of esteemed young fluent Paiwan speakers, and one can easily overhear both Paiwan and Mandarin conversations at village festivals and