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HISTORIAE VARIAE MULTIETHNICAE

Festskrift tillägnad Juha Janhunen
på hans 61. födelsedag 12.2.2013

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CONTENTS

LANGUAGE IN TAIWANESE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Taru Salmenkari

In multilingual contexts, the chosen language indicates identity and accentuates power relations. In contrast, social movements tend to challenge certain structures of power or proclaim certain identities. In Taiwanese social movements, language is thus used to demarcate positions of power, various identities as well as ethnic and social backgrounds, both in emancipatory and constraining ways.

In Taiwan, indigenous languages belong to the Austronesian languages. Some Aborigines still speak these languages. Due to immigration from mainland China, the majority speaks some variation of Chinese. Ethnically, native Chinese speakers are constructed as Han or Hua. The early immigrants from China to Taiwan were mostly from the southern Fujian province. Their language variant is considered to be a dialect of Chinese when it is called Fujianese, Minnan or, in the dialect itself, Hokkien. Lately, the term Taiwanese (Taiyu, Taigi), emphasizing Taiwanese as a language, and the geographically vague term Hoklo have gained popularity.[1] Minnan is by far the largest group in Taiwan, making up about two thirds of the population. However, the Taiwanese are largely bilingual, some even multilingual, and switch between Minnan and standard Chinese

1 Whether Minnan and Hakka are seen as Chinese dialects or as Sinitic languages is a political choice and also depends on whether the Chinese language is investigated in its written (*wen*) or spoken (*hua*) form. Despite their distinctive pronunciations, the Chinese writing system bridges various sublanguages. In this article, the interchangeability between the terms "dialect" and "language" is a purposeful choice recognizing both classifications as justifiable. They are somewhat foreign to native Chinese terminology in which written Chinese (*Zhongwen*), standard pronunciation (*putonghua*), and local dialect (*fangyan, difanghua, tuhua*) are all different aspects of each (educated) person's Chinese language (*Hanyu*) usage. In Chinese the terms for dialects are derived from such positive concepts of identification as place (*fang*) and land (*tu*). The capability to demonstrate one's origin and rootedness with dialect connects socially and can endow prestige. For readers' convenience, I systematically use only one term for each dialect. The criteria for the choice of the terms Minnan and Hakka are two: Firstly, both are terms that native speakers in Taiwan use about themselves. Secondly, I chose common terms used internationally, but not any term referring directly to Fujian province in the mainland. Place names are given in the form that one is most likely to encounter them in a map in English. To respect various linguistic identities, personal names are written like persons themselves write them in English. Other expressions are transliterated in *pinyin*, which is the official Romanization standard in mainland China and one of the many systems used in Taiwan.

Studia Orientalia 113 (2013), pp. 181–188

according to social needs. Despite the promotion of local languages in education in recent years, fluent Minnan speaking has been in decline (Klöter 2004; Scott & Tiun 2007).

Another main dialect is standard Chinese (*guoyu*) based on northern Chinese dialects. The Taiwanese identify standard Chinese with the central governments in mainland China and with the Nationalist Party that took refuge in Taiwan after the revolution of 1949. With the Nationalists arrival, over one million administrators, soldiers, entrepreneurs, artists, and other people from all over China fled to Taiwan to escape the Communist takeover of mainland China. Standard Chinese had been their administrative language already on the mainland. It bridged the dialectically heterogeneous immigrant population, although many did not speak standard Chinese well (Corcuff 2002). Public schools, university examinations, civil service, and the military used standard Chinese exclusively and systematically discouraged the use of vernacular and Austronesian languages (Hsiau 1997; Sommers 2010; Sandel 2003).

The third Chinese dialect common in Taiwan, that of Hakka, or Kejia in standard Chinese, is mostly used within Hakka communities only (Liao 2000). It is not often used in public in social movements anymore. The Hakka identity is sometimes expressed in social movements, but usually not in the Hakka language. For example, a speaker in a land rights demonstration (17 July 2010) used standard Chinese to describe the values that the Hakka customarily ascribe to their land. However, in private and in local groups Hakka is a useful language for movement mobilization. Land rights activists working in grassroots communities pay attention to the Hakka dialect as a tool for organizing resistance in villages that have a Hakka majority. In my interviews, some non-Hakka people admired the Hakka groups and networks for their superior efficiency in building local resistance compared to what other ethnic groups could mobilize. Previously, even anti-dam protests have been effectively framed as movements for the protection of Hakka culture (Hou 2000). In party politics, Hakka is a viable political identity and language. When Taipei City organized the Hakka festival (24 Oct 2010) before the municipal elections, Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-pin addressed the audience in Hakka. Likewise, many other politicians emphasize their mastery of Hakka to attract Hakka voters. Obviously, the reason for the infrequent use of Hakka in social movements today, along with the fact that few people outside of Hakka communities understand the language, can be attributed to the earlier Hakka movement's success. The Hakka no longer need to promote Hakka rights as a social movement. Hakka culture is now officially recognized and promoted through the governmental Hakka Affairs Offices and the Hakka language television channel.

LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL POWER

Against the Nationalist government's imposition of a singular Chinese identity and one standardized language, the democracy movement struggled for the acknowledgement of diverse identities among the Taiwanese. Using vernacular was itself a political statement against the Nationalist Party (Minns & Tierney 2003). The independence movement demonstrates its Taiwanese identity with the use of the Minnan language. One wing of the movement promotes language pluralism, but a more radical position promotes a nation-state with Minnan as the official language (Hsiau 1997; Wei 2006). This caused some mainland-born opposition activists to quit the opposition party and gave rise to the Hakka movement opposing the monopolization of the Taiwanese identity by Minnan speakers (Chu 2000; Martin 1996). The promotion of Minnan over standard Chinese is discriminatory to the Hakka who use standard Chinese in public (Liao 2000). The position of aboriginal languages was more complex. The independence movement often promotes multiculturalism to emphasize a genuinely non-Chinese origin of the Taiwanese people, not to answer cultural needs of Aborigines themselves (Cabestan 2005; Rudolph 2004).

Social movements close to the independence movement, due to their mutual participation in the democracy movement, tend to prefer Minnan. This continues to be the case, for example, with the independent union movement by the labor. For example, when labor rights organizations, labor unions and the Democratic Progressive Party members met for the Taiwan Labor Front anniversary celebration (31 July 2010), they spoke Minnan, leaving standard Chinese only for student supporters and for some civil society activists outside of the labor movement. The use of Minnan had a geographic basis as well. Some pioneering labor activists attending were from Kaohsiung, the industrial center in the south of Taiwan, and did not speak standard Chinese that well.

Another distinction is often made with language variants by contrasting the language of the officials with that of the common people or the languages used in official and informal occasions. The speaker repeats what the officials say or write in standard Chinese and recounts the words uttered by people near to oneself, such as neighbors, children and coworkers, in Minnan. This distinction is made regardless of whether one is speaking standard Chinese or Minnan. Here, the chosen language reflects relations and locations of power. This kind of code switching is not exclusive to social movements, but it becomes more pronounced as social movements deal with power and influence. Relating a story in which an ordinary person uses vernacular in speaking to a governmental official and the official answers in standard Chinese underlines the distance between them.

This demarcation between the official and the popular differs from the use of dialects in mainland Fujianese speech to distinguish between inside and outside. The urban Fujianese, speaking a dialect that non-locals do not understand, switch between the local dialect and standard Chinese depending on to whom they are speaking; dialect is for locals, while standard Chinese is for migrants and travelers. This kind of language accommodation takes place in Taiwanese markets as well (van der Berg 1986), although Taiwanese speakers can expect that listeners understand both Minnan and standard Chinese (Chen 2010). At social movement gatherings, my presence as a foreigner at times caused people to consider the insider/outsider demarcation. In some meetings that I was observing, another participant offered to help me understand and translated what was said from Minnan into standard Chinese. In my presence, language usage sometimes changed towards standard Chinese. Although the mostly elderly leprosy patients of the Losheng Hospital preservation movement gave their public speeches in Minnan, my participation in their internal meeting caused them to change their language to standard Chinese, leaving only those patients who did not speak standard Chinese well to make their remarks in Minnan.

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL STATUS

For the independence movement, the use of Minnan is empowering. However, this is not always the case. When the decision makers use standard Chinese, local resistance could distance itself from the political power centers if they do not speak the official language. For example, local opponents of the plan for building a petrochemical plant in Changhua were mainly fishermen and farmers. In their protests, the use of Minnan signaled the protestors' low social status. This distance became even more pronounced in their direct contacts with decision makers. In the public hearing held in the capital (25 Aug 2010), even their representatives were not confident in speaking standard Chinese. However, in alliance with people in a better position, mainly environmentalists and the opposition party, their resistance was successful. The political elite does not exclusively use standard Chinese. Many politicians, especially those belonging to the Democratic Progressive Party, often use Minnan in public. Legislator Tien Chiu-Chin's language choices illustrate how the context determines the language. She addressed the protestors in the anti-petrochemical plant demonstration (27 Sept 2010) in Minnan, but chaired the public hearing about nuclear power in the Legislative Yuan (21 Sept 2010) entirely in standard Chinese.

Indeed, one factor in language use is the urban–rural divide. This distinction is seen most notably in the land rights movement. Its demonstration in the capital

(17–18 July 2010) was conducted in standard Chinese. Although some individual speakers expressed themselves in Minnan or an Austronesian language, even they introduced themselves in standard Chinese and announced their decision to use their native language. The student branch of the movement uses standard Chinese in its meetings at universities in Taipei. However, when the movement gathers in the countryside, the language changes and Minnan predominates in the meetings. Generally, the dominant language is standard Chinese in the umbrella organization led by intellectuals, but it is mainly Minnan in local land struggles the movement helps to organize, with the exception of individual intellectuals among the movement's leaders who tend to choose Minnan even in NGO (non-governmental organization) events in Taipei. However, the Taiwan Rural Front has accepted one urban land struggle under its umbrella. In Taoyuan, the opposition to the planned metro line uses standard Chinese in its meetings, but chooses Hakka restaurants for meals to celebrate its local cultural background. Here the urban–rural divide dictates the dominant language more than the central–local distinction. The movement center is highly attentive to language variants. It offers lectures about the use of local languages in mobilization. During the meeting breaks, I sometimes heard its student members share information about who speaks which particular dialect.

Most Taiwanese NGOs are urban, and their membership mainly consists of intellectuals and students. As both urban residence and higher education tend to advance standard Chinese speaking (van der Berg 1986; Yeh, Chan & Cheng 2004), most of the NGO events in Taipei use standard Chinese. It is commonly used in conferences and on stage in more informal membership events. In this way, speaking standard Chinese is only one expression of the fact that NGO activists tend to have a more urban and better educated social background than the average Taiwanese.

Standard Chinese speaking is also a generational matter. Younger people are less fluent in vernacular than older generations (Chen 2010). Although elderly farmers and fishermen use vernacular, young villagers have no problem in expressing themselves in standard Chinese, although they sometimes switch to vernacular to accentuate their village identity. The problem for the movements emerging in the countryside is outmigration depriving villages of educated youth. Language patterns in rural-based movements could be very different if they were not movements of aging population. Standard Chinese already is dominant among university students. In the above-mentioned demonstration in Changhua, the only act in the program conducted in standard Chinese was the university students' performance.

NON-SINITIC LANGUAGES

Apart from different Chinese dialects or Sinitic languages, Austronesian languages are sometimes heard in social movements. The indigenous movement has succeeded in translating its demands into official recognition and administrative power (Ku 2005). However, having a minister and councils specifically for indigenous affairs has not helped resolve cultural preservation and land issues. Aborigines make up a small minority divided into different ethnic and language groups, making it difficult to communicate to larger audiences in only one of these languages. Furthermore, many Aborigines no longer master their own tribal languages. Despite the cultural renaissance in recent years, often only fragments of past practices remain. Even fragments can be highly empowering for identity building, as Aboriginal teachers and village leaders told me and a group of NGO activists visiting the Taitung area (26–27 July 2010). In these villages the common language is standard Chinese even among the Aborigines because each village consists of several different ethnic groups, all originally forced to relocate into the village. Consequently, many young people know only few words of their tribal language.

The prevailing language the Aborigines speak in public is standard Chinese. Even the prominent song of the indigenous movement, "We All Belong to One Family" (*Women dou shi yijia ren*), is sung mainly in Chinese. In demonstrations, Aborigines often give speeches in their own language, always with interpretation to Chinese. Sometimes they even call the audience to repeat slogans in their own language.

Aborigine music is heard often in Taiwanese social movements. Along with the indigenous peoples' movement, Aboriginal singer Panai performs at human rights and land rights movement events and demonstrations. Her shows reveal the contrasts and negotiations needed between preserving her own culture and communicating to the audience consisting mainly of the Han. Like many other Aboriginal singers, she sings both in her own language and in standard Chinese. Many of her songs in her own language are bilingual or have an introduction in Chinese to convey the song's meaning to the audience. Bridging cultures can take other forms, such as teaching the audience to sing along to aboriginal tunes that have not only words but also melodic patterns unfamiliar to the majority. In a human rights concert (19 June 2010), Panai lamented that the lack of education in native languages weakens aboriginal cultural transmission. Evidently, her own standard education facilitates cultural dialogue with the audience, but results in elaborate balancing between an indigenous and a Taiwanese identity in her art. The relationship with the audience is different when she performs for the indig-

enous movement. Then the audience knows the lyrics and sings along even the parts in Austronesian languages. Panai identifies with all Aborigines, rather than any single tribe only, and has produced music in various indigenous languages. Her own family background with a history of migrations and mixed marriages is only one explanation to this pan-Austronesian approach.

Aborigine musicians' language usage differs from the Han performers in social movement events in the same pattern as speakers' usage does. Aborigine musicians use standard Chinese and indigenous languages, while Han activists often sing in vernacular. For example, the rap band Kou Chou Ching invites Aboriginal singers who use various Austronesian languages, but mixes several languages in their songs, including Minnan and Hakka. For the band, multilingualism, rather than Minnan, characterizes Taiwanese identity. The group Black Hand Nakasi sings general labor movement songs mainly in standard Chinese, but performs songs about particular Taiwanese labor struggles in Minnan. When the band writes songs together with workers and the marginalized, its collaborators naturally have some say in language choices. When cooperating with migrant workers, songs include languages such as Vietnamese and Indonesian.

Languages from Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam are used in migrant associations. Migrants use their own languages and English together with Chinese in demonstration placards. In public, speakers often emphasize their adaptability to Taiwanese culture by using Chinese, but in labor rights struggles or cultural events they sometimes address other participants in their native languages.

In Taiwanese social movements, multilingualism is commonplace. Regardless of whether speakers are native Sinitic language users or not, language choices communicate identities, social positions, and power relations. However, speakers of non-Sinitic languages have to balance language as an expression of identity with language as a proof of their belonging to Taiwanese society and with the ability to communicate with the majority.

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