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Taiwan: methodological challenges in language teaching and language maintenance

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En tant que proto-État, la planification linguistique de Taïwan reflète les tensions inhérentes au processus de la mondialisation. Ce présent article argumente que la question centrale est celle du conflit entre les communautés locales et les directives éducationnelles à Taïwan. Près de soixante-quinze pour cent de la population ont la langue taïwanaise pour langue maternelle. Pourtant le taïwanais est quasiment absent du domaine de l'éducation. Les enquêtes sociolinguistiques que nous avons conduites en 2004 sur des étudiants universitaires et en 2008 sur l'ensemble de la population suggèrent que les autorités éducatives taïwanaises doivent faire face à leur responsabilité sociale envers les locuteurs natifs dont la langue maternelle est en danger d'être supplantée par le mandarin et l'anglais. Les auteurs ont pris les notions de *diglossie*, *analyse de domaine* et *bilinguisme sociétal* Fishman (1991: 55-56) et l'idée de Ó Riagáin (1997: 107) selon laquelle le foyer est probablement le premier domaine à s'exposer au changement de langue linguistique, comme point de repère pour une discussion de la situation linguistique actuelle de Taïwan. Cet article culminera avec la suggestion suivante: les considérations pédagogiques doivent être prises comme un moyen de sensibiliser les professeurs de langue et les directives de Taïwan vis-à-vis des modèles d'éducation linguistique appropriés pour les étudiants ayant le taïwanais pour langue maternelle. Ainsi, nous défendrons premièrement l'idée que les informations recueillies sont nécessaires pour montrer le processus par lequel le taïwanais peut être maintenu et que les parlants natifs Taïwanais pourraient être habilités par l'identification des comportements qui ont besoin d'être modifiés afin de maintenir leur langue maternelle.

Mots clés:

Langue taïwanaise, enquête sociolinguistique, bilinguisme sociétal, éducation linguistique, conservation de la langue

1. Introduction

Most Taiwanese seem to wish for not exclusively choosing either the Chinese or Taiwanese identity. In our nationwide survey among 917 respondents (Gijzen & Liu, 2008), 58% of respondents considered themselves as "exclusively Taiwanese", 31% declared to be "both Taiwanese and Chinese", with the remainder of respondents answering "exclusively Chinese". For over four decades, Mandarin was used in all of the island's official as well as less formal domains, with a warning system in place for those having the audacity to ignore this system, modeled on the one previously applied by the Americans in California (targeting Spanish) and by the Danish in Greenland, targeting Inuit (Grosjean, 1982; Romaine & Nettle, 2000).

Taiwanese parents, out of economic and pragmatic considerations, want foreign language education for their children and perceive native language

education as disadvantageous and as unnecessary pressure for children: 43% of respondents agree that one weekly lesson in Taiwanese is sufficient on primary school level (Gijssen & Liu, 2008). Liang *et al.* (2006) also point out that most parents believe that Taiwanese should be learned "naturally" and not "forced upon children". While the Taiwanese language is still widely spoken on the island, it has not been modernized in the same way as Mandarin and thus remains a language for use in the lower domains of daily language use: 42% of respondents report to use Taiwanese "at home", with 56% reporting to use Mandarin (Gijssen & Liu, 2004). In the 16 to 29 age group, however, a mere 30% of respondents indicate to "speak Taiwanese" at home.

These statistics refute claims that the language situation in Taiwan is diglossic (Huang, 2004). Not surprisingly therefore, the comprehension / speaking proficiency for the 16 to 29 age group stands at 65% compared to 94% for the 50 to 70 age group. For the domain "with friends", 4% of the 16 to 29 age group indicate to use Taiwanese 'frequently', compared to 96% for Mandarin. The relevant number for the 30 to 59 age group stands at 17%. Code switching between Mandarin and Taiwanese, in particular, seems to account for respondents perceiving themselves to speak more Mandarin, less Taiwanese (Huang, 2004).

In the opinion-section of the survey (Gijssen *et al.*, 2008), respondents seem to contradict themselves concerning Taiwanese in schools. While 43% percent agree that "one hour of Taiwanese" was sufficient in primary schools, 48% agrees that children who have Taiwanese as first language would learn all courses "better and faster" if lessons were offered in Taiwanese, not Mandarin. No less than 77% percent of respondents agree with primary schools offering an equal amount of courses in Taiwanese, Mandarin, and English (trilingual programs). This seems to imply that:

- a) The public disagrees with the current system of one weekly period of Taiwanese in primary schools because of reasons of quality rather than quantity.
- b) The public agrees that their children would be taught more lessons in Taiwanese if this were to improve the quality of education in primary schools.
- c) The public agrees that Taiwanese be put on equal footing with Mandarin and English throughout primary education.
- d) The public does not believe that a child that is taught subjects in three languages is being impeded upon in cognitive skills.

Any change in language involving mother tongue education in Taiwan has to take into account an ongoing language shift from Taiwanese to Mandarin. Language loss in the lower domains of Taiwanese (the home and the

marketplace), in particular, needs to be addressed in language education policies. At stake is nothing less than the decades-old balance of Taiwanese / Mandarin bilingualism on the island, and therefore the survival of Taiwanese. Yeh *et al.* argue that both parents and the Education Ministry seem to agree on the importance of improving English language ability, thereby stressing the dominance of English over local languages in education on the island (2004: 77). Gijsen *et al.*'s survey (2004) seems to justify the motivation behind such policy: 83% of university students answered that learning English was a "very high" priority for them, with 69% of the respondents expressing agreement that the language should be introduced "at primary school level or sooner".

The majority of respondents also express the view that the Taiwan government should be involved in promoting the use of English in the workplace (60%) and in local communities (63%). It thus seems that many Taiwanese students, like the majority of parents, have clearly made a choice concerning the relative importance of localization and internationalization (the importance attached to English). Research results from Chen & Chang (2003) point to the shallow nature of English learning in Taiwan. These authors argue that, rather than bringing children and students into the richness of cultures associated with the language, English in Taiwan is being adopted as a communication tool – nothing more. Likewise, Warden and Lin's study of motivations for studying English in Taiwan concludes that the main motivation was increased financial well being, an aim reinforced even more by the island's language policy (2000: 15).

A mere 29% of native Taiwanese-speaking university students approve of making Taiwanese an official language (Gijsen *et al.*, 2004). In a similar survey conducted by the Formosa Foundation seven years earlier (Chen, 2001), 61% of Mainlanders oppose this, with the Hakka minority evenly divided on the question with 40% on either side. In comparison, 74% of student-respondents agree to make English Taiwan's second official language. Gijsen *et al.* (2004) furthermore established that 72% of respondents stated that their "first language" was Mandarin while only 48% of respondents felt that "their mother tongue" was Taiwanese. Huang's comment (2004: 96) is probably still valid: people who learned Taiwanese at home from their families came to believe that Mandarin is their mother tongue due to factors of "social psychology". Further research into the question whether people's linguistic identification is changing due to a shift in political leverage away from Mainland China and toward a more pro-Taiwanese language stance is needed here.

2. Taiwan's language shift in sociolinguistic perspective

Sociolinguistic misperceptions concerning the Taiwanese language probably stem from confusing linguistic and political realities. Hong (Chan *et al.*, 2004: 86) concludes that most Taiwanese "could still survive well" by using Taiwanese in daily life. While such expressions by prominent sociolinguists would require more detailed explanations, Gijsen *et al.* (2004) argue that the opposite holds true for the island's university students: 22% answer to possess "good" language proficiency in Taiwanese, with 47% giving "quite good" as chosen option. The indicated language proficiency for Mandarin stands at 73% and 22% respectively, signaling that a significant language shift from Taiwanese to Mandarin has already taken place among Taiwan's university students.

Yeh *et al.* (2004: 101) argue that Taiwanese mother tongue speakers tend to use Mandarin more in high domains (government, education), while the lower domains are predominantly Taiwanese. Our 2008 survey shows that it is exactly the low domains (home, marketplace, language used with friends) that are being encroached upon by Mandarin. Moreover, while the higher domains of language use in Taiwan belong to Mandarin, English is increasingly letting its dominance be felt as Taiwan's lingua franca par excellence; Taiwan's students prefer to, one day, raise their children in English rather than Taiwanese (Gijsen *et al.*, 2004).

Language shift is generally defined as the gradual loss of a language within a community, which can ultimately lead to language death (Fasold, 1992). In devising our survey questions, we focused on Fishman's hypothesis that a situation of bilingualism without diglossia (societal bilingualism) can lead to language shift (Fishman, 1968). We investigated societal bilingualism in Taiwan and argued that it is the result of the lack of compartmentalization between the high (H) language, Mandarin, and the Taiwan's largest low (L) language, Taiwanese, which leads to these varieties competing for the same domains. After Ferguson's original concept of diglossia in which he defined it as a situation where the L variety was "the primary dialect" and the H variety "the highly codified superposed variety... which is learned largely by formal education... but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation" (1959: 336), Fishman (1971) has furthermore focused on the basic difference between diglossia and bilingualism:

"Bilingualism is essentially a characterization of individual linguistic versatility whereas diglossia is a characterization of the societal allocation of functions to different varieties of languages". (Fishman, 1971: 87)

Ferguson describes diglossia as being very stable (1959: 332). Fishman (1971), while agreeing with Ferguson, distinguishes one exception:

"Speech communities that have both diglossia and bilingualism seem to be the most stable for minority languages. With diglossia, there is a clear separation between languages, and values remain distinct yet complementary in the various social domains. Without diglossia, one language would replace the other as the roles and values that separate them soon merge together and become blurred". (Fishman, 1971: 234)

For Fishman, stable diglossia in the first language is seen as a key to the maintenance of that language; when diglossia is stable, each language has its own set of functions and space without threatening the other. Bilingualism without diglossia tends to be transitional and the predicted outcome of such situations is language shift (Fishman, 1968: 36). In the light of our survey findings, Fishman's hypothesis has important implications for the Taiwanese language as major L variety in Taiwan, since it risks being replaced by Mandarin in a language shift that has accelerated significantly since preceding studies (e.g. Tsao, 1997; Yeh *et al.*, 2004).

Other researchers question the stability of diglossia by concluding that most diglossic situations described by Ferguson and some by Fishman are "rather rare" (Pauwels, 1986: 16). The typical case seems to be that "la diglossie ne touche pas toujours les mêmes couches de la population au même moment" (Mackey, 1989: 16). Schiffman (1997: 212) points out that:

"In some linguistic cultures, all speakers exhibit diglossic behavior (i.e., use both H and L varieties in complementary distribution), while in others, only some members of the society do and in many diglossic situations, only a minority or elite control the H domain successfully".

Coulmas, on the other hand, (1987: 117) notes:

"Diglossia generally is characterized by a long-term coexistence of native spoken varieties of a language, on the one hand, and a written variety which is the mother tongue of nobody, on the other".

We therefore suggest that a *double* language shift is taking place in Taiwan: in the lower domains from Taiwanese to Mandarin, in the higher domains from Mandarin to English, the latter with active government and public support. Whether Taiwanese stands to lose out because of the dominance of English deserves further research. But bearing in mind that Mandarin and Taiwanese are in a bilingual rather than diglossic linguistic relationship, this situation seems very likely (Fishman, 1977). In absence of a written system for Taiwanese, written Taiwanese mother tongue speakers have used Mandarin for half a century. This situation is in line with Ferguson (1959: 331), who states that:

"Adults invariably use L in speaking to children and children use L in speaking to one another... L is invariably learned by children in what may be regarded as the normal way of learning one's mother tongue, and the learning of H is chiefly accomplished by the means of formal education".

Given the widely held view that only L is acquired as the natural mother tongue in a diglossic speech community, it is remarkable that this critical feature of diglossia is disregarded in the case of Taiwan, where Mandarin as H is increasingly perceived as the "mother tongue" of the younger generation (Liang *et al.*, 2006: 139). As Haugen (1972) observes, such situations result from schooling facilities imposing the written and formal H standard upon the L spoken varieties. The permanence of writing Mandarin has given Taiwan's communities status in the search for historical identity; the absence of a Taiwanese writing system, in particular, has contributed to the erosion of its status among young and middle-aged Taiwanese mother tongue speakers (Liang *et al.*, 2006: 142-143).

3. Societal bilingualism and the decline of Taiwanese in the family

Fishman's concept of language shift and diglossia strongly relies on the notion of domains. In his domain analysis (1968), he proposes that one language may be more appropriate than another in certain domains (which are a constellation of factors such as participants, location, and topic). A domain is defined as:

"...a sociocultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a speech community, in such way that individual behavior and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other". (Fishman *et al.*, 1968: 442)

In analyzing our study's results, we furthermore kept in mind Schiffman's (2006: 7) useful summary as to the notion of domains:

- The H-variety dominates certain domains: literacy, religion, public speaking, "high" usages.
- The L-variety dominates in "lower" domains: jokes, intimacy, street use in the first language learned.
- Domains may shift, get taken over by a non-traditional variety, but only slowly.
- Domain shift may be an index of change of register, or change of formality.

Ferguson's original concept of diglossia applies to languages where H and L were related, L usually being a linguistic descendent of H (or thought to be). Fishman (1968) extends diglossia closer to Taiwan's linguistic situation, where historically unrelated languages are used together: Mandarin as prestige language for H, Taiwanese as the major colloquial one for Both Fishman and Ferguson argue, however, that the family domain is the only domain in which

L dominates. Occasional intrusion of H into L in Taiwan is explained as people's choice for "the purpose of mutual intelligibility" (Yeh *et al.*, 2004: 80).

Domain analysis is not fully supported by all scholars. Gal (1979) suggests that setting, occasion, and topic are less important factors than the identity of the speaker and his/her interlocutors. According to Gal, instead of putting stress on the congruency of the components of a domain, a person's identity alone could be sufficient to explain people's language choice. Gal's proposal is supported by Lu (see Yeh *et al.*, 2004: 81) who claims that language choice in Taiwan may not be determined by domain, since in the family domain, for example, a bilingual speaker might use Taiwanese to talk with his/her parents but shift to Mandarin when he talks with his/her sibling on the occasion about the same topic.

Mandarin is a "learned" language for a substantial part of Taiwanese mother tongue speakers. Wmffre (2001) claims that when a learned language begins being used within the country itself, and outside educational and restricted contexts, that we should begin describing the society as bilingual, the term "bilingual" usually implying equal usage and equal fluency in two languages, the one often exclusive to the other. But "bilingual" can also be used to describe the very different situation where the overwhelming majority of the population speaks two languages. This situation is generally known as "societal bilingualism" (Wmffre, 2001; Garcia, 2005). In Taiwan, often described as a bilingual society, Taiwanese-Mandarin bilingualism is not exclusive: over 90% of the population speaks Mandarin, of which the large majority is Taiwanese mother tongue speakers. Within the last 60 years the increasing prevalence of education in Mandarin has made the once Taiwanese-speaking population societally bilingual (see Yeh *et al.*, 2004: 79-80).

All historic examples of sustained societal bilingualism seem to show that the alleged instances of stable bilingual societies are in fact divided (social or geographical) societies. Also, it has not been demonstrated that societal bilingualism can be preserved in a modern and open democracy, as is Taiwan. Examples of what could be considered stable societal bilingualism in cases such as Hong Kong occur only when, in a particular area, two equally strong languages spoken outside that area and in greater numbers are competing (Wmffre, 2002). In Taiwan's linguistic landscape, Mandarin and English are dominating Taiwanese and other indigenous languages. According to Humphreys (1979: 34-35, 81) and Fasold (1984: chap. 5) the viability of a dominated language in a particular community can be maintained if it is be spoken by above 75% of society. The Taiwanese language is currently at this threshold with just under 75% of the population claiming to have Taiwanese as "mother tongue" (Tsao, 1997; Yeh *et al.*, 2004; Liang *et al.*, 2006).

Home bilingualism is currently declining in Taiwan (Liang *et al.*, 2006), with community use of Taiwanese equal or higher than home use, where Mandarin is taking over from the L language. Ó Riagáin (1997) suggests, contrary to prevailing wisdom and in the context of the Gaeltacht area, that the home may be the first rather than the last domain to exhibit language shift. He furthermore states that a study by him in 1971:

"...showed that not merely were the Irish-speaking areas much smaller than suggested by census statistics, but that within their local social setting they tended to be marginally located vis-à-vis the social networks centered on villages and small towns". (Ó Riagáin, 1997: 107)

This seems to run contrary to the original concept of language shift in which H usually succeeds in eliminating L in all its former domains, but with the home often the last to give way to H. In Taiwan the historical process of language shift is progressing to the point where Taiwanese is ceasing to be a community language and shifting to be a language spoken by the elderly in, mainly, rural lower socio-economic communities (Liang *et al.*, 2006: 142-143). Romaine (2006) concurs with Ó Riagáin's suggestion:

"One of the most frequent mistakes language activists make is to attempt to reverse the diglossic hierarchy by promoting the minority language in the domains now dominated by the majority language. What often results from active intervention to reverse language shift is a reversal of domain distribution in H and L with a decrease in the use of L at home and in private domains, and an increase in its use in public, formal domains such as government, education, etc.". (Romaine, 2006: 451)

Since the early 90s, the Taiwan government no longer suppresses or shuns local mother tongues. Instead, plans have been instituted to preserve them, which has led to an increase of Taiwanese in parliament and a continued, albeit relatively minor use of Taiwanese on radio and television. In 2001, one weekly Taiwanese language lesson has been introduced in the first and second grades of most primary schools, although most parents believe that this language should be learned "naturally" and not be "forced upon children" (Liang *et al.*, 2006: 139). Fishman (1991: 53-54) points out that one of the most frequent errors made by activists is to attempt to prop up a language from the top down, so to speak. This is done either by restoring the use of the language to H domains or, in the case of Taiwan, creating them where they did not previously exist, rather than by strengthening the language from the bottom up. Fishman reports that this has also happened in the use of Basque and Spanish (1991: 55). Jones (1998) furthermore describes how Welsh has been introduced in public domains where it used to be excluded, as in education and public administration, and how its previous dominance in other critical domains such as the home has weakened. As pointed out above, while Taiwanese parents in general support the teaching of a mother tongue, they differ on the way it should be taught.

Domains occupied by Mandarin as H are by definition "secondary agencies of language reproduction" (Fishman, 1997: 194) and cannot therefore transmit languages effectively, nor can they replace the home as the primary site and agency of language transmission. As Fishman (1997: 194) points out:

"Endangered languages become such because they lack informal intergenerational transmission and informal daily life support but, in order to cease being endangered, they need exactly what they do not have and cannot easily get".

Languages that are not transmitted naturally are not guaranteed to survive, apart from particular cases where they hold the status of lingua franca associated with commercial, religious or other important uses at the social level. Even languages with a relatively high number of speakers such as Quechua (see Haboud, 2004) or Northern Khmer (see Vail, 2008) do not necessarily show the kind of healthy situation that might be expected. In this context, Barreña *et al.* (2008: 133) conclude that, if a language is mainly used at home when addressing the older generations, it has very few chances of surviving because it will not be passed on to the next generation.

Liang *et al.* (2006) report that, although Taiwanese-speaking parents claim it important for their children learn Taiwanese, intergenerational transmission of the language is lacking:

"The mother tongue, Taiwanese, may be lost by this present generation of children, notably in urban areas (...). These data indicate that in urban areas Taiwanese is at stage 7 (Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, own comments), 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". (Liang *et al.*, 2006: 139-140)

Taiwanese is mainly the language used between the elderly, Mandarin the language for communication between youngsters, mixed Taiwanese and Mandarin for young and middle-aged parents (Liang *et al.*, 2006: 126). Huang (1998: 91) found that for his study in northern Taiwan, all subjects consistently using more Mandarin than Taiwanese with family members were "females, younger respondents, respondents of higher education level, and respondents born and raised in Taipei." Chan (1994) predicted that language shift from Mandarin to Taiwanese would continue, although at a slow rate. He furthermore claimed that Taiwanese would temporarily survive on the oral level as "a medium serving limited functions, mainly to satisfy partial needs for domestic business exchange, for cross generational communication with the old (especially those over 60 years old) in the Taiwanese families, and for religion" (Yeh *et al.*, 2004: 83). Chan (1994; Yeh *et al.*, 2004: 102) therefore predicted that the transformation of Taiwanese people's attitudes toward their own ethnic identity, as well as their heavy dependence on Mandarin, would bring about the functional demise of the Taiwanese language.

4. A pedagogical model for Taiwan?

A strong trend toward regional awareness has taken hold in most European multilingual communities. This is reflected in the growing attention paid in education to European regional or minority languages. Trilingual primary immersion in Europe started in 1980 (Diwan schools in Brittany, France) and is modeled on the Canadian immersion schooling system. In 2008, fifteen linguistic regions in Europe were involved in elaborate trilingual primary education programs, among which Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, Frisia, Swedish in Finland (immersion education), Northern Germany, Slovenia, and Northern Italy (limited immersion education). Trilingual primary immersion projects are encouraged through ongoing research by the European Commission and financed by private institutions and, in part, by the regional autonomous governments (Mercator, 2008).

The concept of trilingual immersion education takes advantage of seemingly opposite trends: internationalization and regionalization. The point of departure is that attention paid to the English language does not have to be at the cost of the regional or minority language nor the national language, and vice versa. The very principal behind immersion teaching is not to teach the language as a goal in itself, but to use the language as a means of learning in various areas of activity. In other words, the language of instruction can be either the first or second language of the pupils for all different subjects included in the curriculum, but a subject should not be taught solely in this language throughout the whole obligatory education period (Marsh & Lange, 2000). English, for instance, could be used to teach the sciences, while mathematics and the humanities could be taught in the mother tongue and the official (state) language(s) respectively.

In the Basque Country (Spain), pupils have a choice from four education models (A, B, D and G), of which the Basque-only and Basque (Euskara) / Spanish bilingual ones are most successful. For Kindergartens, 41% and 32% of parents respectively opt for these models, while the popularity of the Spanish-only model (with 26%) is declining rapidly (Basque Ministry of Education Website, 2008). The growth in the usage of Basque is particularly evident amongst the 5 to 14 year old age bracket. The major difference in education policy between the Basque region and Taiwan is the fact that Basque is co-official language alongside Spanish, while Taiwanese is a distant third after Mandarin and English. Moreover, Kindergartens and primary schools in Taiwan are exclusively Mandarin-only, with no classes exclusively taught in Taiwanese (including the weekly Taiwanese language and culture period). Yet, the linguistic battle for the revitalization of Basque is ongoing: the presence of Basque is not uniform across all groups and areas, which prevents one to say that the decline in usage has been fully checked.

From the establishment of the Basque language law in 1986 until the school year 2005/2006, Basque-only has increased five-fold in the Navarre area, going from 5.48% to 27.19%. On the other hand, enrolment in Spanish-only medium schools has declined sharply during the same period, falling from 81.18% to 46.53% (Breton, 1990). Parents seem to acknowledge the benefits of mother tongue education in areas where most of the public still uses the mother tongue. Enrolment in Basque-only schools for the whole of the Basque Country in Spain has doubled in 18 years, from 43.37% to 88.12%, with also a considerable increase in the mixed Basque / Spanish education model from 13.36% to 30.13%. In 1992, a mere six years after the establishment of the Basque language law, the demand for the Spanish-only model was practically non-existent (Basque Ministry of Education, 2008).

When comparing Taiwan's language education with the one in Catalonia, differences in mother tongue education are quite pronounced. By the time a pupil has finished primary education in Taiwan, he or she has received a total of approximately 80 hours in mother tongue education, and about 550 hours in Mandarin. Language classes in Taiwanese are partly content-based: they mainly focus on teaching pupils to learn the language, with limited attention given to "Taiwanese culture" taught in the Taiwanese language. Catalan immersion schools offer pupils 768 hours of education in both the official (Spanish) and the minority (Catalan) language (Mercator, 2008). English immersion education accounts for 350 hours, with French as fourth language remaining an option. Foreign and fourth languages are used for different content areas (different subjects) in different schools throughout Catalonia, from mathematics to music, and depending on local conditions as well as parents' preferences. English in Taiwan primary schools is solely offered to teach the language per se, sometimes by English native language teachers with no knowledge of either neither the local language nor an understanding of the local culture.

In Spain's Galician autonomous region, the Galician language enjoys similar language policy guarantees, as do Euskara and Catalan. While in the Basque regions with Basque-only education 81% of people are capable of speaking both official languages, the numbers for Catalan and Galician stand at 68% and 90% respectively (Mercator, 2008). In Taiwan, statistics are similar with 56% of people having Taiwanese as mother tongue and over 75% being able to speak it. One of the main differences between language use in Spain and Taiwan respectively is, however, the linguistic area covering the respective languages. Taiwanese is spoken throughout Taiwan; Spain's official languages apart from Castilian are concentrated in certain territories, and thus more easily preserved. Efforts for language preservation in Taiwan have best chances in the rural south, but because of the public's indifference caused by a lack of information on the benefits of mother tongue education, not much is

being done. Furthermore, research in Galicia has shown that people want more language education in Galician (even those who have Spanish as mother tongue), while in Taiwan the public does not deem the esteem of Taiwanese sufficient to make it language of instruction in Kindergartens and primary schools (Gijssen & Liu, 2004, 2008).

Traditional trilingual primary education is found throughout Taiwan, since the government policy encourages the early introduction of several languages. In accordance with the official language policy for the revised national language curriculum, Taiwanese and other indigenous languages became a compulsory part of the island's primary education (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008). In Taiwan's primary education, pupils aged seven have an average of 102 hours of teaching in Mandarin, 20 hours in Taiwanese, Hakka, or another Aboriginal language. The latter are offered as a subject mainly instructed through the medium of Mandarin because of teachers' ineptitude in teaching these languages. This pattern is basically maintained throughout primary education, with English being introduced in third or fourth primary grade. However, as mentioned earlier, most parents have sent their children to English Cram Schools by the time pupils are "introduced" to English in Taiwan's primary schooling system.

A suitable comparison with a north European country would be Finland. In this country's immersion education (with Swedish as minority language) the first language, Finnish, is used two hours a week, while English counts for one hour. The rest of the time (17 hours a week) is spent with Swedish as the language of instruction including all subjects that are offered during first and second grades (handicrafts, mathematics, physical education, arts, music, religion, environmental studies). In third and fourth grades, Finnish is used seven hours a week; the remaining time (except English) is taught in the second language (Swedish). For physical education, the language of instruction is different for boys (Swedish) and girls (Finnish), an example of how the curriculum is planned to give it a more individual character. The time used to teach in English merely increases from one hour a week to two hours a week (grades three through six), with the introduction of a fourth language in fifth grade (Mercator, 2008).

With the teaching of English in Taiwan's primary schools being exclusively language-driven, content-driven programs modeled on those in Europe are not experimented with nor researched. Instead, Taiwan's official language policy seems to depart from the assumption that, if the child is introduced to English at a sufficiently young age, benefits will follow. Immersion schools in Europe seem to differ accordingly, with Swedish immersion schools in Finland starting to use English with children at the age of five, while in most Catalanian immersion schools, children start receiving English education at the age of ten. In the latter case, the English teacher teaches three courses in the

morning and the Catalan and Spanish teachers split the remaining courses of the day. Catalan is used as a language subject and as language of instruction to teach the social sciences; Spanish is used as a language subject and for mathematics; English is used as a language subject and for the teaching of natural sciences.

In Taiwan's foreign language teaching programs, pedagogy is characterized by aiming for an English-only approach, which can impact on students' learning in several ways. Firstly, it may cause students to doubt the validity of their own culture. Secondly, it may lead to students resisting English culture because of enhanced feelings of nationalism. Thirdly, students may feel disturbed when learning English in an English-only class since the lack of cognitive understanding often makes them misunderstand the content expressed in the target language. Such English-only policy is being adopted in a growing number of courses at secondary and tertiary schools. Such programs are prone to what Phillipson (1992: 185) terms the "monolingual fallacy". That is, the advocates of a monolingual policy find it natural to use English as the only language to teach English. This kind of policy is also criticized by Canagarajah (1999: 126-128) when he argues the need to apply the learner's first language to teach English in an EFL context. In secondary education, in particular, students do not start by thinking in the second language. Therefore, allowing for the exploration of ideas in the first language supports a gradual and developmental process in which the use of L1 drops off naturally as it would become less necessary.

Taiwan's EFL pedagogy is largely determined by those Taiwanese and foreign teachers and policy makers who received their Ph.D. degrees in foreign countries. The teachers, consciously or unconsciously, apply what they have been taught in an English-speaking educational context, such as in the USA, to a non-English-speaking context, such as in Taiwan, with the assumption that the teaching methods they have learned in the Western world are "good" for students in Taiwan. The novelty of teaching approaches from Western countries usually earns the support of authorities from language schools and universities. The latter thereby prefer to ignore a student's Taiwanese / Mandarin bilingualism, as well as that student's educational EFL background: primary and secondary school education based on a teacher-centered Grammar-Translation method in learning English. In this context, Hu (2002: 99-100) explains that in Taiwan and China:

"Learner-centered, interactive methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that allow freedom, unpredictability, spontaneity, and student initiatives in the classroom are generally not well received (...) it is difficult for Chinese students to accept pedagogical practice that tends to put teachers on a par with their students and detracts from teacher authority".

5. Conclusion

The potential problem areas for a European immersion education model in Taiwan are a misguided government policy, the lack of public support and an academic misconception on the nature of Taiwan's language shift. With official support for Taiwanese vocal but ineffective, and public support low to moderate, the feasibility of maintaining the Taiwanese language is questionable in the current conditions. It seems that the first stage of making the public in Taiwan aware that their mother tongue is encroached upon by Mandarin and English remains in dire need of attention. Most Taiwanese will still frown upon the suggestion that one day, their mother tongue might not be used any longer in daily life. With support and initiatives from the academic community in Taiwan, a meaningful change in language policy in Taiwan can be forthcoming. Attitude research into trilingual immersion language schooling (Gijzen *et al.*, 2008) shows a majority of the public is willing to accept Taiwanese mother tongue education alongside Mandarin and English instruction.

The Taiwanese have a choice: face the loss of their mother tongue within a generation or two, or embark upon a drastic change in the island's education policy. Taking similar efforts in Europe as their guiding examples would not only increase language proficiency in local as well as foreign languages, it might furthermore lead to a much desired shaping of a local Taiwanese identity.

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