

Digraphia with and without Biliteracy: A Case Study of Taiwan

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1. Introduction

Digraphia, which parallels to Ferguson's (1959) idea of diglossia, has been defined by Dale (1980:5) as “the use of two (or more) writing systems for representing a single language,” or by DeFrancis (1984:59) as “the use of two or more different systems of writing the same language.” This is currently the situation in Taiwan, where the Taiwanese¹ language is written in several different ways. In addition to the situation of digraphia within a single language, digraphia between (or among) languages in a society also occurs in Taiwan. That is, Taiwanese and Chinese writing systems², which have the status respectively of Low and High languages exist currently in Taiwanese society. Thus, the definition of digraphia in this paper is expanded to the use of more than one writing varieties to serve different communicational tasks within a society. Further, digraphia with/without biliteracy is proposed as a parallel to Fishman's idea of diglossia with/without bilingualism (1967), as is shown in Table 1.

Biliteracy in Table 1 means “control of both High and Low writing systems.” For example, in the Taiwanese case of being able to write in Taiwanese and Chinese. Table 1 shows four types of digraphia-biliteracy relationship. Normally, these four types can apply to digraphia either within a single language or among languages. However, in the case of Taiwan, different types refer to different situations of digraphia. Among the types, “both digraphia and biliteracy” and “digraphia without biliteracy” play a substantial role in contemporary Taiwanese society. The type “both digraphia and biliteracy” refers to the case of different writing systems (generally, Han characters vs. roman script) as used in the Taiwanese Writing Circle (台語文界). This case is an example of digraphia within a single language. In contrast, “digraphia without biliteracy” is an example of digraphia among languages. This type refers to the case of general public in Taiwan, who are taught mostly Modern Written Chinese (MWC), but do not have the ability to write in Taiwanese.

¹ The Taiwanese language refers only to Holo-Taiwanese or the Southern Min if not specified. A broader definition of the Taiwanese languages include indigenous Austronesian languages, Hakka, and Holo. However, in this paper, the discussion of Taiwanese writing is limited to the Holo writing only, since literacy and literates in Hakka and indigenous languages are less widespread than Holo.

² English, Japanese, or other foreign languages, which serve international business purposes in Taiwan are excluded from discussions in this paper, as well.

		Digraphia	
		+	-
Biliteracy*	+	(1) Both digraphia and biliteracy	(2) Biliteracy without digraphia
	-	(3) Digraphia without biliteracy	(4) Neither digraphia nor biliteracy

* biliteracy means control of both H and L writing systems.

Table 1. The relationship between digraphia and biliteracy.

2. Historical background

Taiwan is a multilingual and multiethnic society. There are more than twenty native languages in Taiwan, including indigenous languages, Hakka, and Holo Taiwanese (Grimes 1996). Generally speaking, there are currently four primary ethnic groups: indigenous (1.7%), Hakka (12%), Holo (73.3%), and Mainlanders (13%) (Huang 1993:21). In addition, Taiwan has been colonized by several foreign regimes since the seventeenth century. The most recent regimes, the Japanese regime (1895-1945) and Chinese KMT regime (1945-2000), enacted colonial language policy that prohibited the native languages in public domain, and Japanese and Mandarin Chinese were adopted as the only official languages. In other words, the Taiwanese people were not allowed to speak their vernaculars in public. Moreover, they were forced to learn the official language through the national education system. Consequently, most Taiwanese people are bilingual today in both their vernacular and the official language. For example, a Hakka speaker may know Mandarin as well as his/her Hakka vernacular. Moreover, much research has revealed that there is a language shift toward Mandarin. Chan's (1994:iii) research shows that "proficiency in *Guoyu* [Mandarin] by the Taiwanese is increasing, while that in Minnanyu [Taiwanese] is decreasing." Young (1989:55) also indicates that "there is increased use of Mandarin with succeeding generation." Huang (1993:160) even points out that the indigenous languages in Taiwan are all endangered.

Owing to the monolingual policy, the decline of vernacular languages in Taiwan has been more and more pronounced and obvious. Therefore, people in Taiwan have protested against the monolingual policy, and demanded bilingual education in school. There are two core issues for the contemporary Taiwanese language movement (Chiung 1999:41-49). First, the movement wishes to promote spoken Taiwanese in order to maintain vernacular speech. Second, the movement attempts to promote and standardize

written Taiwanese in order to develop Taiwanese (vernacular) literature. Because the written Taiwanese is not well standardized³ and not taught through the national education system, most Taiwanese speakers have learned to write in MWC instead of Written Taiwanese (WT). In other words, the written language of Taiwanese people is distinct from their daily colloquial speech; people speak in Taiwanese, but write in MWC. Although several orthographies have been proposed for WT by several scholars and Taiwanese promoters, different writing systems have their own proponents and users.

It is clear that colonial language policy has played a crucial role in the situation of digraphia in Taiwan. In order to gain a better understanding of the evolution of languages and orthographies in Taiwan, one needs to show the relationship between language and political status of Table 2.

Period	Political status	Spoken Languages	Writing Systems**
-1624	Tribal society	Aboriginal	Tribal
1624-1661	Dutch colonialism	Aboriginal/Taiwanese*	Sinkang (新港文) Classical Han (文言文)
1661-1683	Koxinga colonialism	Aboriginal/Taiwanese	Classical Han Sinkang
1683-1895	Qing colonialism	Aboriginal/Taiwanese	Classical Han Koa-a-chheh (歌仔冊) Peh-oe-ji Sinkang
1895-1945	Japanese colonialism	Aboriginal/Taiwanese/Japanese	Japanese Classical Han Colloquial Han (in Taiwanese) Colloquial Han (in Mandarin) Peh-oe-ji Kana-Taiwanese (臺式假名)
1945-2000	KMT colonialism	Aboriginal/Taiwanese/Mandarin	Chinese (Mandarin) Taiwanese Aboriginal

* Taiwanese means Hakka-Taiwanese and Holo-Taiwanese in this table.

** The order of listed writing systems in each cell of this column do not indicate the year of occurrences. The first listed orthography refers to the official written language adopted by its relevant governor.

Table 2. Relation between language and political status in Taiwan.

³ The classical Han writing (文言文) was adopted to write the Taiwanese language prior to the 20th century. Thereafter, the issue of Taiwanese writing based on colloquial speech (台灣白話文) has largely succeeded in replacing the classical Han writing. However, for various reasons the Taiwanese colloquial writing has not yet achieved wide spread and standardized (Chiung 1999:37-41).

3. Digraphia in Taiwan

Discussions of digraphia in this section are limited to linguistic situation after Chinese KMT occupied Taiwan. The digraphic situation in Taiwan can be regarded as a double-nested digraphia as shown in Table 3, in which H and L represent High and Low languages (or orthographies) with the digraphia among languages; and h and l refer to high and low languages (or orthographies) of digraphia within a single language. For example, Chinese is serving as High in contrast to Taiwanese Low. When examining orthographies of a single language, Hanji (Han characters) counts as high, and roman script (or Bopomo⁴) as low.

High (or high) and Low (or low) are functionally distinguished within the society. The functional distribution for High and Low means that they are situations in which only High is appropriate, and others in which only Low can be used. There are very little overlap between High and Low situations. Generally speaking, H has higher prestige, and the functions calling for H are formal and guarded. In contrast, L has lower prestige, and it is informal and relaxed.

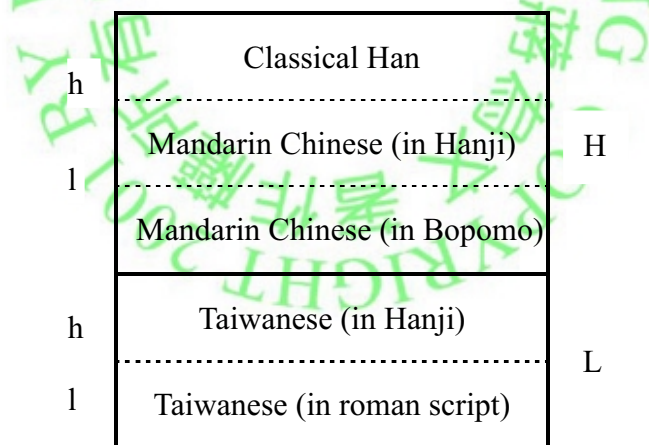


Table 3. Double-nested digraphia in Taiwan.

Digraphia with biliteracy

Digraphia with biliteracy means that people have control over both (or several) high and low writing systems, but they are functionally distinguished. This type of digraphia-biliteracy relationship refers to the cases of digraphia within a single language. They are: 1) Hanji vs. roman script within written Taiwanese, and 2) classical Han vs. Hanji vs. Bopomo within Mandarin Chinese.

Cheng (1990:219-237) and Tiu^N (1998:230-241) have pointed out that there are currently three main writing schemes for writing Taiwanese. They are: (1) Han character only, which means the exclusive use of Hanji, (2) Han-Lo 'Hanji with Roman script,' which means a combination of Hanji with Roman script, and (3) Roman-only, or 'exclusive use of Roman script.' Generally speaking, Han writing has a longer literary heritage. Han-Lo writing is a new proposal, in which about 15% of the Taiwanese words are proposed to be written in roman script, and others in Hanji. Writing in roman-only is usually limited the older generations of church Peh-oe-ji⁵ (白話字) users.

Hanji and roman script are two different orthographies among the three writing schemes. In general, Hanji is more prestigious and dominated. Many people in the Taiwanese Writing Circle enjoy finding the so-called “pun-ji” or original characters 本字 for Taiwanese words in order to prove that Taiwanese is a prestigious language. This phenomenon has shown that most people in Taiwan consider Hanji a classical and prestigious orthography. This phenomenon supports the results of Chiung's (1999) survey of 244 college students' attitudes toward different writing systems of written Taiwanese. Chiung's experimental results reveal that college students tend to prefer Hanji more than roman script.

Digraphia with biliteracy occurs within Mandarin Chinese as well as within Taiwanese. Classical Han writing is the high language in contrast to colloquial Mandarin Chinese writing. Mandarin Chinese written in Hanji is relatively high comparing to the Mandarin in Bopomo.

In Taiwan, all students are taught Bopomo, modern Chinese writing (in Hanji), and classical Han writing through the national education system. Bopomo is first taught as a supplementary tool to the learning of Mandarin. Thereafter, Hanji is taught as an official writing system for Mandarin. Students are inculcated to regard Hanji as “National Characters” (國字), and to avoid using Bopomo in their compositions in higher grade. Further, classical Han writing is taught. Students are considered intelligent if they are able to read such literary works as Tang Poetry (唐詩) and the Analects of Confucius (論語).

Digraphia without biliteracy

Digraphia without biliteracy means that H and L are functionally distinguished, but they are not both controlled by the same linguistic group. This type of

⁴ Bopomo: ㄅㄆㄇ注音符號, National Phonetic Symbols.

⁵ For details about Peh-oe-ji, see Chiung 2000b.

digraphia-biliteracy relationship refers to the cases of digraphia between Taiwanese (L) and Chinese (H).

In Taiwan, Mandarin Chinese is recognized as the only “National Language,” but Taiwanese is deprecated as a “方言” (dialect). Both spoken and written Mandarin are taught through the national education system, but Taiwanese is excluded from the system. Consequently, most Taiwanese speakers do not know how to read and write in Taiwanese. Many of them even do not know that Taiwanese can serve as a written language.

Compared to Chinese, publications in Taiwanese are much more marginalized to themes of homeland and authors' love for Taiwan. Sometimes, Taiwanese captions may appear on political cartoon.

4. Conclusion

Chiung's (1999:135) research on the attitudes of Taiwanese college students toward written Taiwanese reveals that national identity is one of the most significant factors to affect students' attitudes toward Taiwanese writing. It is true that national identity plays an important role in the orthographic transition of Vietnam, where romanization eventually replaced Hanji and became the high orthography (Chiung 2000a). Will this replacement happen to the case of Taiwan? Whether or not roman script will replace Hanji, or Taiwanese replace Chinese depend on people's orthographic demands and their attitudes toward written Taiwanese. Moreover, people's national identity will play an crucial role in the transition. From my point of view, Hanji, at least, will retain dominant status until Taiwanese people are released from their ambiguity in regard to national identity.

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