

Reanalyzing Variation in Written Taiwanese Southern Min: Proposing a Three Camp Framework*

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Abstract

Standard Written Mandarin serves as the official standardized method of communication for much of China and Taiwan. Taiwanese Southern Min, conversely, has been characterized by some scholars as “chaos” due to the lack of a single unified system and heritage (Klötter 2005:249). However, the author proposes the Three Camp Framework to describe systematic variation in written Taiwanese through the analysis of multiple published sources. The Etymologist Camp is focused on the historical lineage and the reconstruction of original characters. The Modernist Camp incorporates the pluralistic influences on Taiwanese in its promoted standards. Finally, the Localist Camp promotes the usage of characters that have a local history or tradition in Taiwan. Within these groupings, samples of Written Taiwanese bear strong resemblance, differing mostly between the camps. The Three Camps Framework calls into question some preconceptions about “unstandardized” written language, thus being an important consideration for future work in the field.

Key Words

Taiwanese Southern Min, orthography, sociolinguistics, language variation

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1. Introduction

Taiwanese Southern Min, or simply Taiwanese, is a Sinitic language spoken on the island of Taiwan. An umbrella term for the language varieties imported by the early immigrants to Taiwan from the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou regions of Fujian Province, modern Taiwanese can be said to be “neither that of Zhangzhou or Quanzhou, but also retaining parts of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou” 不泉不漳亦泉亦漳 (Ting 1980:6). Despite some regional variation, modern Taiwanese has effectively leveled to a more unified variant, with the Taiwanese speakers of Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan serving as the canonical speaker for many dictionaries. Despite efforts dating back to the Romanized Taiwanese Movement in the 1920’s during the Japanese Colonial era (Heylen 2014), speakers of Taiwanese have yet to achieve widespread consensus on a single orthographic system, largely due to the lack of interest on behalf of the colonial governments, who were mainly interested in shifting the population to the colonial language. This lack of a unified writing system has led some scholars to describe the present situation of written Taiwanese as “chaos” (Klötter 2005:249). However, the present paper argues that such a term is misplaced when used to describe Taiwanese. Instead of an unstandardized “chaos,” an analysis of a variety of published Taiwanese works instead shows that there is a sharp distinction among the groups utilizing written Taiwanese, their methods, and their goals. Of the three groups, the first is the Etymologist Camp. Individuals in this camp are primarily concerned with finding the original etymological character of modern words, thus linking it to a global Pan-Chinese context. Second, there is the Modernist Camp that incorporates a multitude of influences, mirroring that of Taiwanese society itself, in an approach that looks towards a unified future rather than any individual past. Finally, there is the Localist Camp that aims to promote a version of Taiwanese that has its origins in the geographic area of Taiwan—thereby rejecting any pan-Chinese identity. The present work is limited to the establishment of variation between these camps. The sociolinguistic indices and its implications for future standardization efforts will be discussed in later publications.

2. Background

During the time in which Taiwan was under martial law (1949-1987), speakers of non-Mandarin dialects and languages were suppressed, being compelled to speak only the ‘national language’ in public setting such as the workplace or school (Tse 2000:156). However, since the end of martial law, the official stance in Taiwan towards these minority languages has shifted from a policy of erasure to one of revitalization (Klötter 2009:113). Taiwanese is a prime example of this shift, as the government has expanded efforts in recent decades to promote the usage and education of languages such as Taiwanese.

Since the current millennium, Taiwanese has seen numerous attempts by the government to standardize that language and enshrine its place within Taiwanese culture. Dupré (2017:90) asserts that the year 2001 can be pinpointed as the major turning point in language policy with the establishment of a mandatory local language curriculum. This curriculum mandated the instruction of local languages, such as Taiwanese and Hakka, beginning in primary school. This policy was enacted with the goal of strengthening the increasingly endangered local languages, which were deemed as part of the national heritage. However, this effort faced several barriers to implementation. The first was the choice of which “mother language” to teach in an area—such a demographically motivated choice invariably leads to some groups in a region being ignored as they are not the majority. Dupré (2014:403) noted in his analysis of the mother tongue curriculum implementation that such a program unfairly favored Taiwanese at the expense of Hakka and

aboriginal languages in many cases. Additionally, the content the curriculum was often superficial, as they relied heavily upon cultural bits of knowledge such as proverbs, old sayings, nursery rhymes, and folk songs, resulting in very little actual language acquisition (Dupré 2014:404). This issue was exacerbated by a closely intertwined issue—the lack of standardized teaching materials. The process of implementing an effective mother tongue curriculum revealed the need for a standardized version to serve as a base for those educational materials. As such, the government also undertook standardization efforts, such as the introduction of an official romanization system called *Tâi-uân Lô-má-jī Phing-im Hong-àn* 台灣羅馬字拼音方案, commonly referred to as *Tâi-lô* or TL (Ministry of Education 2006). Three years after the introduction of an official romanization system, the Ministry of Education codified a set of 700 recommended characters for Taiwanese, later compiling a dictionary of approximately 14,000 words, called the *Taiwan minnanyu changyongci cidian* 台灣閩南語常用詞辭典 [Taiwanese Southern Min Frequently Used Words Dictionary] (TMCC) using these characters (Ministry of Education, 2009; Jiaoyubu Guoyu Tuixing Weihuanhui, 2011).

However, support for these standards is not ubiquitous amongst the Taiwanese. Taiwan is, in many regards, a post-colonial society. Following colonization by the Japanese from 1895 to 1945, Taiwan entered what should be considered a second era of colonization by the Kuomintang (KMT) 國民黨 Nationalist government following their retreat from China during the Chinese Civil War in 1949 (Dawley 2019:14). Under these two successive governments, Taiwanese was suppressed by officials (Klötter 2005:132,188; Heylen 2014:33). As such, language standardization efforts undertaken by the current Taiwanese government are not always seen in a positive light, as some see it as a continuation of linguistic colonialism and a “Mandarin-ization” of Taiwanese (Klötter 2005:248; Dupré 2017:93).

These periods of standardization, with conflicting aims of erasure and transition, have been the cause of a multitude of influences on modern Taiwanese. In addition to the Sinitic heritage, modern Taiwanese is heavily influenced by Japanese for certain lexical items and orthographic solutions, such as the word *oo-tóo-bái* ‘motorcycle’ derived from the Japanese lexical item *ōtobai* オートバイ. Additionally, the modern era has seen heavy influence of Mandarin on Taiwanese, as the population has shifted to being effectively bilingual or monolingual in Mandarin. Chen (2010:101) reports that over 90% of people speak Mandarin and it is dominant in all domains of use, a statistic that contributes to Mandarin’s influence on Taiwanese.

This sociopolitical history is essential to understanding the different approaches of representing written Taiwanese. A language is made of people who speak it, and in this case write it, and Taiwan’s complicated post-colonial history has caused the people writing Taiwanese to be diverse in ideology and background. This difference in background has led authors to select different orthographic solutions in writing Taiwanese. These solutions and inclusion of some influences over others, in turn, allows for a construction of different groupings of authors. As such, the “chaotic” state of written Taiwanese reorganizes itself into variation based upon the language attitudes of its authors.

3. The Three Camps

We can now turn to a discussion of who is using written Taiwanese, as well as the characteristics of their chosen orthographic representation. Klötter (2009:113) asserted that “no study has assessed the dominance of a certain mode of writing,” a claim that remains true to the author’s knowledge. As such, the current project addresses this dearth of scholarship by not only taking a descriptive look of written Taiwanese, but also providing a framework for the analysis of these written sources.

This is achieved through an analysis of thirteen published works, listed in section 5.2. All these works contain unambiguous examples of written Taiwanese and are written in a variety of genres and by a variety of authors. In the case of this paper, unambiguous is taken to mean that either the author states the text is in Taiwanese, or it is made obvious through other factors. This is significant as some approaches to writing Taiwanese may make it difficult to distinguish cases of written Taiwanese to cases of written Mandarin. Through a comparison these works, the existence of three different approaches to writing Taiwanese was discovered. These approaches are defined with in the Three Camp Framework to represent not only their orthographic solutions, but their sociolinguistic attitudes as well. The camps are as given in example (1).

(1) The Three Camps

1. The Etymologist Camp *benzipai* 本字派
2. The Modernist Camp *xiandaipai* 現代派
3. The Localist Camp *dangdipai* 當地派

The remainder of this section is organized as an exploration of each of these groups and the linguistic traits that define membership. For each camp, select examples from the corpora are given that best illustrate the orthographic solutions. The current project is limited exclusively to establishing the existence of these three camps, as their sociolinguistic meaning will be analyzed in future work.

3.1 The Etymologist Camp

The Etymologist Camp *benzipai* 本字派 consists of those who are concerned with accessing the greater history of Chinese, both Mandarin and other dialects, through tracing historical characters and linking the modern language to the long history of Chinese as a family of languages. In a sense, this camp is trans-national, as they are less concerned with the local history of Taiwanese in Taiwan but instead with its genealogy. As such, one goal of this camp is to be able to situate Taiwanese in the larger context of Chinese languages, thus linking a part to a whole. Indeed, many individuals in this camp are less likely to consider Taiwanese a separate language at all—they are more likely to view it as but one variant of one Chinese language.

Individuals in this camp are likely to turn to historical linguistics in order to attempt to trace the development of words throughout time, in other words, to find the *benzi* 本字 [Original Graph]. This mindset is neither new nor unique to Taiwanese, and has a long cultural history known as *benzikao* 本字考 scholarship (Snow 1993:21). As such, this camp gets its name from this tradition of scholarship. According to Snow (1993:21), this approach has the appeal of adding “tradition and legitimacy” to the dialect-writing forms. Klöter (2005:176) recalls the Taiwanese scholar Lian Yatang 連雅堂, who was active during the Japanese colonial period. Lian aimed to establish a link between the Taiwanese of the 1930’s and classical sources, which he called the “sole legitimate source for Taiwanese orthography” (Klöter 2005:178). Likewise in the modern era, Yang Qingchu 楊青矗 has been a vocal activist for etymological characters, even publishing his own dictionary in 1998 containing 10,000 entries in the *Tai-hua shuangyu cidian* 台華雙語詞典 (Klöter 2005:201).

Not only unique to Taiwanese, Sebba (2007:85) described a “pro-etymological” camp of language activists who were advocating for a French-based Haitian Creole writing system. In Sebba’s view, such a pro-etymological camp is primarily concerned with maintaining historical links. Such an argument holds true for Taiwanese as well. Snow (1993:22) connected this approach with a more scholarly approach, stating that proponents of a etymological approach to writing

borrowed characters from Standard Chinese on basis of their meaning in the contemporary source. However, Snow (1993:22) also claims that this approach would lead to issues when promoting writing in Taiwanese, as people would be required to learn “two sets of characters.”

Due to the variety of methods and sources that can be used when proposing etymological characters, those within this grouping tend to not have unanimous agreement on what the proper characters are. There exists quite a wide variety of proposals that can differ depending on the scholar, as can be seen with the Etymologist Camp sources in the present project. As such, one of the defining features for an author in this category is generally whether the rationale for which characters they use is based upon etymology. However, while there may be some variation, this camp is quite consistent in employing classical words, those borrowed from the literary canon, to represent Taiwanese, and as such has a distinctly classical or literary feel to it.

To illustrate the Etymologist Camp, we shall turn to the book *Heluo Minnanyu: Zonghengtan* 河洛閩南語：縱橫談 [Holo Southern Min: A Comprehensive Discussion] by Wu Zai-ye 吳在野. This book is not written exclusively in Taiwanese—it is written in Mandarin. However, written Taiwanese is unambiguously present when the author is discussing specific words or phrases.

The first point of interest in Wu’s discussion is his terminology for referring to the language itself: 河洛閩南語 *Heluo Minnanyu* [Holo Southern Min]. This is an equivalent term for what is also known as Taiwanese, but it instead focuses on the origin of the people who spoke this language. Lin (2001:3) notes the first group who spoke this language were originally from the basin region around the Yellow River and Luo River. As such some refer to the language as 河洛 *heluo*, literally referring to the Yellow and Luo Rivers. Southern Min refers to the fact that the language is part of the Min group, being contrasted with Northern and Eastern Min (Norman 1988:232). From the title alone, we can start to build a profile of the author. The author does not prefer the locally-salient term *taiyu* 台語 [Taiwanese Language]; instead he prefers a more historically oriented Holo Southern Min appellation. Additionally, such an appellation reminds the reader that the topic variety is only one language variety out of a family—orienting towards a Pan-Chinese identity. The title alone is enough to suspect that the author falls into the Etymologist Camp, one interested in finding historical original characters for Taiwanese, a decision that is only further supported by the content of book itself.

Not content with only discussing the historical development, Wu Zai-ye also claims that Taiwanese is a superior heir to the prestige of old Chinese in his introduction to the book. With the claims that Taiwanese maintains old pronunciation, meaning, characters, and vocabulary, Wu argues that Southern Min is the true cultural heir of the Han Language (漢語) (Wu 2011:8-9). In contrast, today’s Modern Standard Mandarin has been changed through the influence of foreign dynasties, and is really the “Han language of the non-Han” 胡漢語 [lit. Barbarian Han Language] (Wu 2011:9).

Turning to how Taiwanese is written, Wu (2011:10-11) has the following to say, worth reprinting in full:

反觀閩南文讀就完全不同了，它本來是一支先有文字的語言，當然——有音必有字，能念必能寫。所有漢語當中，沒有比閩南方言在文、白讀上分歧更大的，所謂「文讀」，不妨倒過來解釋為——「讀文」，顧名思義即可知是閩南人為了方便閱讀古書以及參加科舉而刻意設計出來的，它念的是一種典雅大方而跟得上時代潮流的音韻，其

中有些跟口語音相同或相近；有很多又跟口語音之間有視律[sic.]¹的對應關係可尋，但也有一些跟口語音迥然不同的，二者些跟文讀音發音差異很大的口語，卻正是「失寫」或經常被「訛寫」的，其實它原本都是有字的，而且一般說來，其字、音、義三者都比文讀更早。

By contrast, the literary pronunciation of Southern Min is completely different. It was originally a language that had characters first. Naturally, that which has a sound must also have a character representation, that which can be read must also be able to be written. Amongst all the Han languages, there are none whose distance between the colloquial and literary readings of characters is larger than that of the Southern Min dialect. There is no harm in flipping the interpretation of this so-called term “literary reading” into the reverse order “reading literature.” As the name implies, one can then know that the literary reading arose from the meticulous design of the Southern Min people to read old books aloud more conveniently as well as participate in the imperial examinations. The way it is read aloud is a type of elegant, stylish rhyme and rhythm, capable of keeping up with the current trends. Amongst its pronunciations, there are some which are identical or similar to the colloquial pronunciation. There are many correspondences in the prosody between it and colloquial speech that can be searched for. But there are also some words that are completely different from that of the colloquial speech. The second type of colloquial speech which has great differences from the literary reading pronunciation, however, exactly is this “lost writing” or commonly “falsely written” type. Actually, they originally all had a specific graph. Moreover, normally speaking, their graph, pronunciation, and meaning all have an earlier origin than the literary reading.

(Wu 2011:10-11; translation by the current author)

This passage is interesting in several respects, particularly in Wu’s claims to graphic principles. First, Wu implies that the written to spoken correspondence of Taiwanese and graphs is inherently one-to-one, as he says that which can be read must also be able to be written and asserts that every word has a corresponding character. Given Wu’s desire to establish Taiwanese as the true cultural heir to old Chinese, this assertion makes sense. Wu asserts that the so-called literary pronunciation of Taiwanese is actually newer than the colloquial pronunciation, but that it was simply created in order to allow Southern Min speakers access to the political system which utilized a language different—or in Wu’s point of view, corrupted—from Southern Min. Such an argument is backed up by linguistic evidence. Coblin (2002:536) asserts that the three waves of migration to the lower Yangtze watershed explains the presence of the various colloquial and literary readings present in the Wu dialect. According to Coblin, the colloquial readings represent an earlier stratum, whereas the literary readings were brought by successive waves of migration and language contact. In essence, Wu Zai-ye is attempting to establish the legitimacy and prestige of Taiwanese in this passage by casting it as having the strongest connection to historical Chinese. Wu still refers to Taiwanese as a dialect, part of the larger family of the Han language *hanyu* 漢語, while also arguing that Taiwanese has a stronger claim to the term *hanyu* than the barbarian-influenced Modern Standard Mandarin, which he (2011:9) calls 胡漢語 *huhanyu* [lit. Barbaric Han Language].

With Wu’s language attitudes firmly established, the question turns to how Wu represents Taiwanese graphically. Interestingly, Wu uses little to no romanization. Instead of giving romanization, Wu opts to use a modified version of the *Zhuyin Fuhao* 注音符號 [Phonetic Symbols]

¹ In the original text, the author types 視律 *shilü* [lit. to inspect the law]. Given the context, I suspect this was a typo for the homophone 詩律 meaning prosody, meter, or rhythm.

system to represent Taiwanese. As such, a layperson in Taiwan, likely unfamiliar with alternative romanization systems, would find this material more accessible, as it is more like the standard practice in Taiwan of writing Mandarin using the *Zhuyin Fuhao* system.

In terms of graphs, Wu takes a literary approach, as predicted by his membership in the Etymologist Camp. For example, the word ‘to know’ in Taiwanese is *tsai-iánn*, romanized in the Ministry of Education’s Tai-lo system, which is discussed in section 3.2. In this source, it is transcribed as <ㄗㄞ ㄩㄢˊ> with a <~> over the <ㄩ> to represent a nasalized vowel and given the graphs <知也> (Wu 2011:6). The transcription system makes the pronunciation accessible to individuals in Taiwan, who would not necessarily be familiar with other linguistic transcription systems such as *Tâi-lô* 台羅 or *Pêh-ōe-jī* 白話字. In attempting to demonstrate the connection between Taiwanese and the classical language, Wu is interested in correcting misconceptions of Taiwanese characters. The entry for ‘to know’ reads as follows, translated by the current author:

「知影」二字其實是文雅的「知也」，此「知」字念「ㄗㄞ」，一方面是口語音，一方面更是古音，而文讀念「ㄉㄧ」是中古音；至於「也」字係詞尾，本音是「ㄩ」，書面語則念「ㄩˊ」，所以「知也」是古音加上書面音的詞尾，跟「影」字毫不相干。湊巧的是「也，影」同音，遂便張冠李戴，唯有「有影、無影」纔用「影」字。二者不容混淆。(Wu 2011:6)

The two graphs of the word ‘to know’ actually is the classical phrase *Zhi ye*, this graph *zhi* is read “zai,” simultaneously being the vernacular reading and also the old historical reading. The literary reading is “di” which is the Middle Chinese pronunciation. As for the *ye* bound suffix, the original pronunciation is “a,” but the literary reading is pronounced as “iann.” Therefore, *zhi ye* is a classical pronunciation with a literary reading suffix added. It is not related in the least to the character *ying*. As chance may have it, *ye* and *ying* are pronounced the same, so are thereupon suitably confused with each other. Only *youying* [to exist] and *wuying* [to not exist] can use the character *ying*. The two of them must not be mixed up.

From this passage, Wu clearly is attempting to link Taiwanese to classical sources, tracing the development of the graph <知> for *tsai* and proposing the “accurate” usage of the graph <也> for *iánn*. Turning to the other attested variants for *tsai-iánn*, both the Ministry of Education’s TMCC and the local activist Taiwanese Character Field dictionaries agree on the graphs <知影>. However, Wu specifically refutes this manner of writing, saying that <影> does not have any relationship to the word ‘to know,’ only being a homonym by chance. As such, Wu directly refutes the place of popular practice, stating that the etymological origin of the word should take precedence.

Another illustrative example is Wu’s proposal for the word ‘now’ *tsit-má* (2011:242). Wu says that the proper graphs for ‘now’ are <即也> instead of the Mandarin semantic loans <現在> or <目前>. Wu’s reasoning is that <現> was not present in old Chinese, with only <見> attested (2011:242). As for <目前>, Wu argues that since the modern literary reading for this graph is *bók* and the colloquial is *bák*, this is also not an appropriate graphic representation of *tsit-má*. Given that <即> has the attested meaning of ‘now’ in literary texts, Wu argues that <即也> is proper graph. Interestingly, the TMCC and Taiwanese Character Field characters of <這馬> and <只馬> are not addressed.

Wu Zai-ye’s *Heluo Minnanyu: Zonghengtan* 河洛閩南語：縱橫談 [Holo Southern Min: A Comprehensive Discussion] is a clear example of Etymologist Camp membership. Through his proposed characters for Taiwanese, Wu aims to reconnect the prestige and lineage of Taiwanese

to Old Chinese, reminiscent of Sebba's (2007:85) discussion of the pro-etymologist camp. This also ties to Wu's broader views of the place of Taiwanese, and potentially Taiwan. While not explicitly discussed, it is interesting to note that Wu consistently places Taiwanese in context of China 中國 and not Taiwan 台灣, as he discusses the place of Taiwanese within the realm of all the dialects, not only against standard Mandarin. It is clear from this that Wu takes a Pan-Chinese orientation towards the place of Taiwanese. Wu also refers to the standard version of Mandarin as *Putonghua* 普通話 [Common Speech], which is more common in China than in Taiwan, as Taiwanese typically prefer *Taiwan Guoyu* 臺灣國語 [Taiwanese National Language] or, more recently among some groups, *Taiwan Huayu* 台灣華語 [Taiwan Mandarin].

Another example of Etymologist Camp membership is the book *Ni Xiedui Taiyu le ma?* 你寫對台語了嗎? [Are You Writing Taiwanese Correctly?] by Lü Yingtang 呂應棠 published in 2017. In this source, Lü recounts his experience of learning how to write Taiwanese growing up, specifically noting that he relied upon Classical Chinese novels and texts (Lü 2017:10). One such example of this reliance upon etymological characters is Lü's suggestion for the word *tsit-ma* 'now', given as the literary <即目> (2017:156). Such a character choice is clearly literary in nature and sharply contrasts to other recommended characters by the Modernist and Localist camps which render *tsit-ma* as <這馬> and <只馬> respectively. The cover of the book itself proclaims this etymological orientation, stating:

以中國古典小說與古籍為基礎探尋台語對應漢字，漢語元素、外來元素、本土元素，將台語轉化為「能讀易寫」的活語言。

Taking Classical Chinese novels and text as a foundation to search out corresponding Chinese characters for Taiwanese, as well as taking Chinese language elements, foreign elements, as well as local elements, Taiwanese metamorphizes into a living language that is “readable and easily writable.” (Translation by author)

In summary, there exists a non-negligible group of people who are interested in promoting a written system for Taiwanese based upon their reconstructed variants of the modern reflexes of Taiwanese. Such approaches do not factor in popular usage or local history—a trait that will now be shown to define the Modernist Camp and Localist Camp.

3.2 The Modernist Camp

The second camp is the Modernist Camp *xiandaipai* 現代派. This term is used due to the interest of the individuals in this camp in the modern situation of Taiwanese, and the mutual attitude towards finding a consensus to move forward united regardless of previous history. Individuals on this side are still concerned with the relationship between Taiwanese and other Chinese languages, but they are not as concerned with maintaining the classical language. Instead, this group is predominantly concerned with situating Taiwanese in the present-day bilingual reality of Taiwan. As such, the representative characters of this camp tend to include a mixture of both etymological characters *benzi* 本字 and folk usage *suzi* 俗字 characters. The officially promoted standards of the Ministry of Education fall into this category, meaning that the Modernist Camp is the government sanctioned orthography. To understand the orthographic background of this camp, it is helpful to first read the statement given by the Ministry of Education in the “Explanation of the Usage of Characters” *yongzi yuanze* 用字原則 in the *Taiwan minnanyu changyongci cidian* 台灣閩南語常用詞辭典 [Taiwanese Southern Min Frequently Used Words Dictionary], the officially published dictionary for Taiwanese:

在各種閩南語書寫方式中，本辭典以漢字為基礎，採「一音一字」。而選字的標準，則依該字的使用現況，再據本典既定的概念選定用字。大致有以下三種類型：本字、訓讀字、俗字。

In every manner of writing Southern Min, the current dictionary took Chinese characters as foundational, employing the principle of “One sound one character.” While choosing a character as the standard, the current dictionary considered the current situation of the words while also consulting the established ideas of this dictionary in order select the character. Under this schema, there are three types of characters: Etymological Graphs, Borrowed Meaning Graphs, and Folk Usage Graphs.

(https://twblg.dict.edu.tw/holodict_new/compile1_3_9_2.jsp, translation by the author)

This short excerpt displays the characteristic duality of the Modernist Camp. For this camp, there are multiple sources of characters, without one being explicitly valued more than the others. The Etymological Graphs allow for a historically accurate reconstructed version of Taiwanese, but their procedure also allows room for local history and influence through the inclusion of Borrowed Meaning and Folk Usage graphs. These Borrowed Meaning graphs *xunduzi* 訓讀字 are examples of repurposed orthography in which an imported word was adopted to represent a local word, such as <人> being used for *lâng* ‘person.’ Folk Usage graphs, on the other hand, represent popular solutions for orthography and may be based upon phonetic borrowing, in essence a rebus principle of graph usage. Such graphs created by the rebus, or punning, principle would be heavily reliant upon the readers knowledge of Taiwanese phonology and vocabulary, as it might not represent historical usage of the character in the broad Chinese language family. As such, this approach is an amalgamation of varied influences on Taiwanese orthography—a reflection of the multicultural pluralistic reality of Taiwanese society today.

The TMCC dictionary can be taken as a set of standards for individuals who fall into this camp, due to its officially promoted status and the likelihood of authors to agree with the Ministry of Education’s recommendations. First published in 2011, the TMCC uses the *700 Recommended Characters for Taiwanese Southern Min* published in 2009 by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2009; Jiaoyubu Guoyu Tuixing Weihuanhui, 2011). This dictionary is presented in an online format and serves as the basis of many subsequent works that follow the MOE’s standards. All entries within the TMCC use the *Tâi-uân Lô-má-jī Phing-im Hong-àn* 台灣羅馬字拼音方案 (henceforth referred to as TL or *Tâi-lô*) (MOE 2006).

An interesting example of the Modernist Camp is found not only within the published works for members of the Taiwanese speech community, but also in the production of pedagogical materials for those who wish to learn Taiwanese. For example, the language textbook *Short Takes: A scene-based Taiwanese Vocabulary Builder* explicitly takes the MOE’s recommended romanization system and character suggestions (Chi 2021:11). Chi’s choice of words is important, as he explicitly calls the romanization the “standard.” This is important given that Taiwanese typically has the reputation of being unstandardized, and as such, Chi is recognizing and asserting a shift in that status.

As a language textbook, *Short Takes* is unique amongst the selected materials for its focus on the present-day situation without regard for purely Sinitic history of Taiwanese. This is evidenced by the terms included in the textbook, as we see a variety of influences all listed as acceptable Taiwanese. For the word ‘apple’ given in lesson five, the Sinitic *phông-kó* 蘋果 as well as the Japanese loan word *lìn-gooh* りんご are listed as alternative acceptable terms (Chi 2021:56). The

acceptance of Japanese terms is not necessarily new for scholars of Taiwanese, as the Japanese influence on the language can still be observed 70 years after the end of the Japanese colonial period. However, what is notable in *Short Takes* is the acceptance of Mandarin loanwords, sometimes called “Mandarin-isms.” In the same chapter, two alternative vocabulary words for ‘fruit juice’ are listed. *Kué-tsi-tsiap* 果子汁 is marked as a more traditional way of referring to it, implying that is an original Taiwanese word. The alternative is *kó-tsiap* 果汁, which is a Mandarin-ism taken from Mandarin *guǒzhī* 果汁, but Chi refers to it simply as a “new” way of saying it (Chi 2021:56).

Short Takes exemplifies the Modernist Camp view of pluralistic influences. It accepts the historical heritage and influence, but then it redirects back into a modern local standpoint. As such, *Short Takes* accepts that the language has not only changed but also that it has its roots in a long tradition, and thus looks forward to a newly defined local usage that is a union of these influences.

Another example is the dictionary *Taiyuhua cidian* 台語話詞典 [The Dictionary of Taiwanese Speech]. In the introduction to the dictionary, there is an explanation of the orthographic choices made in the dictionary. The introduction states that the Ministry of Education’s *700 Recommended Characters for Taiwanese Southern Min* was taken as the base (Li et al. 2019:003). However, this source is not limited to these 700 characters, but instead expands upon them. While no official counts of individual unique characters are given, the dictionary is divided into 665 monosyllabic morphemes. From these elements, additional vocabulary and related terms using the morpheme are provided. According to their calculations, this resulted in a text containing over 11,200 of these ‘elongated morphemes’ (Li et al. 2019:4). As such, the authors claim that this book captures more vocabulary than the Ministry of Education TMCC dictionary.

Turning to the dictionary itself, the foreword was written personally by the lead editor Lí Khîn-huānn 李勤岸 in Taiwanese. It is in his style of a mixed script combining characters and romanization (Li et al. 2019:2). Strikingly, Li elects to use the romanization <hōo> over the graph <予> for the dative and passive marker throughout the foreword. However, when turning to the dictionary’s own entry for the word, the graph <予> is suggested. As such, this potentially represents a meaningful choice by Li in rejecting the suitability of <予> as a representation of hōo.

It seems significant to consider that many cases in which Li rejects the Ministry of Education character tend to be grammatical particles, such as the dative and passive marker *hōo* and possessive particle *ê*. It is possible that the origin of these words is unclear, and as there is a strong disagreement on what the proper character for these words are. For example, the Taiwanese Character Field, the source promoted by those in the Localist Camp, proposes the use of <乎>. None of the works within the Etymologist Camp offered any suggestions on how this word should be represented. As such, it is feasible that Li’s reluctance to use <予> may represent his hesitation to fully support the Modernist Camp on this particular word, despite his firm entrenchment as a member.

In all, the Modernist camp is remarkably standardized for a writing system that is often claimed to be unstandardized. In cases where an author does not agree with the official character selection, they are able to use the officially sanctioned alternative of romanization to write the same word. It is important to recall that just because a writing system has variation does not mean that it is unstandardized, as English also displays written variation. The defining feature of the Modernist camp orthography is the inclusion of pluralistic sources for the writing. This includes the etymological characters promoted by the Etymologist camp, but it importantly also includes the Japanese and Mandarin influence and loanwords that have been adopted into Taiwanese over the

past century of popular usage. In some senses, the Modernist camp can be seen as the intermediary between the Etymologist Camp and the Localist Camp, which is the next topic of discussion.

3.3 *The Localist Camp*

In opposition to the Etymologist and Modernist camps, there are individuals interested in the local history and tradition of Taiwanese exclusively. As such, the defining feature of this camp is focus on Taiwan-centric history and the refusal of ‘foreign’ influences, particularly that of Mandarin Chinese. These individuals, using systems oriented to the local, are more commonly found to support Taiwanese independence, nativist politics, and hold attitudes that Taiwanese is not related to Chinese (Aiong Taigi, 2021). This final point is interesting as there is a rejection of linguistic evidence and arguments in favor of political ideologies and reactions against the KMT colonialization of Taiwan. As such, these individuals are categorized into what is called the Localist Camp *dangdipai* 當地派. This term was selected because it reflects the interest of its proponents in the local, or Taiwan-exclusive, tradition of writing.

Recommended by these same individuals is the *Tâi-jī Chhân* 台字田 [Taiwanese Character Field] (TJC) online dictionary. Compiled by local language activists in Taiwan, this source acts more as a compilation of a variety of different historical sources of Taiwanese, such as historical dictionaries, songbooks, or other sources.² What is interesting about this source is that it completely disregards the recommended characters of the Ministry of Education. Uninterested in etymological correctness or even a prescriptive outlook in the first place, the Taiwanese Character Field dictionary does not instruct which character is the “right” character for a given word, but instead makes suggestions about what has conventionally been used to represent that word in historical sources local to Taiwan. This suggests that the compilers view the local history of a variant as key to correctness, and as primary over etymological accuracy. This decision makes for a sometimes complicated and messy presentation of character variants, however, it is generally suggested to follow the variant marked in red with a circle, as that is the most common representation within their sources. In other words, for this camp, some degree of variation is sanctioned under the condition that it reflects historical variation.

The unifying feature of this viewpoint is the idea that written Taiwanese reflects the local heritage and tradition of Taiwan. This camp is not interested in, and some members even vehemently oppose, situating Taiwanese in the larger context of Chinese. While some in this group still use characters to represent Taiwanese, there is also a movement to use romanization exclusively, thereby separating it entirely from the other Chinese languages (Aiong Taigi, 2021). As Sebba (2007:84) asserts, such choices in the context of a post-colonial society are not entirely motivated by linguistic concerns, but instead can be analyzed in the context of rejecting the colonial identity.

While an unofficial resource, the Taiwanese Character Field (*Tâi Jī Chhân* 台字田 TJC) dictionary represents a rich trove of information about the history of Taiwanese in Taiwan, as it is a bottom-up compilation of what popular practice was. For this reason, it is not unreasonable to believe that this resource should be connected to the nativist language movement. All romanization is given in the *Pêh-ōe-jī* romanization scheme, one that has historical basis in the Church Romanization system used by the missionaries that spread Christianity in the region. This same system was adopted by the Taiwanese language activist groups due to its local history (Klötter 2005:218). The alteration between different graphic variants is not simply the competition between

² These sources are given on their website <https://ji.taioan.org/chhamkho/>

orthographic preferences. Instead, they appear to be very deliberate choices that can index political stance and ideology. In fact, in the view of some language activists, Pêh-ōe-jī is considered a better representation for Taiwanese as it allows for a demarcation between Taiwanese and Chinese (Klötter 2005:219). Klötter (2009:114) defined this preference toward romanization as due to its ‘negative adequacy’—it is sufficient through the mere fact it is not the Chinese script. For the activists in this camp, any Mandarin influence is seen as a negative quality—one that should be avoided.

An illustrative example of this camp is *Gínná Ôngchú* 囡仔王子 [The Little Prince]. This text is a translation of *Le Petit Prince* written by Antoine St. Exupéry, which was translated by Chng Hūi-Phêng 莊惠平 and edited by Ko An-lóng 高安勇³ into Taiwanese (2021). Such a text is important because it is not the author’s original work in terms of content, although the specific style of writing belongs to the author. As such, we can analyze how a children’s book, which is apolitical to the place of Taiwanese, can make significant claims through the representation of the language. Immediately, from the title, we can see one of the decisions that have been made: the usage of Pêh-ōe-jī instead of Tâi-lô. Such a choice implies that the authors belong to the Localist Camp, an assumption that is validated with a further look into the story.

Instead of choosing only one writing system to tell the story, the authors have elected to not make the choice. Both the character and romanization versions are available within the same book. The rendition of the title in characters is also telling: <囡仔王子> [Child Prince]. The first word, *gínná*, makes use of <囡>, which is quite common. However, the Ministry of Education’s *Taiwan Minnanyu Changyongci Cidian* (TMCC) instead represents it as <囡仔>, with <囡> listed as a commonly used, but incorrect, variant. <囡>, as a character, is only given the pronunciation *kiánn*.

Interestingly, given the position of the local Taiwanese camp, we do find some validation of colonial writing system history. On page two, the following sentence is written (Chng 2021:2):

“呔个大人郎苦勸我講、共看會着甲看袂着腹內个奔蛇喜二幅畫藏ㄌ。”

“Hia ê tôa lâng lóng khó-khng góa kóng, kā khòaⁿ ē tiòh kap khòaⁿ bē tiòh pak lái ê bóng-chôa hit nng pak oē khng le”

‘That adult admonished the young me saying that I should put away my drawings of boa constrictors—no matter from the inside or the outside.’

Of the many interesting things in this sentence, the first thing that we shall call our attention to is the last two graphs <藏ㄌ>. The intended reading for these characters is given on the side, in the style of Japanese *furigana*: *khng le*. This consists of a verb and a particle. The first graph <藏> meaning to hide or put away, is an example of character variation between the different camps. The TMCC recommends the graph <囡>, whereas the Taiwanese Character Field recommends <勸> or <藏>. In fact, the entry for *khng* ‘to put away’ specifically states that <囡> was sometimes borrowed by non-speakers to represent the word *khng*, but was not the accurate graph or one with any historical basis.

The second part of this dyad is even more interesting. This graph is not a Chinese character, instead being taken from Japanese Katakana *re*. Due to the phonology of Japanese, there is no

³ It must be noted that Ko An-lóng, more commonly known on the internet as Aiong, is not a native Taiwanese speaker. However, despite this, the various views and practices that Aiong promotes have received positive reception by at least some members of the community. As such, Aiong’s views can themselves be seen as representative of a portion of the population’s views as well.

distinction between /ɾ/ and /l/, so the same kana would also be used to represent /le/. This occurs throughout multiple places in the book, and always represents the *sentence final particle le* (some examples are Chng 2021:2, 7, 11). Klöter (2005:139) does show <レ> pronounced as /le/ as part of the Taiwanese Katakana system, a system created during the Japanese Colonial period in order to represent Taiwanese based upon Japanese Katakana. This is one of the special traits of Taiwanese compared to other the Southern Min varieties. The usage of Japanese Katakana gives the written language a distinctly Taiwanese feel—and distinguishes it from the other Southern Min varieties. Such usage of Katakana through the property of phonetic loan is not limited to only grammatical particles. For example, in the Taiwanese language textbook *Short Takes: A Scene-based Taiwanese Vocabulary Builder* (126) by Pin-chih Chi, the vocabulary item “tennis” is given both as *the-ní-suh* and *bāng-kiû*, one derived from Japanese テニス *tenisu* and one taking Chinese graphs 網球 as this vocabulary item made its way into Taiwanese first through Japanese and later through Mandarin. As evidenced by the examples above, the authors of *Ginná Ôngchú* should be firmly situated in the Localist Camp.

Another example of the Localist Camp, although not as extreme as *Ginná Ôngchú is Southern Hokkien: An Introduction*. This textbook is meant for English speakers who are wishing to learn Taiwanese. However, this textbook is not exclusively intended for English-speaking learners, as National Taiwan University, the publishers of the textbook, has an open access online course that is taught in Mandarin which uses this textbook. In the introduction of *Southern Hokkien*, authors Bernhard Fuehrer and Yang Hsiu-Fang state that they use the Missionary Romanization System (MRS), which is a variety of Pêh-ōe-jī romanization.⁴ Their reason for using MRS is “[MRS is] widely used to transcribe Southern Hokkien dialects” (Fuehrer and Yang 2014a:10). In another section, they note the following:

“Southern Hokkien shows a low level of standardization which easily leads to the learner receiving conflicting information and instructions from textbooks and native speaker informants. This textbook applies a descriptive approach and does not attempt to present one dialect variant as classroom standard. It reflects linguistic realities of contemporary Southern Hokkien spoken in Taiwan but also includes occasional references to historical layers and regional variants.” (Fuehrer and Yang 2014a:10)

From these statements, we can glean some observations about their attitude towards Taiwanese, which they call Southern Hokkien. The first one is that this effort represents a much stronger linguistic treatment than some of the other materials thus far. This textbook touches upon the idea of variation, descriptivism, and the modern. However, it also concerns itself with historical strata and phonology. This is evident by the first lesson of the textbook being a phonetics and phonology lesson (Fuehrer and Yang 2014a:27).

The choice of the word transcription is particularly revealing when discussing their romanization choice. To Fuehrer and Yang, it is apparent that they are approaching the writing system as little more than a linguistic tool. In an echo of the “phonemic principle” that Sebba (2007:17) deconstructs the history of, Fuehrer and Yang view an accurate linguistic transcription as the top priority. This viewpoint is only further compounded as the textbooks primarily teaches in romanization with characters meant only as supplemental aids. In fact, the authors view

⁴ One main difference between the MRS and Pêh-ōe-jī romanization schemes is the marking of the tone. In MRS, tone is marked with a superscript number, while Pêh-ōe-jī marks tone with a diacritic on a vowel. For example, ma² and mà for 馬 [horse].

Southern Hokkien as being a romanized language, as they state that they include “characters to facilitate the ‘switch-over’ from Mandarin to Southern Hokkien” (Fuehrer and Yang 2014a:10). As such, this implies that the authors may not view Taiwanese as a language with a strong writing tradition—it is primarily a spoken language. As such, Fuehrer and Yang focus more on the spoken reality instead of asserting any version of the written language.

For the characters that are used, we see that there is a tendency to select characters with strong Taiwanese history or of literary origin. Interestingly, Fuehrer and Yang (2014a:82) propose that the literary and colloquial readings for the word ‘person,’ *jîn* and *lâng* respectively, are of separate etymological origin, and as should be represented by two different graphs: <人> and <儂> respectively. From the perspective of global Southern Min, this is not surprising, as the author has observed the usage of the latter representing *lâng* by Southern Min speakers in Singapore and Indonesia in personal communication. However, such a choice has rarely been seen in Taiwanese to the author’s knowledge. The Taiwanese Character Field dictionary, which compiles graphic variation from a large number of historical Taiwanese sources, does not offer <儂> as a historically attested character for *lâng*.

In one final example, we see an inclusion of Japanese kana. In Lesson Seven, the vocabulary item ‘to tie a necktie’ *kat nē-khu-tái* is given with the Japanese borrowing <結ネクタイ> (Fuehrer and Yang 2014b:16). This is an interesting case as we see the borrowing of the Japanese katakana orthography to represent Taiwanese, along with a Taiwanese verb *kat*. As such, this book is promoting a clearly Taiwan-centric view, as other variants of Southern Min would not have the Japanese loanword *nē-khu-tái*, apart from borrowing it in turn from Taiwanese.

Upon one’s first impression with this textbook, it does not firmly follow any of the three camps as closely as some of the other resources. However, there are several key decisions made in the textbook that justify its classification as a member of the Localist Camp tradition—in spite of some internal variation. Primarily, Fuehrer and Yang promote an entirely romanization-based version of Hokkien, a stance typical of the historicist Taiwanese language activists (Klötter 2005:219). Such a decision is also important given the authors’ background as linguists. Instead of engaging with the debate as to the appropriate character, they suggest completely separating it from the historical lineage. As more evidence, this book is concerned with the history of Southern Hokkien in Taiwan, as it attempts to disseminate some of the locally used characters—despite them not promoting the use of characters at all.

In summary, the Localist Camp focuses on the local Taiwanese history, incorporating elements from the local songbooks and other documents in order to promote an orthography that is distinctly Taiwanese in origin. This camp is also characterized by its support for romanization, particularly the locally adopted Pêh-ōe-jī, first introduced by foreign missionaries and later adopted, as there is no desire to situate Taiwanese within the broader Chinese tradition of character writing.

4. Conclusions

The Taiwanese language has a long history, both oral and written. However, due to the sociopolitical history of the island, Taiwanese lacks a single unified written representation of the language. However, a lack of a singular orthography is not the same as being in a state of chaos. The present project has proposed the Three Camp Framework in order to more accurately depict the situation of present-day Taiwanese through the lens of sociolinguistic variation. Through the analysis of these sources, three camps emerged as primary grouping factors: the Etymologist, Modernist, and Localist camps. Each of these groups, while still containing minor variation within, display strong similarities to other works in the same group. Any of the remaining variation within

a group can be attributed to individual preference—much as how each person writing in English has a preference in their own language use, such as <color> or <colour>, or to use the oxford comma.

The main distinctions between the groups can be succinctly summarized through their incorporation of source materials. The Etymologist Camp places the highest regard on characters that have attested literary usage throughout the history of the Chinese language, often relying upon sources that are over a thousand years old to support the argument. In stark contrast, the Localist Camp places emphasis on the local history of the language on the island of Taiwan. Members of this camp look towards the pre-colonial, or sometimes including the Japanese colonial period, sources for their orthographic solutions. Finally, the Modernist camp represents a middle ground approach to these two camps—considering both broader etymology as well as local popular tradition. However, what is also important for the group is recognition and acceptance of the pluralistic reality of Taiwanese today through the inclusion of Mandarin-isms, or words that are newly borrowed into the Taiwanese language after the 1950’s.

Interestingly, these differences in source materials leads to another interesting test of group membership. Due to the variety of sources and the specific strategies underlying the selection of characters, an individual monolingual in Mandarin will have a varied experience reading sources from each of the camps. For works in the Etymologist Camp, works are more comprehensible, although they may be literary in style. Works in the Modernist Camp also incorporate many character solutions that are understood by a monolingual Mandarin speaker. Finally, the Localist Camp authors utilize several phonetic loan characters that, unless one has knowledge of Southern Min phonology, would be difficult to understand. The key linguistic differences between the camps are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Distinguishing Features of Each Camp

| The Etymologist Camp | The Modernist Camp | The Localist Camp |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Usage of sources from broad history of Classical Chinese | 1. Usage of both classical and local sources | 1. Usage of sources with local history |
| 2. Distinctly literary in style | 2. Use of semantic-loan characters | 2. Reliance upon local phonetic loan characters |
| 3. Focus on finding the original etymological character (<i>benzi</i>) | 3. Acceptance of modern loanwords and “Mandarin-isms” | 3. Reliance upon local tradition for <i>suzi</i> |
| 4. Mandarin-transparent | 4. Mandarin Transparent | 4. Mandarin-opaque |
| 5. Promotion of a Chinese character-only orthography | 5. Mixed support for mixed orthographic systems | 5. Support for the exclusive usage of romanization |

The present work establishes the existence of the Three Camps Framework for analyzing written Taiwanese Southern Min. Recharacterizing “chaos” as systematic variation, there are several new paths for future directions. It is essential to determine if popular informal writing, such as what is seen on the internet, can also be described using this framework. Additionally, this

framework should be checked against new publications to determine if it is possible to maintain distinction between group membership.

This nuanced view of Taiwanese writing emphasizes the importance of reconsidering some basic assumptions about not only written Taiwanese, but about unstandardized writing systems more broadly. Through the lens of sociolinguistics, what once may have been seen as an unorganized chaotic free variation takes on a new sense of order and cohesiveness. Instead of limiting the language attitudes towards these sources of “dialect writing” as vulgar, unstandardized, or rural, such writing become source material for better understanding the sociopolitical milieu that surrounds language use and language attitudes. As such, a critical sociolinguistic view of orthography is important for all scholars working with languages, as the mere act of writing an utterance down may carry sociopolitical implications, and it is our duty to understand those implications when working with a community.

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