

Toward a sociolinguistic profile of Taiwanese Americans

Eleanor Lin*

Abstract. This study works toward a sociolinguistic profile of Taiwanese Americans. Despite Taiwan's rich linguistic history, previous studies of language use in the Taiwanese American community have been limited to case studies of Taiwanese Americans as heritage learners of Mandarin Chinese. I therefore seek to understand Taiwanese Americans' relationships with both Mandarin and languages other than Mandarin by surveying 33 Taiwanese Americans and conducting follow-up interviews with 10 respondents. I find that Taiwanese Americans are highly multilingual, live transnationally, are directly and indirectly impacted by language policy in Taiwan, view Taiwanese Mandarin as a marker of identity, have varying levels of interest in and access to resources for learning heritage languages other than Mandarin, create spaces for language learning and maintenance through student organizations, view code-switching non-negatively, experience challenges to freely using their languages from anti-Asian racism, and hope to pass on their heritage languages despite consciousness of a widespread shift to English. These findings contribute to our understanding of the language attitudes and identity construction of the estimated 697,000 people of Taiwanese origin living in the United States, as well as providing insights into the future vitality of Taiwan's languages in diaspora.

Keywords. Taiwanese American; heritage language; sociolinguistic profile

1. Introduction. As of 2019, the Pew Research Center estimated that as many as 697,000 people of Taiwanese origin were living in the United States (Passel et al. 2021).¹ Despite Taiwan's rich linguistic history, previous studies of language use in the Taiwanese American community have been limited to case studies of Taiwanese Americans as heritage learners of Mandarin Chinese (Wiley 2017; Liao et al. 2017). In order to understand Taiwanese Americans' relationships with both Mandarin and languages other than Mandarin, this study works toward a sociolinguistic profile of Taiwanese Americans by reporting the results of interviewing and/or surveying 33 Taiwanese Americans. I begin with a brief overview of the history of Taiwan and Taiwanese Americans, with particular attention to their languages (§2). I then introduce the survey and interview methodology (§3), followed by the results and discussion (§4), and conclusions and suggested future work (§5).

2. A brief linguistic history of Taiwan and Taiwanese Americans. Taiwan has a long history of multilingualism. The indigenous peoples of Taiwan speak such a diversity of Austronesian languages that many linguists believe Taiwan was the origin from which Austronesian-speaking peoples later spread throughout the Indo-Pacific (Li 2008:523). Taiwan was first colonized by the Dutch and the Spanish, who encouraged the immigration of Southern Min speakers from the Chinese mainland in the 1600s (Chen 2010:82–83). Southern Min speakers continued immigrating

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¹ This figure was calculated based on self-identification of Taiwan or Taiwanese as one's race, ancestry, or birthplace by respondents to the American Community Survey (ACS) administered by the United States Census Bureau. Children and grandchildren of self-identified Taiwanese Americans are included in this figure.

under the subsequent rule of the Qing Dynasty, joined by Hakka speakers beginning in the 1700s (Chen 2010:83). While the Europeans and the Qing government adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to language policy, the next colonial force, Japan, elevated Japanese to the prestige language in Taiwan by mandating its use in education and administration over the first half of the twentieth century (Chen 2010:83). When the Republic of China took Japan's place in 1945, Mandarin replaced Japanese as the prestige language (Chen 2010:83–84). However, the ROC also brought speakers of many other Sinitic languages to Taiwan (Chen 2010:83). In the past few decades, policies promoting both the revitalization of languages other than Mandarin and the learning of English as a second language have been implemented (Chen 2010:84). At present, in addition to the national language of Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese Southern Min,² Hakka, Austronesian languages, English, and other languages are spoken in Taiwan, continuing the island's history of multilingualism (Chen 2010:84,94).

The history of Taiwanese immigration to the United States can be described in terms of four main waves, stretching from the 1950s to the present (Wang & Zhou 2021:4–6). Prior to the 1950s, Taiwanese immigration to the United States was extremely limited, due to anti-Asian immigration and naturalization laws (Ewing 2012:3–4).³ In the 1950s, supporters of the Chinese Nationalists began immigrating to the United States by way of Taiwan, fleeing the fallout of their defeat in the Chinese Civil War (Wang & Zhou 2021:5). American immigration reform in the 1960s opened the door for a second wave of Taiwanese immigrants, who came to pursue graduate studies in STEM (Wang & Zhou 2021:5). A third wave of businesspeople followed in the 1980s, helping establish Los Angeles County as a major population center of the Taiwanese American community (Wang & Zhou 2021:6–7). Wang and Zhou differentiate a most recent, fourth wave of Taiwanese immigrants (from the 1990s to the present) as more politically active and pro-Taiwanese democracy than previous waves (Wang & Zhou 2021:6).⁴ Taiwanese immigration to the United States peaked in the 1990s and has since declined (Wang & Zhou 2021:5). The Pew Research Center estimates that as of 2019, as many as 697,000 people of Taiwanese origin were living in the United States (Passel et al. 2021).

Taiwanese American immigration patterns have ambiguous implications for the survival of languages other than English within the Taiwanese American community. Because many Taiwanese immigrants came to the United States to pursue graduate school or business opportunities, they dispersed widely across the United States in search of these opportunities, rather than concentrating in ethnic enclaves (Wang & Zhou 2021:7). Many settled into predominantly white, middle class suburban areas relatively quickly (Wang & Zhou 2021:6–7). Geographic dispersal and settlement in the suburbs might be expected to accelerate Taiwanese Americans' shift toward English. On the other hand, scholarship since at least the 1990s has challenged the view of the suburbs as a site of assimilation (Alba et al. 1999). Furthermore, technology allows Taiwanese

² Throughout this paper, Taiwanese Southern Min will also be referred to by the English translation of one of its most common endonyms, "Taiwanese."

³ Nevertheless, there were a few noteworthy exceptions, such as Lin Mosei, who became the first Taiwanese student to be awarded a doctoral degree from Columbia University in 1929. Lin Mosei was tragically killed in 1947 in the 228 Incident, a crackdown of the ruling Chinese Nationalists which systematically eliminated much of Taiwan's intelligentsia and other leading figures in society, in response to widespread anti-government protests (Mei-chun 2001).

⁴ However, earlier waves of immigrants also played a pivotal role in the transnational organizing that led to Taiwan's democratization in the 1980s (Ooi 2009).

Americans to find community in virtual spaces, regardless of geographical separation (Wang & Zhou 2021:11). Taiwanese Americans also stay connected through a plethora of organizations, ranging from groups organized around ethnolinguistic identity⁵ (e.g. the Taiwanese Hakka Association of America) to professional organizations (e.g. Taiwanese American Professionals) (Wang & Zhou 2021:8). Taiwanese Americans also perpetuate their languages and culture through online educational resources, private language and culture schools geared toward K-12 students, and classes at institutions of higher education (Wiley 2017; Liao et al. 2017; Chen 2018). A goal of this study is to elucidate how each of these factors impacts language attitudes, language ideology, and language use within the Taiwanese American community.

3. Methods. This study distributed an online survey of Taiwanese Americans' language use via social media, email, and word of mouth. The author reached out to friends, family, acquaintances, and Taiwanese American organizations in New York City. In some cases, participants assisted in sharing the survey with their own contacts. To maximize response rates, the survey was limited to eight questions on basic demographic information and languages spoken (see §6.1) (Deutskens et al. 2004). Participants could answer as many or as few questions as they wished. Follow-up interviews were conducted with ten participants. Interview questions were designed to understand family histories, experiences with language acquisition and second language learning, involvement with Taiwanese American community organizations, language use in daily life, and language attitudes, using the "Basic Sociolinguistic Interviewers Guide" distributed in Columbia University's Fall 2023 Endangered Languages course as a starting point (Perlin 2023). While a prepared list of questions was employed (see §6.2), additional questions were spontaneously posed (or omitted, since not all questions were applicable to all interviewees) based on interviewees' responses during the interviews.

4. Results and discussion. The survey received 33 responses, with 10 respondents participating in follow-up interviews.⁶

4.1. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS. Figure 1 displays the ages and genders of study participants.⁷ A majority of participants (57.6%) were 18 to 24 years old. Many participants in this age group indicated that they are currently attending or have recently graduated from college. A majority of participants (54.5%) were women. Unsurprisingly (since study participants were recruited through personal connections), the typical participant's age, gender, and education resemble those of the author, and this study therefore does not claim to be representative of the entire Taiwanese American community. Nevertheless, it represents a first step toward understanding this community's language use in context.

4.2. LANGUAGES SPOKEN. Figure 2 shows the languages participants reported themselves as speaking. Figure 3 shows the languages participants reported as their native languages. All 33 participants reported speaking English. 97.0% of participants reported speaking multiple languages. 81.8% of participants reported English as a native language, 69.7% reported Mandarin

⁵ While "Taiwanese American" serves as a broad ethnic identification in the American context, in the Taiwanese context, more granular distinctions become important, such as the ethnolinguistic distinctions between Hakka and Southern Min-speaking communities and the distinction between *benshengren* and *waishengren* communities, based on descent from pre- versus post-1945 Han immigrants to Taiwan.

⁶ For 3 of the 10 interviewees, responses to the online survey questions were obtained verbally, in the same session as the responses to the follow-up interview questions, then manually recorded by the author.

⁷ The age groups are the same as those employed by the U.S. Census Bureau (United States Census Bureau 2023).

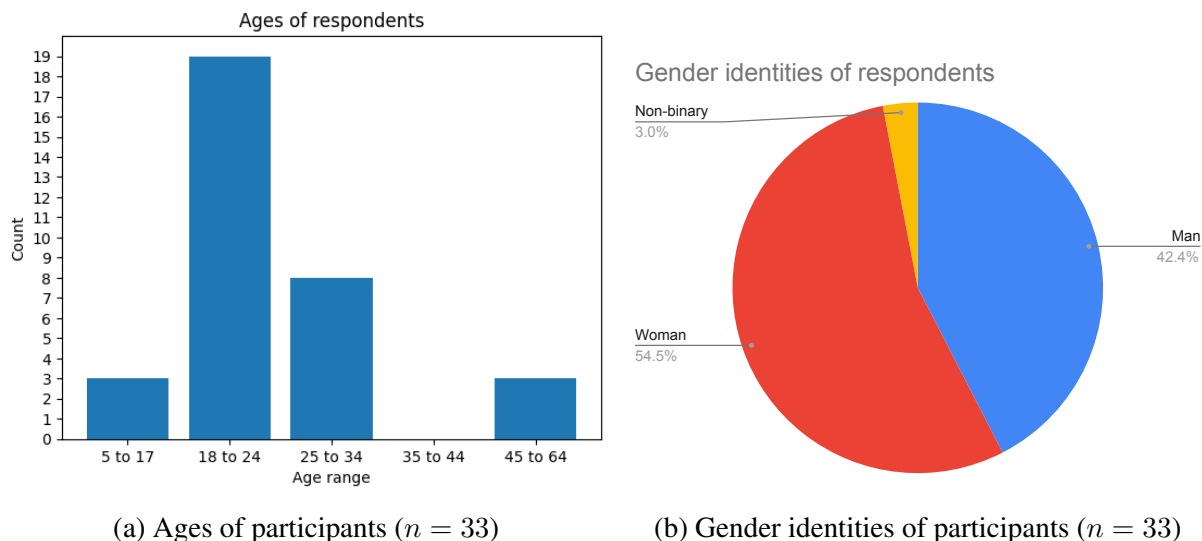


Figure 1. Ages and gender identities of participants

Chinese as a native language, and 54.5% reported both as native languages. The third most commonly spoken language after English and Mandarin Chinese was Taiwanese Southern Min, with 42.4% of participants reporting that they spoke this language, but only 6.1% of participants identifying as native speakers. The participants included 1 native speaker of Hakka and no speakers of indigenous Austronesian languages, paralleling the linguistic situation in Taiwan, where Hakka and Austronesian languages are also less widely spoken than Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Southern Min (Chen 2010:94). Interviews revealed greater linguistic diversity at the level of participants' families, but this linguistic diversity usually decreased such that family members mainly spoke English within three generations of the first, immigrant generation, as exemplified by the linguistic profile of one interviewee given in Table 1, modeled after Wiley (Wiley 2017:97).

4.3. SPECTRUM OF TRANSNATIONAL LIVES. Table 2 lists selected examples from the spectrum of participants' transnational lives.⁸ Some American-born participants had not had the opportunity to visit Taiwan. Some participants were born in the United States but had spent most of their lives in Taiwan. Others were born in Taiwan but spent most of their lives in the United States. Many participants living in the United States visited Taiwan every summer with their families growing up, resulting in what one participant described as a "cyclic" pattern in their Mandarin proficiency: "I would get way better over the summer when I was [in Taiwan] and then I would get worse again over the year and then I would go back to Taiwan and get better again, and then forget it all again." The diversity of transnational experiences among participants demonstrates that the social contexts of both Taiwan and the United States must be considered as factors affecting Taiwanese Americans' language use.

⁸ Schiller et al. defined transnationalism as "processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement," but for many participants in this study, "immigrants" could be amended to "immigrants and their descendants," "country of origin" to "country of their parents' or grandparents' origin," and "country of settlement" to "country of birth" (Schiller et al. 1992:1).

⁹ This term is derived from Schiller et al.'s idea of a "transmigrant," referring to immigrants who engage in transnationalism (Schiller et al. 1992:1).

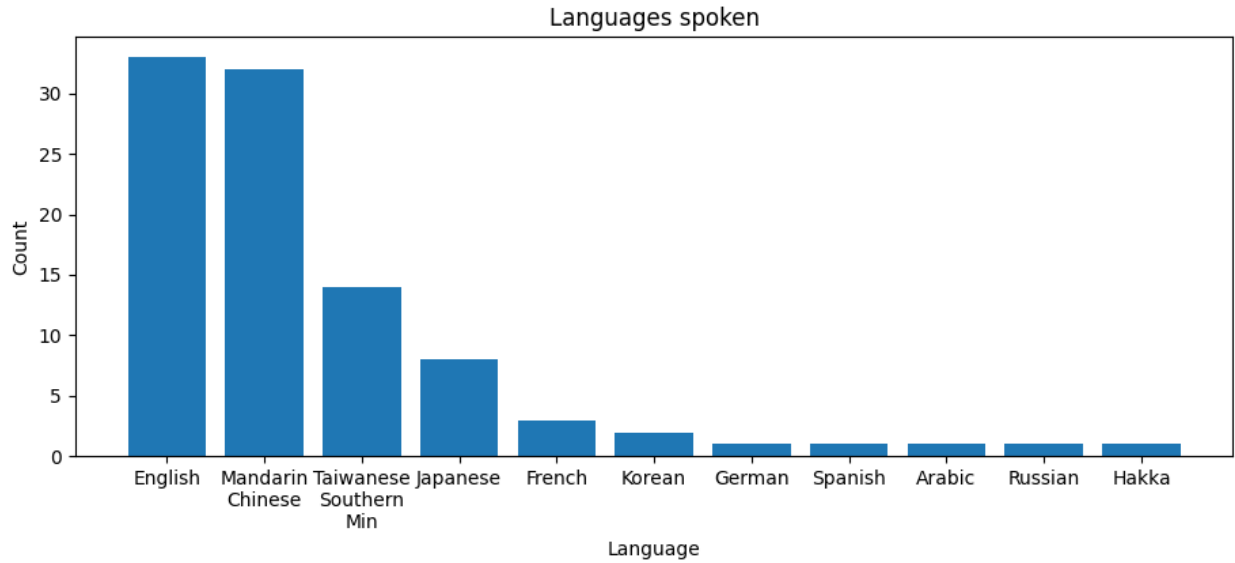


Figure 2. Languages spoken by participants ($n = 33$)

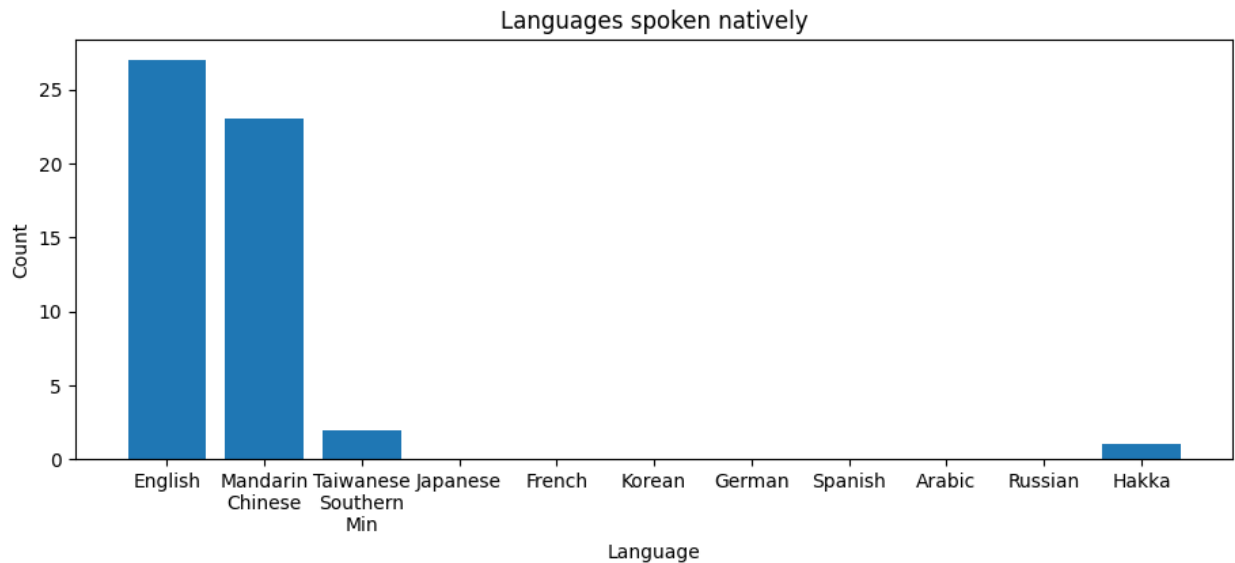


Figure 3. Native languages of participants ($n = 32$). One of the 33 participants did not respond to this question.

4.4. EXPERIENCES WITH TAIWANESE LANGUAGE POLICY AND EFFECTS ON LANGUAGE USE. Participants who attended public school in Taiwan experienced radically different language policies based on their age. At least two participants were old enough to experience the government's Mandarin-only language policy, which lasted from the 1940s until democratization in the 1980s (Chen 2010:85–86). Both recalled being punished for speaking their native languages (Hakka and Taiwanese Southern Min) in school, including being forced to wear signs and banners with slogans such as “I won’t use dialect,” “Dialect is a dirty language,” and “I did not speak

Relative	Languages Spoken
Mother (second-generation Taiwanese American)	English (native language), Mandarin Chinese (heritage language, native-like fluency), Hakka (listening ability)
Father (second- or third-generation Italian American)	English (native language), Mandarin Chinese (second language, limited proficiency)
Younger brother (third-generation Taiwanese American)	English (native language), Mandarin Chinese (heritage language, limited proficiency from weekend classes)
Sister (third-generation Taiwanese American)	English (native language), Mandarin Chinese (heritage language, intermediate proficiency from summer program in Taiwan)
Maternal grandmother (first-generation Taiwanese American)	Hakka (native language), Mandarin Chinese (fluent, unknown if native), English (second language, fluent)
Maternal grandfather (first-generation Taiwanese American)	Taiwanese Southern Min (native language), Mandarin Chinese (second language, fluent), English (second language, fluent)

Table 1. Linguistic profile for family of 23-year-old American-born Taiwanese American man. **Relationships** and **native languages** are shown in **bold**.

Gender	Age	Birthplace	Transmigration ⁹ History
Man	57	Taiwan	Grew up in Taiwan, moved to the United States at age 26 but still visits Taiwan occasionally
Woman	23	United States	Grew up in the United States, has never visited Taiwan
Man	21	United States	Moved to Taiwan shortly after birth and lived there for 9 years, then moved back to United States; visits roughly annually
Non-binary	16	United States	Lived in United States for first year of life, has spent rest of life in Taiwan

Table 2. Transnational lives of Taiwanese Americans

Mandarin.”¹⁰ While school regulations reduced both participants’ use of their native languages as children, both participants also felt that first-generation Taiwanese Americans like them were more likely to speak their native languages with other speakers in the United States than they had been in Taiwan, since they were now free from language-related stigma and restrictive language policy. Second- and third-generation Taiwanese Americans are indirectly affected by the experiences of first-generation parents and grandparents in the public school system, which actively limited their proficiency in and ability to intergenerationally transmit native languages.

In contrast to older participants’ experiences of suppression of languages other than Mandarin through the public school system, a younger participant recalled attending mandatory weekly Taiwanese Southern Min language classes. Such classes were implemented by the Mother Tongue Language Policy, which seeks to revitalize Taiwan’s local languages, beginning in 2001 (Chen

¹⁰ These slogans refer to Hakka and Taiwanese Southern Min as “dialects” as a means of stigmatizing and disempowering these language varieties, but I use the term “language” or “language variety” as these more neutral terms accurately reflect how Hakka/Taiwanese Southern Min are referred to in scholarly literature.

2010:87–89). However, this participant stated that these weekly classes seemed to benefit students who were already heritage speakers of Taiwanese Southern Min the most, whereas she herself had no familial connection to the language and did not feel that she gained much proficiency in the language long-term through the classes.

4.5. SPOKEN AND WRITTEN TAIWANESE MANDARIN AS A MARKER OF IDENTITY. With China promoting the use of simplified Chinese characters and Taiwan promoting the use of traditional Chinese characters to write Mandarin Chinese, one's choice of writing systems can be viewed as a marker of national identity (Zhao & Baldauf 2011). Many interviewees (or their parents) prioritized learning traditional Chinese characters, through private tutoring or language classes on the weekend or after school. Some interviewees attended Chinese language schools run by and for Taiwanese families, such as the Ann Arbor Chinese School, through which they gained more exposure to the spoken form of Taiwanese Mandarin, in addition to learning to write in traditional characters (Ann Arbor Chinese School 2023; Taiwan Center for Mandarin Learning in Ann Arbor, Michigan 2022).

Some viewed the ability to speak and write Taiwanese Mandarin as pridesworthy and felt a sense of “protectiveness” over the writing system in particular. One interviewee noted that he “take[s] pride in” the fact that his spoken Mandarin is “not very obviously like a foreigner’s and not also sort of like mainland Chinese speakers” in its phonology. Another compared forgetting how to read traditional Chinese characters to “losing a language” and stated that they would prefer to “learn traditional [Chinese characters] on [their] own” over taking college-level Chinese classes that taught only simplified characters.

Other interviewees did not view Taiwanese Mandarin as inherently more worthy of being passed down in the community compared to other varieties of Mandarin. Referring to spoken Taiwanese Mandarin, one interviewee said, “不是標準,”¹¹ and expressed that “it was good for [her] to be able to not have too strong of an accent” by attending a non-Taiwanese Chinese language school, in addition to the Taiwanese-run Chinese language school she attended. Referring to Taiwanese Mandarin as “non-standard” and having “an accent” reflects a view of the Beijing variety of Mandarin as the standardized and “correct” form of the language.

4.6. LEARNING HERITAGE LANGUAGES OTHER THAN MANDARIN. Participants expressed varying degrees of interest in learning heritage languages¹² other than Mandarin. Some participants felt that “learning [Mandarin] Chinese is enough” for them to stay connected with their culture and families. Multiple participants felt little incentive to learn heritage languages other than Mandarin because they would be of limited practical or professional use. Other participants expressed strong interest in learning their heritage languages, but faced significant challenges in finding language learning resources.

For younger participants with Hakka heritage, interest in learning and identification with the Hakka language seemed weak due simply to sheer lack of familiarity with the language. While multiple participants had a parent or grandparent who spoke Hakka, since these parents or grandparents married speakers of other languages, the couples’ common languages (Mandarin and English) were transmitted to their children instead of Hakka (see Table 1 for an example). One par-

¹¹ It’s not standard.

¹² In this specific context, by “heritage languages” I mean languages which are used in the participants’ self-identified ethnic groups, families, or communities (and thus claimed as part of their cultural heritage), regardless of whether these participants possess proficiency in these languages (Wiley 2017:92).

participant with Hakka heritage said, “Even if you’re in much more Hakka-centric areas [in Taiwan] like Meinong or Miaoli, I think usually Mandarin is the default language,” so there was little incentive for him to learn Hakka. Another participant whose mother is Hakka stated that he “barely think[s] about Hakka, because it has such a small presence” in his life. In contrast, this participant’s mother, a first-generation Hakka-speaking Taiwanese American, viewed her language as “fundamental” to her identity. However, due to growing up under Mandarin-only language policy in Taiwan, this participant never had the opportunity to formally study Hakka, and even described the experience of watching an older relative write in Hakka as “shock[ing],” because of government efforts to “[not] even let [people] know [they] actually can write [their languages] down.” Thus it seems that the decline in the vitality of the Hakka language in Taiwan has carried over to the Taiwanese American community (Chen 2010:93–95).

Multiple participants described interest in and efforts to learn Taiwanese Southern Min. Some made use of online resources such as Taiwanese language-learning apps, radio, and YouTube videos. A few had access to formal coursework, such as Berkeley’s Taiwanese Language course, previously offered as a student-run course through Berkeley’s DeCal Program (Democratic Education at Cal 2018). According to a participant who took the Berkeley Taiwanese Language DeCal course, many of the student course facilitators were members of Berkeley’s Taiwanese Student Association, whose membership was largely composed of Taiwanese international students. However, another participant who attended Berkeley but did not have the opportunity to take the course recalled that students from the school’s Taiwanese American Student Association may also have been involved in the course’s leadership. (See §4.7 for more on the distinction between TSA and TASA.) Students learned Taiwanese phonology, vocabulary, and grammar. Instruction included romanized writing, phonics, and written examinations. The participant recalled sufficient student demand for the course to be offered in multiple sections and levels. The DeCal website lists two 30-seat beginner sections as full for the Fall 2018 semester, with a third 30-seat intermediate-level section still open for enrollment (Democratic Education at Cal 2018). However, Fall 2018 is the last semester in which Taiwanese Language is listed in the DeCal course catalog,¹³ and another study participant expressed disappointment that by the time they matriculated at Berkeley, the course was no longer offered. This participant also suggested that the administrative challenges of running a DeCal course (which they themselves had experienced) could have been one of the reasons the course was discontinued. The Berkeley Taiwanese Language DeCal serves as case study of the challenges faced by heritage language learners in the Taiwanese American community. Since Taiwanese language courses (much less courses for Hakka or other heritage languages) are usually unavailable through higher education institutions,¹⁴ community members must take it upon themselves to create and maintain spaces for language learning. However, given the competing obligations of work and study for organizers and learners, the longevity of classes launched through such grassroots efforts is precarious.

4.7. ROLE OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS. None of the predominantly young, second-generation Taiwanese Americans interviewed were involved in the types of large regional or national ethnic organizations (e.g. TACL) which Wang and Zhou identify as “form[ing] the institutional basis of the Taiwanese American community” (Wang & Zhou 2021:8). Second-generation individu-

¹³ The DeCal catalog does not list courses for terms before Fall 2018.

¹⁴ Stanford University, which offers conversational Taiwanese courses, is a notable exception (Stanford University 2024).

als' lesser involvement in Taiwanese ethnic organizations reflects their integration into American society and consequent lack of reliance on such organizations for mutual aid and community, contrasting with first-generation immigrants. Beyond Chinese language schools, which interviewees were generally only involved in during their pre-college years, the other significant community organizations in interviewees' lives were limited to their campus Taiwanese American Student Association (TASA) or Taiwanese Student Association (TSA). Based on the interviewees' (and the author's) experiences, TASA (as the name implies) is usually home to more second-generation Taiwanese Americans. Taiwanese Student Associations, on the other hand, tend to include more international students who have immigrated from Taiwan to the United States for college. The social networks of these two groups of Taiwanese Americans are by no means completely compartmentalized. Nonetheless, the existence of both student groups on the same college campuses reflects the differing needs and experiences of first-generation and second-generation Taiwanese Americans. These two groups also foster distinct linguistic environments. In one interviewee's experience, TSA members tended to use much more Mandarin Chinese among themselves, a choice probably made out of preference rather than necessity, since many such students have attended private international schools which provided English-language instruction, and are thus also fluent in English.¹⁵ In contrast, TASA members at the interviewee's school would use much more English in their interactions. As discussed in §4.6, TSA members (and potentially TASA members as well) brought Taiwanese language classes to Berkeley, demonstrating that in addition to creating spaces for Taiwanese Americans to use Mandarin in their daily lives, TSA and TASA may also promote use of heritage languages other than Mandarin.

4.8. VIEWS ON CODE-SWITCHING. Multiple interviewees reported that they engaged in code-switching, the use of multiple languages or language varieties within a single discourse. The prevalence of code-switching is expected, as 97.0% of participants reported speaking multiple languages (see §4.2), and code-switching is common among multilinguals (Myers-Scotton 2017:217). Interviewees reported code-switching between English and Mandarin Chinese, Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Southern Min, and Sixian Hakka and Hoifong Hakka. Some expressed a neutral or positive attitude toward code-switching, viewing it as a natural expression of the range of their linguistic repertoire. In this vein, one interviewee expressed their admiration of "how older people [in Taiwan] who know Japanese and Chinese and Taiwanese and Hakka switch between all of them." Multiple English-Mandarin bilinguals recounted using code-switching as a means of preserving their privacy in both English-speaking and Mandarin-speaking spaces, by switching to Mandarin or English, respectively. However, one interviewee recounted feeling "othered" in their after-school Chinese language program because of an instance where they unconsciously code-switched between Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Southern Min: "I remember feeling a little out of place there and being very confused as to why nobody knew what I was saying." This interviewee's experience of othering in Chinese language classes parallels the experiences documented in a prior case study of a Taiwanese American heritage language learner (Wiley 2017:100).

4.9. EXPERIENCES WITH ANTI-ASIAN STEREOTYPING AND RACISM. Multiple interviewees experienced anti-Asian stereotyping or racism that was either directed at their language use or

¹⁵ According to one participant who attended both schools, the two main English-language international schools in Taiwan are Taipei American School and Morrison Academy (Taipei American School 2024; Morrison Academy 2024).

affected their language use. One interviewee was told by a difficult customer at their workplace that they “sounded like [they were] speaking Chinese,” despite English being this interviewee’s native language and undergraduate major. A second interviewee said, “There was just a lot of stereotyping that I dealt with growing up and that did push me away from like speaking [Mandarin] and it kind of contributed to why I exclusively started using English unless I was communicating with my grandma.” While relatively uncommon among interviewees, such experiences discourage Taiwanese Americans from using languages other than English in public.

4.10. VIEWS ON THE LONG-TERM VITALITY OF LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH. Most interviewees viewed languages other than English as unlikely to survive multiple generations into the future in the Taiwanese American community. While transmission of Mandarin Chinese is relatively strong from first-generation to second-generation Taiwanese-Americans, interviewees perceived transmission of Taiwanese Southern Min as weaker, with one person commenting, “I literally don’t know anyone who is second-gen[eration] [American] and fluent in Taiwanese.” This perception is supported by participants’ self-identification of their native languages, with only 6.1% of participants identifying as native speakers of Taiwanese (§4.2). As an English-Mandarin bilingual interviewee born and raised in the U.S. recounted, his mother “compared her Taiwanese level to [his] Mandarin level.” This quote encapsulates the experience of many first-generation Taiwanese Americans, for whom Taiwanese is already their heritage (rather than native) language, meaning there are gaps in their linguistic repertoire which present challenges to passing on the language.

Despite this bleak outlook, one interviewee drew hope from the visibility brought to Taiwanese Southern Min by high-profile Taiwanese Americans speaking the language in public, such as Tiffany Chang (Miss Asia USA) and Jensen Huang (president of the tech company Nvidia) (FTV News 2023; 台視新聞 TTV NEWS 2023). Another interviewee viewed Mandarin Chinese as unlikely to “die out” in the United States because “people always immigrate,” bringing their languages with them. The same interviewee also said, “Language and the culture are kind of tied together. It’s very hard to maintain one but not the other. And I do think that maintaining the culture is important,” a view shared by many participants, who expressed a desire to pass on their native and heritage languages other than English to future generations, including through enlisting the assistance of their more fluent parents.

5. Conclusions and future work. This study worked toward a sociolinguistic profile of Taiwanese Americans by surveying 33 Taiwanese Americans and conducting follow-up interviews with 10 respondents. The survey and interviews revealed that Taiwanese Americans are highly multilingual, live transnationally, are directly and indirectly impacted by language policy in Taiwan, view Taiwanese Mandarin as a marker of identity, have varying levels of interest in and access to resources for learning heritage languages other than Mandarin, create spaces for language learning and maintenance through student organizations, view code-switching non-negatively, experience challenges to freely using their languages from anti-Asian racism, and hope to pass on their heritage languages despite consciousness of a widespread shift to English. As this study predominantly reflects the experiences of heritage speakers of Mandarin (and to a lesser extent, Taiwanese) who were not highly involved in community organizations, future work should exam-

ine the role of indigenous Taiwanese American speakers of Austronesian languages,¹⁶ churches,¹⁷ and Taiwanese language and culture schools which teach languages other than Mandarin¹⁸ in shaping community language use.

6. Appendix.

6.1. SURVEY QUESTIONS.

1. *Which languages do you speak? Select all that apply:* The response options provided were English, Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese Southern Min, Hakka, Amis, Atayal, Bunun, Pailwan, Truku, Puyuma, Rukai, Saisiyat, Tsou, Yami, Japanese, and Other.¹⁹ Participants who selected “Other” were given the option to enter the names of other languages spoken as a free-text response.
2. *Which of the above languages do you consider to be your native languages? Select all that apply:* The same response options were provided for this question as for question 1.
3. *How old are you?:* This question only accepted numeric responses in years.
4. *What is your gender identity?:* The response options provided were Woman, Man, Transgender, Non-binary, and Other. Participants could select multiple options as needed and provide more details as a free-text response if they selected “Other.”
5. *Where were you born?:* To respect participants’ privacy, this question accepted free-text responses, allowing participants to decide how specific they wished to be in answering this question.
6. *How long have you lived in the US?:* This question accepted free-text responses.
7. *If you would like to share any other details about yourself and/or your languages, please do so below.*
8. *If you are interested in being contacted for a follow-up interview, please leave your contact info for your preferred method of communication (name, email, phone, etc.) below.*

¹⁶ Baitz Niahosa, who speaks the indigenous Tsou language, has advocated for the revitalization of her language and collaborated with the New York City-based Endangered Language Alliance, bringing visibility to her language in the United States (Endangered Language Alliance 2016; Niahosa 2019).

¹⁷ For example, the Reformed Church of Newtown in Elmhurst, New York offers in-person and livestreamed services in Taiwanese, Mandarin Chinese, and English (The Reformed Church of Newtown 2024).

¹⁸ The Houston Taiwanese School of Languages and Culture, Taiwan Center of Greater Los Angeles, Taiwanese American Foundation of San Diego, Taiwan School of the Taiwanese American Center of Northern California, and Washington DC Taiwanese School all offer Taiwanese Southern Min language classes and clubs (The Houston Taiwanese School of Languages and Culture 2024; Taiwan Center: Greater Los Angeles 2024; Taiwanese American Foundation of San Diego 2024; Taiwanese American Center of Northern California 2024; Washington DC Taiwanese School 2024).

¹⁹ The Formosan languages listed are those which Adelaar describes as “not under immediate threat of extinction,” though all of these languages certainly face substantial challenges to their vitality (Adelaar 2012:7).

6.2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS. These interview questions are based on the “Basic Sociolinguistic Interviewers Guide” distributed in Columbia University’s Fall 2023 Endangered Languages course (Perlin 2023).

1. Location

- (a) Where do you currently attend school or work?

2. Family

- (a) Do you have any children? If so, how old are they?
- (b) Which language do you use the most with your family? With your parents/grandparents/siblings/partner/spouse?
- (c) Do you ever speak your native language(s) with your family?
- (d) Does your spouse/partner speak with your children in their native language(s)?
- (e) Which language are your children most fluent in? Do they understand/speak any of your native languages? Do they express any desire to learn them?
- (f) If you ever start a family of your own, would you want your family members to speak your native language(s)? Which ones and why?

3. Language Resources

- (a) Do you attend languages classes in your native/heritage language(s)? If so, when/where? Who else attends these classes?
- (b) Do you read/write in your native language(s)? If so, when/where?
- (c) Since moving to the U.S., have you stopped speaking your native language, or do you speak it less than you did before you moved to the U.S.? Why or why not?

4. Transnational Connections

- (a) Have you ever visited Taiwan? If so, how long ago was your last visit?

5. Community Organizations

- (a) Where do you normally interact with the Taiwanese American community in your hometown?
- (b) Do you attend any community celebrations?
- (c) Does your community have any formal or informal organizations or leaders?
- (d) Has your group ever organized to work on a project together for the community?
- (e) Are there any major religious divisions in your community?
- (f) Do you attend religious services? If so, where?

6. Language Ideology/Language Attitudes

- (a) Is speaking your native language a strong part of your identity?

- (b) Do you think it is important for your children to learn the language(s)? Why?
- (c) Do you think there are ideas or feelings that can be expressed better in your native language?

7. Language Vitality and Social Stigma

- (a) Where do you use your native language(s) (at home, at work, on the telephone, on the street)?
- (b) How comfortable do you feel using your native languages in public?
- (c) Do you think your language is endangered?
- (d) Has anyone ever commented positively or negatively about you speaking your native language? If so, how did their comments make you feel?
- (e) Have you ever felt that you were treated differently for speaking your native language(s)?

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