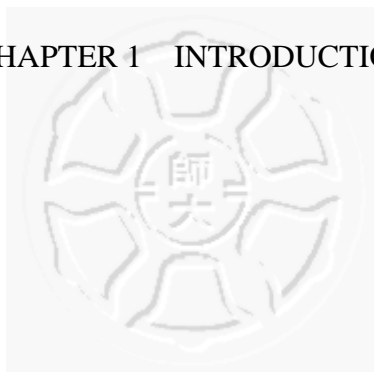


CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



Mandarin has been promoted in Taiwan for nearly six decades. Originally, it was roughly linked to the identity of Mainlander Chinese. Such a link was initially politically triggered, since ethnic grouping in Taiwan, regardless of its legitimacy and the controversy, was originally a political issue. In Taiwan, linguistic performance had been assumed as one of the salient dimensions to discern one's ethnic identity. There was thus a stereotype that "Mainlanders employed Mandarin as their daily language¹ and spoke more 'standard' Mandarin". Though not completely reflecting the situation in Taiwan, this stereotype indeed reflected the general situations in the early days. Thus, one can occasionally hear older generation of Taiwanese² proudly describe their experiences of "being complimented" on their Mandarin that made them "sound like Mainlander" as "Mainlander Mandarin" roughly equaled "Standard Mandarin", which was strongly promoted in the society of Taiwan.

¹ This is merely a politically triggered general impression that does not completely reflect the linguistic truth. In fact, many of the first generation Mainlanders speak the languages of their hometown, instead of Standard Mandarin. However, although not Standard Mandarin, many of these languages belong to different varieties of Mandarin (e.g. Northern Mandarin, Low Yangzi Mandarin.) In other words, compared to local languages in Taiwan, most of these first generation Mainlanders' languages are genetically closer to Standard Mandarin in terms of mutual intelligibility.

² "Taiwanese" here, following the loose definition in the society of Taiwan, refers to the Southern Min population in Taiwan. Most strict definitions and terminology for the present study is discussed in the following chapter.

Such an alignment of Mandarin to Mainlanders has been increasingly blurred in the course of long term and increasing contacts between Mainlanders and local Taiwan people at various levels, including language contacts. To distinguish one's ethnicity by means of his/her Mandarin accent has become increasingly difficult. In other words, Mandarin in Taiwan has, to a considerable extent, been leveled.

Previous studies, though not adopting the term “leveling”, have described the narrowing of the Mandarin gap in Taiwan (e.g. Chang 1998; Tseng 2003). However, it appears that no systematic studies have been conducted on this gap narrowing. The current study thus aims to explore this gap narrowing. It intends to answer two research questions: (1) “ Has Mandarin been leveled in Taiwan? ”; (2) “ If Mandarin has been leveled in Taiwan, how has it been leveled? ”. Sociolinguistic perspectives are applied to the investigation of leveling; phonological features of Taiwan Mandarin and their interactions with three sociolinguistic factors – age, gender, and ethnicity, are studied.

This dissertation includes seven chapters, including this introduction chapter. Chapter 2 defines the key terminology in this study. Many of the terms referring to the varieties of Mandarin spoken in Taiwan and China, such as “Taiwanese Mandarin”, “Taiwan Mandarin”, “Guoyu”, and “Putonghua”, were not defined and distinguished in an explicit manner in previous studies; ambiguity and confusion may thus occur.

These terms are clearly defined and elaborated in chapter 2. In addition, two ethnic groups that play central roles in the current study, *Waishengren* and *Benshengren*, are defined and elaborated in chapter 2 as well. Chapter 3 reviews previous studies of dialect leveling, including two cases of dialect leveling -- one in New Zealand, a new settlement, the other in Milton Keynes, a British new town. Previous studies of the varieties of Mandarin in Taiwan, particularly at phonological level, are reviewed as well. Chapter 4 presents the methodology of this study, including the examined variables, stimuli design, informant background, and the criteria of data judgment. Chapter 5 reports the results of statistical analyses on the variables presented in chapter 4 and the variables that subcategorize the informants, such as gender, age, and ethnicity. Chapter 6 discusses from various aspects the findings of the current study, including the leveling of Taiwan Mandarin, neutral tone as a fifth tone in Taiwan Mandarin, and the koineization of Taiwan Mandarin. Chapter 7 presents the conclusion of this study.