

## **Sociolinguistic variation in Taiwan Mandarin: deretroflexion and labial glide deletion among Taipei County high school students**

This paper examines two variables found in Taiwan Mandarin (TM): deretroflexion where Standard Mandarin (SM) [ʂ] → TM [s] and labial glide deletion where SM [wɔ] → TM [ɔ]. The data comes from 18 sociolinguistic interviews with students at a Taipei County high school, conducted in 2003-2004. Results show that the TM features are used more frequently by boys, by students in vocational programs, and by those who do not plan to attend college. Significantly, glide deletion is used much less frequently than deretroflexion, and it correlates much more strongly with students preparing for blue-collar occupations. In this paper, I discuss these results to show how TM features are connected to locally relevant social meanings, and how they fit along the continuum that exists between SM on one hand, and the most stigmatized form of TM on the other.

TM is an important Chinese variety partly because of the controversial political status of Taiwan with respect to China: as a localized form of Mandarin, TM represents Taiwanese identity in contrast with the Mainland. Locally, TM is linked with ethnic Taiwanese but also with lower-class speakers. Yet, there is limited work on TM available to date. Early studies by local researchers describe TM features as the Taiwanese “foreign accent” (Lin 1983, Li 1986, Lin 1987). This approach was in keeping with nationalist ideologies of the Kuomintang (KMT) regime, which saw Taiwan as part of China: locals were expected to learn the national language, Mandarin; successful acquisition of the prescriptive ‘standard’ was promoted as the optimal goal. Simultaneously, however, researchers working outside of Taiwan argued that TM is the product of interference from Taiwanese mixed with features of Southern Mandarin varieties spoken by refugees who fled the Mainland in the late 1940s (Cheng 1979, Kuo 2005), and that it is a distinct local variety with native monolingual speakers (Cheng 1984, Kubler 1986, Li 1995). Both Cheng and Kubler provide examples of TM phonological, syntactic and lexical features, but their work is descriptive and their data largely anecdotal, while variationist analyses of TM such as Li (1995) and Rau and Li (1994) are limited to deretroflexion and do not draw larger theoretical implications from the observed correlations. Su (2005) makes the crucial point that Mandarin spoken on Taiwan forms a continuum ranging from the most mainstream to the most stigmatized, but her work does not involve quantitative analysis.

By contrast, this paper compares the sociolinguistic distribution of two TM features. I argue that both SM and TM are imagined linguistic forms: the former is the prescriptive ideal whose actual use in its “pure” form is rare, and the latter is the stereotype of the speech of workers, farmers, the elderly, and those with limited education (Su 2005, cf. Feifel 1994). The sociolinguistic reality is a continuum between these two: TM features index a range of social meanings and are used to varying extent depending on the speakers’ geographic and social background and the identities they are negotiating. Of the two features analyzed in this paper, deretroflexion is more acceptable to mainstream speakers, while consistent retroflexion may be considered affected or indexical of Beijing speech (Chung 2006). Glide deletion is more stigmatized as can be observed from the way it appears in popular jokes and imitations of a “strong” TM accent associated with working-class, rural or uneducated speakers. I argue that the different social

meanings and values connected with the two features account for their significantly different distribution among the participants in my study, with the more stigmatized feature correlating more strongly with students in vocational programs. My analysis offers new insight into the social functions of TM, and invites further systematic investigation of its grammatical and sociolinguistic structure.

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**TAIWAN** is an island off the coast of China. Its earliest inhabitants were Austronesian-speaking aboriginal people. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, migrants from China's Fujian Province (directly across the Taiwan Strait) began settling on Taiwan. It is their Southern Min variety of Chinese that has evolved into present-day Taiwanese (also known as Tai-yu, Tai-gi, or Holo). The other Chinese variety historically spoken on Taiwan is Hakka. After 1945, Mandarin was introduced in Taiwan after the island passed back under the Republic of China's (ROC) control, following 50 years of Japanese colonial rule. In 1949, Chiang Kai-Shek and his Kuomintang (KMT) government retreated to Taiwan after losing the war with the Communists. Mandarin became the official language and the language of education. It came to be associated with the Mainlanders who arrived in Taiwan with the KMT. The combined influence of the different Mandarin dialects spoken by these refugees and of Taiwanese has led to the development of present-day Taiwan Mandarin. According to a 1993 study by Shuanfan Huang, the population of Taiwan is 73.3% Taiwanese, 12% Hakka, 1.7% aboriginal, and 13% Mainlander. Most of the Mainlanders are concentrated in urban areas such as Taipei City. The investigation presented at this meeting of NWAV-Asia-Pacific took place in Taipei County, in a highly urbanized and industrialized, mainly working-class area adjacent to Taipei City.