

A Macro and Micro Contexts, Forces and Challenges for Indigenous Language Education at Elementary Schools in Taiwan

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Abstract

In Taiwan, many indigenous languages are endangered. The major contexts and forces behind this state of affairs are previous assimilation policy, the impact of English as a global language, the colonized, marginal and low socio-economic status of most indigenous populations, societal and parental attitudes toward indigenous people and languages, the shortage of qualified teachers, the lack of resources, and the lack of consultation with indigenous peoples themselves. This article first outlines the global and local contexts and forces of indigenous language education in Taiwan, Republic of China. The focus is on elementary schools due to the reason that the indigenous language teaching has mainly been delivered at primary education level. It then presents a reflective analysis of indigenous language education, based on literature review, document analysis, observations of indigenous language teaching in some elementary schools in Bunun and Seediq tribes, and interviews of indigenous language teachers. Finally, it proposes some possible strategies to improve indigenous language education.

Keywords: indigenous language education, globalization, Bunun, Seediq, Taiwan

1 Introduction

In Taiwan, many indigenous languages are endangered and some of them are dying (Huang, 1995 as cited in Chang, 2001). Although the Taiwan government and indigenous peoples have worked hard to preserve indigenous languages, the achievement seems limited, and much remains to be done. To understand the teaching of indigenous language and the challenges that indigenous language education practice faces, the author regularly observed indigenous language teaching in a Bunun (one of the indigenous peoples of Taiwan) elementary school for four months (two hours every two weeks) in 2005, irregularly observed other Bunun and Seediq elementary schools in 2006, 2008 and 2012, and also interviewed five indigenous language teachers and one non-indigenous-language teachers.

The first part of this paper gives some background information about Taiwan, and analyzes the macro and micro contexts and forces in which indigenous language teaching in Taiwan is embedded. Secondly, the author explores the challenges of indigenous language teaching as they emerged in the cases studied and literature. Finally, the author proposes some possible ways of improving indigenous language teaching.

2 Background Information about Taiwan

Ethnically, the peoples of Taiwan consist of two main groups: An indigenous minority of Austronesian origin, who were originally the only inhabitants of Taiwan (G.I.O., 2007a), and a Han majority whose ancestors came from China (G.I.O., 2007d). Some scholars divided them into four primary groups according to the languages: Mandarin language, indigenous languages, Haka, and Southern Minnanese (Chao, 2005 as cited in Sung & Hsiung, 2010, p. 1). In 2011 there are approximately 520,000 indigenous people, making up about 2 percent of the total population of 25 million. There are 14 major and officially recognized indigenous peoples in Taiwan: Amis, Atayal, Bunun, Kavalan, Paiwan, Pinuyumayan, Rukai, Saisiyat, Sakizaya, Thao, Truku, Tsou, Yami (also known as the Tao) and Seediq (C.I.P., 2013). Many indigenous people live on mountainous reservations. Others live in metropolitan centres far from their home towns, cultures and languages. Each indigenous people have their own language, and tribes within each language group may have different dialects. The indigenous peoples didn't have writing systems until the Dutch Era (1624-1662 A.D.) and therefore, indigenous peoples continued to pass on their socio-cultural knowledge and traditions by oral means (Pawan, 2004).

In Taiwan, for historical and political reason, Mandarin is the current official language, while Holo Taiwanese (also known as Taiwanese or southern Minnanese) is spoken widely. Austronesian languages are spoken by indigenous peoples, but are slowly disappearing because of cultural assimilation.

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The population of Bunun, the indigenous people on whom this paper focuses, is around 52,824 in 2011. Because they live among Taiwan's highest mountains, the Bunun have been called the "real mountain people." Their practices of shifting cultivation and hunting have led to a complex system of beliefs, rituals, and taboos. Characteristic cultural features include a patriarchal system, skills at making clothing from animal hides, and ancestor worship (C.I.P., 2013; G.I.O., 2007a; Huang, 1992). The Bunun are particularly noted for their "pasibutbut," the polyharmonic choral singing of prayers for good harvests.

The population of Sediq, another focus of this paper, is about 10,000. They live in the central and eastern parts of Taiwan. They share unique customs and traditional rituals. The most unique trait is its equal right, i.e. the most intelligent and capable persons are the leaders regardless of gender and social status. The viewpoint of adoring Utux, the spirits of ancestors, has extended to conscientious living rules called gaya/waya and has developed different culture, for example, tattoo, hunting, weaving, music, language, songs and dance (C.I.P., 2013).

3 The Context and Forces of Indigenous Language Teaching

Indigenous language teaching in Taiwan has been embedded in a complicated context and impacted by forces which can be described in four macro and micro layers. The first is the economic globalization and English as a global language. The second is the social, economical, political, and cultural plights of indigenous peoples in Taiwan society. The third is the history and current conditions of language policy. The fourth is the school system. Each of these layers is dealt with in turn.

3.1 Economic Globalization and English as a Global Language

In the era of economic globalization and information capitalism, information technology, the knowledge-based economy and marketization are trends of development and progress in many nation-states. Everything that has market value or is seen as the key to knowledge or information technology is valued (Hung, 2009).

As some educationists have pointed out, indigenous languages in Taiwan have been regarded by some indigenous parents, teachers and students as having little market value and have been considered useless from the viewpoint of utilitarianism and pragmatism (e.g. Huang, 2009; Pawan, 2004). By contrast, Mandarin has much more market value, and offers better access to highly-valued fields such as information technology. In other words, Mandarin constitutes more economic, social and cultural

capitals both in Taiwan and in the global world. In this context and force, indigenous languages are becoming less spoken and less transmitted to young generations that they are losing their communication value.

David Crystal (1997) talked about "English as a global language." This concept reflects the importance and widespread use of English; it also possibly accelerates the marginalization, exclusion, or death of minority languages. When a language dies, the associated culture always dies or is dying too (Hung, 2009).

In Taiwan, English used to be a required subject only at the level of secondary education. Since 2001, English has been required at primary education level. School students have to learn three languages, and two of which are not their everyday languages. Many parents, students and schools value English more than indigenous languages because it is more "useful" -- For example, it might help to get higher scores in national examinations and allow entry to better senior high schools or universities; it might also help to obtain better jobs and higher salaries. The Han teachers in our interviews even thought English was regarded more important than others. In addition, all indigenous teachers interviewed mentioned the interference of learning English and indigenous due to the similar phonetic symbols and burden of learning three different languages. Indigenous languages are more marginalized under the impact of English. The majority of schools, even the indigenous schools, there are bilingual environments consisting of Mandarin and English.

3.2 The Plights of Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan

Generally speaking, indigenous peoples in Taiwan have been disadvantaged in many areas, including economics, politics, culture and education. They have higher rate of unemployment, lower salaries, higher rates of single parenting, lower academic achievement, and so on. This disadvantage is mainly due to the long history of assimilation policy and repression strategies, in the course of which their traditional ways of making a living (e.g. hunting) have been prohibited or destroyed, traditional prosperous lands and resources deprived. They were forced to move and the remaining lands have been taken away and established as reservations. Indigenous peoples have been undervalued as barbarians, and their mother languages and ancient knowledge system belittled and forbidden at education system (Hung, 2006; Pawan, 2004).

Most indigenous peoples used to live in mountainous areas and some still do. This is why their languages and cultures have to some extent been preserved. But more and more young indigenous peoples have moved to the cities for jobs, and left their indigenous languages and cultures behind. Their languages and the cultures are also disappearing as a result of the pattern of disadvantage.

After the lifting of martial law in 1987, there was a democratic climate in Taiwan society, and human rights became the major issue. What followed were social movements for the rights of minorities, such as returning lands to indigenous peoples. In the meantime, the localization movement started and aroused the consciousness of local cultural revitalization (Hung, 2009). In 1992, under these appeals, the *Amendment of the Constitution* was enacted and the government was required to “provide assistance and encouragement” for indigenous peoples’ “educational, cultural preservation, social welfare and business undertakings.” A law approved by the Legislature Yuan in 1996 allowed the indigenous groups to restore their traditional tribal names (Tsao, 1997). That same year, the Council of Indigenous Peoples was established under the Executive Yuan to aid indigenous groups in Taiwan. The Education Act for Indigenous Peoples was enacted in 1997 to safeguard the education rights of indigenous peoples and upgrade indigenous education and culture, according to the will of the indigenous peoples themselves. The Indigenous Peoples Basic Act, 2005, stipulates that the government should provide resources to help indigenous peoples develop a system of self-governance, formulate policies to protect their basic rights, and promote the preservation and development of their languages and cultures. An indigenous TV station funded by C.I.P. also started to broadcast in 2005.

3.3 The History and Current Conditions of Language Policy in Taiwan

Taiwan was ceded to Japan in April 1895 under the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Compulsory Japanese education and cultural assimilation were implemented. The colonial government adopted a Japanization (Kominka) policy to acculturate Taiwan’s residents as Japanese citizens. The use and practice of Mandarin and indigenous dialects and customs were discouraged, and Chinese-language schools were closed (G.I.O., 2007b). There are still some Taiwanese and indigenous elders who can speak Japanese, and in both Taiwanese and indigenous languages, there are many words derived from Japanese.

In 1945, following Japan’s defeat and surrender at the end of World War II, the Republic of China assumed control of Taiwan. From 1946 to the lifting of martial law in 1987, the assimilation policy of language was strictly implemented (Huang, 1994 as cited in Huang, 2002). From 1956 to 1987, because KMT (Kuomintang, the National Party) government enacted many laws and regulations to solitarily advocate the status of Mandarin, Mandarin was the sole language permitted in all education settings (Sung & Hsiung, 2010).

In New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Britain and Scandinavia, minority children are reported to have been subjected to physical punishment in school for speaking their home language (Tsao, 1997). This also occurred in Taiwan. Students were punished and denigrated for speaking their mother tongues at school. This could take the form of corporal punishment, or hanging signs around the student’s neck with humiliating words on them, which could be taken off only when the student found somebody else violating the rule.

Both Japanization and Mandarinization meant that not only was the learning of one language, Japanese or Mandarin, emphasized, but other languages and associated cultures were undervalued, stagnated, or even prohibited. Since World War II this internal colonial condition has kept the Han people, its culture and Mandarin in a dominant status on the one hand, and indigenous peoples, their cultures, and languages in a subordinated status on the other.

Nevertheless, following Taiwan’s democratization in the late 1980s, social diversification was accompanied by a growing emphasis on local languages. Public and private efforts have been devoted to teaching students their mother tongues and preserving the languages and dialects of smaller ethnic groups (G.I.O., 2007c). For example, in 1987, a language clash took place in provincial council and made those improper language policies suspicious and challengeable. Wulai junior high and elementary school in Taipei County began its indigenous language instruction experiment in 1990 (Pawan, 2004; Sung & Hsiung, 2010).

Promoting the teaching and use of indigenous tongues has been an important aspect of Taiwan’s educational reform since the 1990s. In 1998, local language and culture education named “place-based curriculum” was organized into formal curriculum guidelines. In 2001, local languages was organized into national language learning area of Grade 1-9 Curriculum and became a required course for elementary students and an elective course for junior high school students. Foreign language education is also being promoted so that Taiwan’s people may better compete in a globalized world (G.I.O., 2007d; Huang, 2009; Sung & Hsiung, 2010). Among foreign languages, English, as an imperialist language and global language, has been regarded as being as important as Mandarin. English was added to the curriculum of fifth- and sixth-year primary school students in 2001, and to the third- and fourth-year in 2005.

In 1995, after investigating 1,000 junior high school students in 25 schools, Jin-Pao Lin found that only 37 percent of indigenous students said that their indigenous languages were spoken most frequently at home. While 68 percent said that they could speak their parents’ language,

only 16 percent claimed fluency (Tsao, 1997). A telephone survey conducted in 1999 by the United Daily Newspaper found that only 9% of indigenous children were fluent in indigenous languages. And several researchers found in 1990s that, among the indigenous peoples of Taiwan, language loss was evident among those who were 50 years of age and younger, and among people of 20 years of age residing in urban areas (Pawan, 2004).

New generations growing up in cities are usually not as fluent in their ancestral languages as they are in Mandarin or Taiwanese. To help preserve indigenous culture and language, the Taiwan government has included the study of indigenous languages in Taiwan's compulsory education system. Since 2001, primary school students have been required to take one native language course. For junior high school students, such language courses remain elective. The government supports such courses with funding at various levels and aspects, e.g. Ministry of Education's funding for hiring indigenous teachers and implementing indigenous education, Council of Indigenous Peoples' funding for conducting an annual accreditation of indigenous language proficiency and related training courses, some city governments' supporting the language nest plans, and so on. Courses in indigenous studies have also been gradually established on university campuses (G.I.O., 2007a; Pawan, 2004).

3.4 Micro Context and Force: The School System

The elementary school regularly observed by the author has 137 students and 12 staff members. The student number of other schools is around 70. Almost 99 percent of the students are Bunun or Sedig. The majority of teachers are Han, including the principal. The schools are located in a mountainous area in Nan-tou County. The nearest town is only a half-hour's drive away, and this relatively short distance exposes the students to the Han culture and lifestyle.

These schools are "indigenous priority schools." According to the Education Act for Indigenous People and its regulations, an "indigenous priority school" is a school with an indigenous student intake exceeding one-third of the total student population. This kind of school can apply for an extra grant for implementing indigenous programs or improving the disadvantaged conditions of its students.

The micro context in a school environment is a reflection of macro power structure in a society/nation-state. Indigenous language teaching in the formal school system is marginalized, if not excluded. One elementary school's director of academic affairs office interviewed by the author, who is a Han, mentioned that "generally we don't think about the importance of indigenous languages since most of teachers at our school are Han. We can't

speak any indigenous language and don't know what to do to promote it."

Although an indigenous language course is now required at primary education level and is an elective course at secondary education level, most indigenous language teachers are part-time teachers. They are not "mainstream" staff in schools and generally do not have the power to voice their opinions. They might have the authority to some degree to decide their curriculum and teaching strategies, perhaps because indigenous language is not a "mainstream" subject in schools both for students and parents; it is not a subject in national exams, and no guidelines and requirements are set up for indigenous languages. Indigenous language teachers have lower levels of support and resources from schools, the government and even the communities than teachers of "mainstream" subjects. Indigenous language is allocated only one period of 40 minutes per week.

4 Challenges for Indigenous Language Teaching

4.1 Subordinated Indigenous Cultures and Undervalued Indigenous Education

In Taiwan society, Han culture is the mainstream and dominant culture, and indigenous cultures are the minority and subordinated ones. After a long period of assimilation policy, the space for indigenous cultures is restricted, and indigenous education undervalued.

In the assimilation period, from 1895 to 1987, indigenous peoples were encouraged to mix with non-indigenous people so that they would "open up" to Han culture. Their assimilation with the rest of the nation was reinforced through the compulsory learning of Japanese and Mandarin.

Fortunately, after the lifting of martial law, many scholars and the public spoke up, calling for the use of indigenous languages in education and indigenous perspectives in teaching materials. Government agencies did respond to these calls (Tsao, 1997). In 1988, the Ministry of Education (M.O.E.) established the Indigenous Education Committee, with the objective of "adapting to modern life and maintaining traditional culture." It also launched programs to promote aborigine culture and funded research on the tribes. In 1993, the five-year program to develop and improve indigenous education was drawn up. In 1998, the second five-year program to develop and improve indigenous education was launched. The program was included in the educational reform movement project, with funds dedicated to the implementation of indigenous education. In 2003, the National Education Development Conference announced the objectives of the program as

“respecting aboriginal identity and developing aboriginal tribal education.” Afterward, Ministry of Education issued the third five-year mid-term individual program to develop and improve indigenous education (2006-2010) in 2005, the fourth five-year mid-term individual program to develop and improve indigenous education (2011-2014) in 2011, and the white book for indigenous education in 2011 (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2011).

However, a great deal remains to be done. Stereotypes for indigenous peoples and cultures still exist. They are thought to be primitive, inferior and underdeveloped. Some research findings point out that indigenous students have low levels of cultural identity, self-identity, understanding of their indigenous cultures and knowledge, and inadequate competence in their indigenous languages.

The subordination of a culture does not mean only that the dominant culture is learned widely and the subordinated culture is assimilated to it but that the subordinated culture and people are denied. Similarly, the subordination of a particular kind of knowledge means the adoption of the dominant education perspective, learning styles and skills, and the evaluation of the subordinated knowledge by the dominant perspective's criteria.

The subordinated status of indigenous language is evident. For example, in some schools, the course is taught at unofficial period such as after school session or lunch time, and the reason for this arrangement is not to interrupt the official courses (Huang, 2009). As the director interviewed suggested, teaching indigenous language at home rather than schools was not to squeeze the time for learning the national language, i.e. Mandarin, and foreign language, i.e. English.

4.2 The Debate over the Indigenous Language Skill Certificate and Its Linkage to National Examinations

According to the indigenous peoples language skill certification procedure, the certification examination procedure is though executed by the respective certification task force organized by each indigenous tribe, there are still some issues about dialects and the writing system (to be more specific, the phonetic system). Some tribal members are disadvantaged because of their dialects. The issues become even more critical when the certificate is related to “preferred admission status” for indigenous peoples.

Indigenous students have had preferential policy toward admission to senior high schools and universities since 1946 (Chen & Ou, 2010). According to the year 2001 edition of regulations regarding preferred admission status for indigenous students and government scholarships for indigenous people to study overseas, indigenous students have preferred admission status. They receive

an additional 25 percent added to their original scores in the senior high school entrance examination and college entrance examination. There are also guaranteed places for indigenous students in senior high schools and universities.

However, in year 2006, the Ministry of Education and Council Of Indigenous Peoples announced changes to the regulations. From the academic year 2007, students who pass the indigenous language test and receive the indigenous peoples language skill certificate will receive an extra 35 percent added to their scores in the national entrance examinations and those who don't will still get an extra 25 percent during the academic years 2007-2009; however, the rate of extra marks will be gradually diminished after that. Furthermore, the latest revised regulation stipulates the extra 35% marks for indigenous students passing the certificate test and only 10% for those who fail.

In March 2007, the first “culture and language test for indigenous students to get preferred admission status” was held by the Council Of Indigenous Peoples. Almost 70 percent of the candidates passed. On the one hand, the policy is valuable for it enhances indigenous students' competence in indigenous language and diminish the doubt whether they will receive the extra marks, although the elder female indigenous teacher interviewed found students only memorized for the test and soon left the language behind. On the other, it may become a burden on indigenous students and reinforce their disadvantage. Indigenous scholar Pawan (2004) also revealed the burdens on both learning and teaching. The burden for students came from learning of three languages and studying for the entrance examinations at the same time. The burden for teachers was that they were held responsible for implementing the instruction of Grade 1-9 Curriculum and many new issues and had to take on extra administrative tasks.

In addition, challenges of different dialects and different writing systems remained though the Ministry of Education had been devoted to establishing a common system since 1992 and developed two systems (Huang, 2009). The reasons for this predicament are that some indigenous peoples have had their own writing system developed by Dutch or other missionaries for years, indigenous teachers didn't learn the MOE's writing systems (e.g. the teachers interviewed) and the MOE's systems didn't suit the specific indigenous languages.

4.3 Language Teaching with Limited Cultural Foundation and Implications

The Ministry of Education has delegated the production of indigenous language textbooks first to indigenous taskforces and secondly to National Chengchi University. In the first edition, the content was too difficult in some

respects and too easy in the others. Some teachers did not know there were such textbooks or were not supplied with them at all. The second edition is thought to be too easy and simplistic by some teachers, including all indigenous teachers interviewed by the author.

These new textbooks are also available on-line, with Mandarin translations. They are language learning texts without any cultural meaning and foundation. The content of the various textbooks for each indigenous tribe is the same, based on phrases such as “I am a student,” “you are a teacher,” “good morning,” etc.

The actual teaching of these languages shows similar characteristics. Some teachers do relate the language teaching with their culture, and try to tell stories about their ancestors and festivals, but some completely focus on teaching “language” only. Among the indigenous teachers interviewed and observed by the author, the elder teachers inclined to embed their cultural knowledge and history in their curriculum, while the younger ones tended to teach communicative and daily conversation. Overall, indigenous language textbooks and teaching are unsatisfactory for the limited cultural foundation and implications. One of the reasons is that the teachers themselves do not have enough cultural knowledge or the confidence to use them. During their own schooling, they were not allowed to learn anything about their own culture and language. Two young female indigenous teachers talked about their limitation of knowledge about their own culture and history. Other reasons may be that they don’t know how to incorporate such knowledge, or are just too busy to get prepared. For those elder teachers, there are more possibilities for weaving cultural material into language teaching. They attribute their limited share of indigenous knowledge and tradition to the students’ insufficient proficiency of their mother tongues and their inadequate knowledge of their tribes and ancestors.

4.4 Teaching for Further Understanding of Indigenous Language Traits

The author taught foreign learners Mandarin for three years. She found it was helpful to understand the traits of students’ mother tongues, because with that understanding the teacher might then be able to predict and recognize the problems students (might) encounter. Teachers could also then analyze and explain to students the differences between the two languages and help them resolve or minimize the problems.

Tan (1996) concluded that there were four factors which influenced educational achievement of minority students. They were students’ cultural capital, language forms and traits, cultural identity, and social class.

In Bunun, there are more guttural fricatives and glottal stops than in Mandarin. Most of the Bunun students are so used to Mandarin that they do not recognize these traits, and cannot pronounce the language correctly. In addition, there seem to be only two tones in Bunun while there are five in Mandarin. There are also similarities and differences between Bunun and English. Students easily get confused.

4.5 Understanding and Responding to the Need for Different Learning Styles

There has been much research on the learning styles of indigenous students in Taiwan over the last decade (e.g. Tan & Lin, 2002). This may help teachers to have better understanding of and responses to students’ needs; it may however be harmful if teachers acquire fixed beliefs about the learning styles of all indigenous students, without understanding individual differences.

Teachers themselves have varying teaching styles. For example, one of the male teachers observed was a hunter, and he seemed to teach in a way similar to hunting in that he followed the students’ “tracks,” in the form of the questions they raised or the comments they made. Other teachers did not have this characteristic. They generally ignored questions and comments not relevant to the set themes, or kept reminding students to focus on the theme under discussion.

Research indicates that if students’ learning styles fit teachers’ teaching styles, they can learn better (e.g. Bennett, 1995; Tan & Lin, 2002). In the author’s observation, sometimes teachers could understand students’ learning styles and respond well, but at other times they could not and felt frustrated. In the limited period of time available for indigenous language teaching, how to teach effectively and efficiently is much more important.

4.6 Problems with Teacher Training and Shortage of Teachers

According to the education act for indigenous peoples and education act for indigenous peoples implementation procedure, those who hoped to become qualified teachers of indigenous tribal languages must pass the Council of Indigenous Peoples’ aboriginal language skill certification Test and take courses in multicultural education or indigenous education. The Ministry of Education offers 72-hour curriculum for indigenous seed teacher education and the Council of Indigenous Peoples offers 36-hour curriculum for indigenous languages supportive faculty every year since 2002 (Huang, 2009; Sung & Hsiung, 2010). The government also supports schools’ mother-tongue programs with various levels of funding for the compilation and publication of teaching materials, teachers’ handbooks and teaching seminars.

Despite this range of support for indigenous language teachers, problems exist. For example, there is a shortage of qualified teachers. There are not enough opportunities for pre-service and in-service indigenous teacher training, and most of those which do exist are too difficult to reach for many prospective or in-service indigenous language teachers. There are also insufficient indigenous language teachers for every specific language so schools have to divide indigenous students into the language class which doesn't teach their mother tongues, or conduct mix-age teaching (Huang, 2006; Hung, 2009; Pawan, 2004).

Many teachers of indigenous language have problems in classroom management, making curriculum and teaching plans, getting access to teaching resources, and so on. The majority of indigenous teachers interviewed encountered this challenge and almost all indigenous teachers who took part in this author's research thought it would be helpful to attend teaching seminars for the increase of their knowledge of teaching. More could also be done to enhance their understanding of respective groups of indigenous peoples, the culture and history of these peoples, the characteristics of students, and so on. However, for most of them, teaching is just a low-paid part-time job; some have other jobs and do not have time to travel long distances to attend teaching seminars.

4.7 The Need for Developing a Consistent and Coherent Curriculum Plan

In her study, Pawan (2004) found the teaching content included family, numbers, body parts, animals, the sky, food, living tools, native plants, names, the name of the tribal village, and songs. Similar to her findings, most indigenous language teachers the author interviewed or observed came from the same communities as their students and many used their own life experiences and the resources of their communities to teach, such as introducing Bunun or Sedig food by bringing in vegetables gathered from neighbouring fields or telling stories about hunting in the mountain area. It is good for learners to develop new learning on the base of their everyday life experiences.

But due to the time pressure, limited knowledge of teaching and other reasons, there was a lack of consistent, coherent and holistic curriculum planning for the respective class and for the whole school. For example, based on the author's observation, alphabets and the organs of the human body were taught in three different year groups -- Years 2, 4 and 6 -- Without any new material added. The reasons for this are the shortage of time spent in curriculum design, the difficulty for teachers to get together and discuss the whole framework of curriculum, the limited professionalism of designing curriculum and teaching language, and the lack of assistance from the schools.

4.8 Problems with Textbooks and Learning Materials and the Lack of Teacher Handbooks

There are few learning and teaching materials, and even if there are, there are problems in the levels of difficulty (as outlined above). There is also a "missing link" between indigenous teaching/learning and indigenous cultures/societies. Handbooks for teachers would help to fill this gap. Teaching materials also need to be developed. Though some teachers are willing to do this, they need more help and would also need to discuss this development with other indigenous language teachers, and school support are needed.

Some non-indigenous teachers believe it is not their business to learn about indigenous peoples, like the Han director interviewed, even though their students come from these groups. Others simply do not know how to help and support indigenous language teaching. Many teachers have never taken a course in multicultural education or indigenous education. Besides, teacher mobility and turnover in indigenous and/or country schools (which largely overlap) has been significant, and the workload is often higher than it is for teachers in other schools. This minimizes teachers' opportunities for professional development and restricts their understanding of students and communities.

Indigenous teachers, despite the fact that they have generally fewer teaching resources, have to develop their own curriculum, design their own teaching, and try to find or make the teaching and learning materials they need by themselves, without help from the school or other teachers. Principals do have some knowledge of multicultural education, but there is much to do in order to construct a multicultural environment and an education setting which can genuinely support indigenous language education.

4.9 Non-Supportive Families and Communities

Family and community are important sources of support for a younger generation's learning of mother tongues. In Taiwan, this foundation for indigenous languages has been eroded.

According to researches, many indigenous parents do not support their children's learning their mother tongue (Huang, 2009; Hung, 2006; Pawan, 2004). One reason is that parents consider learning indigenous languages a burden, which will lower their children's academic achievements. Another reason is that they believe the indigenous language is worthless and learning it would be a waste of time. Moreover, many indigenous parents cannot speak their indigenous language well. The majority of indigenous teachers interviewed mentioned that parents didn't speak mother tongues to their children and grandparents had to learn Mandarin in order to

communicate with their grandchildren. There are many indigenous families moving to cities, where they have few chances to speak their mother tongue. There are more and more interethnic marriages, and these couples speak Mandarin at home. In these non-supportive environments, indigenous students speak Mandarin and even Taiwanese better than they do their own indigenous languages.

5 Some Possible Strategies for the Development of Indigenous Language Teaching

Educationally, the specialists who met in 1951 under the sponsorship of UNESCO (Fishman, 1968) unanimously agreed that the mother tongue was the best language for literacy. They also strongly recommended that the use of the mother tongue in education be extended to as late a stage as possible. It has been proven by experience (UNESCO Meeting of Specialists, 1951, 1968) and by experiment (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991) that the teaching of mother tongue in the way proposed would not slow down students' acquisition of national language (cited in Tsao, 1997).

For these reasons, as well as for strengthening the self-esteem and cultural identity of indigenous students and preserving indigenous languages and cultures, improving the practice of indigenous language education is an important project. In response to the challenges that teaching of indigenous language faces in Taiwan, the author proposes some possibilities for improvement as follows.

5.1 Adopting an Indigenous-People-Centred Policy Approach

In planning and making decisions on indigenous language policies, the participation of indigenous communities and teachers is necessary. The main concern of the policies should be the well-being of indigenous peoples, and they should therefore be indigenous-people-centred. The previous process of policy-planning and decision-making was top down -- Only Han elitists' opinions counted.

This situation is changing. Some indigenous elitists may take part in the process and act as a voice for their peoples; however, they do not necessarily understand the difficulties and desires indigenous communities and schools have. Even if they do, they do not necessarily take these views and perceptions into account.

Top-down decision making, even "for the good" of indigenous peoples, is a form of domination. It leads to the reproduction of unequal power relations and inner colonization. An indigenous-people-centred policy approach might help more because it takes into account

the desires, difficulties, strengths, and uniqueness of indigenous peoples. Official policies on the development of indigenous cultures and languages, indigenous teacher training, indigenous skill examinations and so on, will not succeed unless indigenous communities and related persons are included in both the formation and the implementation of such policies.

5.2 Designing Integrated and Culture-Related Planning of Curriculum and Teaching Materials

Language and culture are intertwined. It might be helpful to combine indigenous language courses with local culture courses so that local culture can be learnt through indigenous language. This will not only provide more time for indigenous language teaching and learning, the indigenous language learned will also be grounded in cultural meanings and understanding, and relevant to the everyday life of the people.

Indigenous teachers are passionate about delivering their knowledge of indigenous language and culture. However, there are ways of empowering them more effectively. First, the school can cooperate with indigenous teachers to set up an integrated curriculum for all grades (Years 1-6). Those planning the curricula need to take indigenous culture and tradition into account and regard it as the core. If there is a common theme for different year groups, collaborative teaching can be designed. If there is a festival in the community, the school and teachers can cooperate with the community and teach something relevant. Through this approach, indigenous teachers can disseminate their knowledge and learn to design integrated curricula with colleagues. The school will be more involved in indigenous language teaching and provide better support for the teachers and students. Secondly, more and better teaching and learning materials as well as handbooks for teachers are needed. These should not become mandatory, but should give teachers the flexibility to decide what and how much to use. They should be a resource for teachers and students, not a burden, and should not deskill teachers.

5.3 Responding to Language Traits and Learning Characteristics

Indigenous languages have similarities with and differences from the dominant languages -- In this case, Mandarin and English. To find out what these are and to provide this knowledge to teachers might benefit teaching and learning.

Generally speaking, indigenous students prefer lively and visual texts for learning, and prefer learning through interactions, activities (with some body movements), and group work. Many indigenous students have high musical intelligence. Liu and Lin (2001) did experimental research

on setting new vocabulary and phrases to melody. The research findings indicate indigenous students learn better in these ways than in the traditional ways.

However, it is dangerous to take for granted that indigenous peoples always have particular learning styles. Sometimes the differences within ethnic groups are bigger than those between ethnic groups. It is necessary for teachers to acknowledge individual differences and implement various teaching styles accordingly.

In addition, although the indigenous language taught is generally students' mother tongue, it is actually more like their second language. Indigenous language teachers might need some knowledge of second language teaching.

5.4 Providing Effective Teacher Training and School Support

Indigenous teachers need to have access to a range of forms of teacher training, for example long-term and short-term, seminar and workshop, and a range of types of content, such as education theories, teaching practices, classroom management, indigenous culture, indigenous language teaching, second language teaching, etc.

One particularly important goal would be to establish a multicultural school to encourage teachers to learn indigenous culture and history and to encourage the appreciation of indigenous culture and identity. It is not only indigenous language teachers who need further teacher training; non-indigenous language teachers also need in-service training to learn more about other cultures and respect for others. It is necessary for non-indigenous teachers to take courses in multicultural education and indigenous education. It would be even better for teachers to learn about indigenous peoples and their cultures. Multicultural education is not only necessary for teachers. It should be required for everyone who lives in a multicultural and multiethnic world.

Schools can provide some supports to teachers, such as inviting other teachers to assist the indigenous language teacher. The assistance may include providing access to teaching resources, helping to get them prepared for teaching and managing the classroom, and learning the indigenous language with students, and so on. Through these methods, indigenous language teachers will get more resources and support from the school, and other teachers in the school will learn more about indigenous culture and language. This will form a learning organization to engage in the development of indigenous culture and education.

There is an example for creating an indigenous language friendly environment. The Han principal of a Bunun elementary school the author visited has started a teachers' study group, designed to provide introductory knowledge of the Bunun people and culture. A regular

story-telling morning has been set up for elders from the community to tell Bunun stories. The principal himself has learnt Bunun and gives lectures in Bunun occasionally.

5.5 Supporting Families and Communities to Play Major Roles in Indigenous Language Learning

Parents and communities play an important role in indigenous language learning. For learning a language, it is not enough to have a one-hour course per week in school. As Fishman (1985 as cited in Chang, 2001) pointed out, schools could help language preservation, but families and communities were the keys to transmitting indigenous language. Schools have three limitations: They are not the key factor for language preservation; learning the language at school is too little and too late; and it achieves only the communication function. The functions of indigenous language as a cultural symbol, a sign of identity, and the medium for relationships with indigenous societies are lost.

The Taiwan government now financially supports local governments to set up language nests and indigenous language learning workshops in order to encourage communities and families to engage in indigenous learning (C.I.P., 2007). Churches, too, can play an important role in indigenous teaching. Around 70 percent of indigenous people are Christians. Prayers and sermons are chanted in Bunun, and in the observed district, the Sunday school also teaches children Bunun.

Nevertheless, indigenous languages are dying. To preserve these languages and their associated cultures, we need more support from the whole society and every possible resource.

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