LANGUAGE COMPETITION AND CHALLENGES IN PLURILINGUAL EDUCATION: THE CASE OF A HAKKA SCHOOL IN TAIWAN

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Abstract.
The Council of Europe and Taiwan are both promoting plurilingual and intercultural educations for all students, regardless of social group. This paper aims to challenge the assumption that language learning can be expected to benefit all students equally. A Taiwanese socio-cultural study of junior high school students' (age 13) English language learning processes is used as an example for discussion. Findings from the Hakka School, which is the focus of this paper, revealed emerging inequality arising from the enforcement of a mother-tongue education policy in Taiwan. Language competition and identity clashes are creating a new and worrisome divide that threatens to widen existing gaps not only between urban and rural regions but also among other social groups within Taiwanese society. This study leads to several conclusions, highlighting implications for teachers of first and second languages, including English, other educators, and policy makers in areas like Europe and Taiwan.

Key Words: English; Hakka; identity; plurilingual education

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, growing emphasis has been placed on the pursuit of multiculturalism and plurilingualism as a means to societal equality (e.g., Fleming, 2009; 2010; Little, 2010). Based on the recognition that all languages and cultures are equally important for offering quality educations for all learners, the Council of Europe has proposed a project to support social cohesion and intercultural dialogue through the promotion of plurilingual and intercultural education in schools (Little, 2010). In Asian countries, such as Taiwan, multiculturalism and plurilingualism have been celebrated, but with slightly different aims than those seen in Europe. Taiwanese policy aims to preserve ethnic dialects that are in immediate danger of extinction and to bridge the linguistic gaps that have gradually emerged in some ethnic minority groups between the older and younger generations due to the considerable shift from various mother tongues to the national language (Mandarin Chinese) and the international language (English). However, as Fleming (2010) noted, the plurilingual learning process must be viewed as more than just a narrow, sheer functional aim that only emphasises the acquisition of the four linguistic skills. As demonstrated by recent literature, language learning is a social, psychological and cultural process that involves issues pertaining to practice, community and identity (e.g., Lin, 2008; Lin & Ivinson, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2011). The pursuit of multiculturalism and plurilingualism may be influenced by various forces, such as cultural, political, economic, ethnic and linguistic prejudices, which should not be underestimated.

The popularity of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is growing among many Asian countries, including Japan, Korea and Taiwan. EFL education in Taiwan is a good example where social forces are riddled with local plurilingual and intercultural education programs. Taiwan is a nation in which learning English has become considered vital to its rapidly developing island economy. English-speaking ability carries considerable prestige, and it is strongly believed that speaking English more fluently fuels upward mobility, in terms of both occupational and social status. In 2005, the official downward extension of English education to Year 3 of schooling highlighted its economic and political significance. Although it was already a matter of concern that national longitudinal achievement data had consistently demonstrated substantial gaps in English ability (i.e. the 'urban-rural divide' in learning English) among junior high school candidates (age 13) living in different locales (Chang, 2002, Lin, 2008), official endeavours have tended to focus on the macro aspects, such as urban-rural resource discrepancies. This overly simplified interpretation and examination of the gap in English language learning fails to provide a micro-genetic view of language learning processes, which examine the complexities of the social and psychological forces affecting language learning and teaching.

One of these social forces is Taiwan's plurilingual social reality, which arises from its ethnic hybridity; it is composed of four major ethnic groups (the Hokkien,

Hakka, Chinese Mainlanders, and indigenous people), each with its own mother tongue and cultural specificity. Successive governments have intended to pursue plurilingualism and mother-tongue education policies as means to promote local identities and social equality. However, the histories of their endeavours have been riddled with cultural, political, economic, ethnic and linguistic prejudices. Since English language competence has been reinforced and recognised at the official, community and institutional levels as a key to success, it has become a new form of 'high language' **(Huang, 1993)**, muddying the water of local plurilingual and intercultural education and provoking further linguistic identity clashes, conflict and competition. Unfortunately, in Taiwan, there has been very little recognition of the impact of such linguistic identity clashes on plurilingual and intercultural education.

Recently, many empirical studies have supported the notion that language learning is a socio-cultural process that takes into account social, cultural, historical and political contexts (Donato, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Poehner, 2000; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Lin, 2008; Lin & Ivinson, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2011). Emerging cultural issues concerning values and identities have gradually been investigated in foreign language acquisition research (e.g., Kramsch, 2000; Lantolf & Poehner, 2000; Lin, 2008).The first socio-cultural study on EFL learning and teaching in Taiwan (Lin, 2008) serves as a good example; this study found that EFL learning must be viewed from broader social, cultural and historical contexts. It reveals that students from various social groups have experienced the processes of learning languages differently, including EFL and ethnic mother tongues (L1), even though they were taught the same national or school curriculums.

Drawing from this Taiwanese socio-cultural research, this paper explores the emerging issues pertaining to Hakka students' experiences; namely, language competition and identity clashes during the plurilingual learning process in schools. It aims to challenge the assumption that learning a second or foreign language can be expected to equally benefit students from various cultural backgrounds. In this paper, I briefly illustrate the theoretical and methodological constructs of the broader socio-cultural study at the outset. I then depict the conflicting histories of the four social groups and their current EFL learning contexts in multicultural and plurilingual Taiwan. Furthermore, relevant discussions are provided based on the emerging findings of this Taiwanese case study. Several conclusions are made, highlighting some implications for language teachers and policy makers in Taiwan.

2. THE TAIWANESE STUDY

2.1 Socio-cultural theoretical framework

This study employed a research design based on Vygotsky-inspired socio-cultural theoretical approaches to learning, which explore students' complex identity formations during the English-learning process (Lin, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Socio-cultural theories require a shift from 'the individual human mind' as the single unit

of analysis in understanding human thought to the recognition of the socially and culturally constituted practices through which human thinking and behaviour develop (Scribner, 1997). Informed by such a theoretical perspective, language learning in students is viewed as a process of changing participation in the socio-cultural activities of students' communities, where identity development is conceptualised as socially, culturally and historically constructed (Rogoff, 2003).

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Settings and Participants

Participating students (grade 8, age 13) and teachers were drawn from four junior high schools in southern Taiwan. Eight classes within these four different school localities (two urban, two rural) were chosen to represent the four ethnic groups. The major ethnic group present in the Urban School was Hokkien, whereas the Suburban School included Hokkien students and Mainlanders. In the Hakka School, the majority of the students were Hakka (88%); the Mountain School contained largely indigenous Paiwan students (97%). The ethnic mixes and the languages spoken by the students in each school are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Principal language and ethnicity in the four schools

Locales	*Languages*	*Students' ethnicity*
Urbany School	Mandarin & Hokkien	Hokkien (70%) Mainlanders (19%) Hakka (10%)
Suburbany School	Mandarin & Hokkien	Hokkien (74%) Mainlanders (26%)
Hakka School	*Mandarin & Hakka*	*Hakka (88%)* *Non-Hakka (12%)*
Mountain School	Mandarin & Paiwan	Indigenous Paiwan (97%)

2.2.2 Research Instruments and Analysis

To develop appropriate research instruments for socio-cultural analytic purposes, I used multiple methods of data collection, including historical analyses, classroom observations and interviews, in order to depict the emerging cultural issues concerning values and identities in relation to EFL learning. The first method was historical analysis, which included an informal visit to local communities to investigate the broad political, economic and historico-cultural issues related to English learn-

ing. Second, classroom observations were used to map pedagogy in the context of teacher-student interactions. Finally, interviews were carried out with students and teachers to clarify the interactions and practices observed in classrooms, as well as individual students' learning histories, in order to uncover their identity development during language learning. Thematic and discourse analyses were employed to gradually develop interpretations. Ethical issues, such as confidentiality and anonymity, were taken into account, including ensuring that all participants' names and school names were reported fictitiously in the study. While the purpose of this paper is primarily to discuss the findings from the Hakka School, when comparing these results with the other three schools' findings, this discussion would make little sense without an explanation of their complex, historical contexts; thus, relatively thorough references to these contexts must first be made.

2.3 History in context

2.3.1 The four ethnic groups in Taiwan

Taiwan, with a population of approximately 23 million, is an island with an ethnically diverse population, composed mainly of Hokkien (69%), Hakka (15%), Chinese Mainlanders (14%), and indigenous people (2%). These four social groups have different geographic and historical roots, as well as specific ethnic cultural and linguistic variations. From the beginning of the 17th century, the majority of migrants arriving in Taiwan from China to join Taiwan's indigenous inhabitants were Han Chinese; these individuals had sub-ethnic differences. Most were fleeing from social turmoil or hardship in the south-eastern provinces of China; namely, the southern Fujian and eastern Guangdong areas. The descendants of these two migratory groups now make up the two largest population groups: the Hokkien and Hakka people. By 2005, the Hokkien people, or 'Southern Min' (*min-nan-ren*), made up approximately 69 per cent of the Taiwanese population, while the Hakka Chinese composed approximately 15 per cent. In the post war era, mainly in 1949, an influx of Chinese Mainlanders fleeing the Communist advance in mainland China replaced the Japanese colonial government (1895-1945) and came to comprise some 14 per cent of the population. For thousands of years before the Han Chinese migrants arrived, however, aboriginal footprints could be found all over Taiwan. These indigenous people comprise roughly 2 per cent of the population; the exact population of each ethnic group continues to change over time.

Geographically, the Hokkien people settled in the plains, developing the sea and river ports, particularly in Taipei (to the north) and Kaohsiung city (to the south), which provided good living conditions and close networks for trade with the mother country (China). The Hakka people, who originated from the eastern Guangdong province, settled in Taiwan somewhat later than the Hokkien; they inhabited marginal areas, living on rather tough and less lucrative farmland. The later-arriving mainlanders were primarily soldiers and Chinese Nationalist government officials,

known as *Kuo-Ming Tang* (KMT), who lived mainly in military camps and urban areas. As Greenhalgh (1984, p. 537) put it, the Mainlanders were largely concentrated in Taiwan's cities, and 'the larger the city, the higher the proportion of mainlanders'. Urbanisation and modernity were the features that distinguished the mainlanders from other groups. The indigenous peoples were, and are, the only group living mainly in the mountains and along the rivers, living traditional hunting and farming lifestyles. Though many of them had originally been plains dwellers, they were forced to withdraw and head inland, becoming labelled 'mountain people' (*shan-di-ren*) by the Han Chinese migrants (Thompson, 1984) and, later, 'high mountain people' during the Japanese occupation from 1895. The current terms 'Aborigines' and 'Indigenous people' were not officially used to describe these groups until 1995. By 2005, there were 14 officially recognised indigenous tribes island-wide, each with its own tribal language.

Each of the four ethnic groups has its own social, cultural, historical and linguistic background. They speak different dialects that have various linguistic roots. Those from the Fujian province, who constituted the majority of immigrants before Japanese colonialism, spoke the Hokkien dialect, currently termed *'tai-yü'*, 'Taiwanese' or 'Southern Min', while those from the Guangdong province spoke Hakka. The mainlanders who took over control of the Taiwanese state from the Japanese colonists mainly spoke Mandarin Chinese, officially called *'guo-yü'*, which became the national language of Taiwan (and is identical to the official language of China). Indigenous people speak various tribal languages among the 14 recognised tribes whose characteristics are mainly Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) (Thompson, 1984). It is worth noting that, even though most Hakka people dwelled on less lucrative farm land, a proportion of them migrated to urban areas for better job opportunities. This group of Hakka migrants is commonly termed the 'urban Hakka'; they tend to speak Mandarin Chinese in public rather than their Hakka mother tongue, in an attempt to hide their 'humble ethnic identity' (Lin, 2008), a matter to be further discussed later.

Historically, political tension among these groups has existed for the past two hundred years, centring primarily on limited land resources. Before the arrival of the Chinese National Government in 1949, feuds between the Hokkien land occupants and the later Hakka immigrants were widely documented. As Thompson (1984) put it, the Hakka people tended to either cluster together in the foothills for self-protection or ally themselves with other Hakka communities

> 'against the numerically superior Hokkien-speakers and, occasionally, against the aborigines located further into the mountains; they ...thus give rise to the stereotyped notion of the Hakka people's "ethnic cliquishness"' (Thompson, 1984, p. 555).

The political tension consists of linguistic divisions and suppression of languages, which haunt the modern history of Taiwan, although in recent years multiculturalism has become the official policy.

As a result, political rivalries between the mainlanders and other native Taiwanese in the post-war era led to a language hierarchy and ethnic conflicts. For example, to ensure national monolingualism and justify Taiwan's perceived role as a legal representation of China, the Chinese Nationalist government promoted Mandarin as Taiwan's national language; from 1949 until 1987, a Mandarin Language Policy was enforced in schools, whereby pupils were not permitted to speak in their mother tongues (Sandel, 2003). This declaration of Mandarin as the national language gave the language a high political status (Huang, 1993), ostensibly denying the legitimacy of other ethnic languages and, thus, undergirding a language hierarchy, which Giles and Johnson (1981) term 'ethnic speech markers'; these have been a source of conflict among social groups within Taiwanese society for decades.

This language suppression has also suppressed ethnic identities within minority groups, inducing the latent death of low-status languages, such as is the case of the Hakka dialect depicted in this paper. To counterbalance such trends, and in recuperative celebration of ethnic differences, a more recent policy, termed 'home soil education', has been implemented by the ministry of education since 1994. Within this policy framework, there are language curricular requirements which have entailed the introduction of mother-tongue linguistic education for each social group, aiming to revitalise both ethnic languages and local identities. Relevant incentives have been generated by the successive governments to encourage the learning of Hokkien, Hakka and indigenous local languages in addition to Mandarin Chinese (the national language) and English (the major foreign language).

2.4 Neo-political framing of EFL learning

Among such complex linguistic divisions and forms of suppression, English has emerged as a new form of high language. Since the 1980s, Taiwanese society has been subject to far-reaching and rapid economic growth, becoming the world's fifteenth largest trading country in 2004 (Bureau of Foreign Trade, Taiwan, 2004). Learning English as an international language has become regarded as vital to Taiwan's economy in terms of providing access to the world community, which is viewed as one of the keys to success in economic globalisation and modernisation. Taiwan's entry into the World Trade Origination (WTO) in 2002 has led to greater economic cooperation and trade exchange with other countries in the international community. Learning English has become a highly value-laden practice, exacerbated by heightened political pressure to ensure Taiwan's place in the global economy. Accelerated by the need to communicate with the outside world in regards to business, diplomacy, and scholarship, English has become a dominant foreign language in Taiwan's public sector, job markets and schools.

In schools, for example, the pressure to develop better English-speaking ability is fierce among learners at each educational level. At the pre-school and kindergarten stages, common slogans, such as 'the earlier your children learn English, the

better they will succeed', have fuelled growth in bilingual and monolingual English kindergartens and cram schools. The Curriculum of Elementary and Junior High School Education (Grades 1-9), introduced by Taiwan's Ministry of Education in 2001, legitimised English language learning as early as grade 5 (age 10) at the primary level (MOE, 2011). In 2005, English was added to the Year 3 and 4 primary school curriculums, and many schools have extended it even further, to Years 1 and 2, in order to meet parental expectations and demand. This downward extension of English education has greatly highlighted its economic and political significance in Taiwan. As the new high language, English not only complicates plurilingual Taiwan but also draws our attention to the need to be cautious as to whether EFL learning should be thought capable of benefitting all students equally, without considering the social realities of language clashes and competition.

2.5 The national curriculum

Apple (1988, p. 195) contends that 'we cannot fully understand the curriculum unless we first investigate the way our educational institutions are situated within a larger configuration of economic, cultural, and political power.' This has certainly been the case with respect to Taiwanese curriculum reform in recent years, including the birth of the 'Grades 1-9 Curriculum' for primary and junior high schools. Responding to a dramatic sense of socio-political and economic change and conscious of global trends in educational reform, in 2001, the Taiwanese government introduced the Grades 1-9 Curriculum for primary and junior high schools, with unified guidelines regulating curriculum goals, pedagogic methods, timetables, content and evaluations. Most importantly, it has far-reaching implications for the teaching and learning of English. This curriculum comprises ten core competences and seven major Learning Areas (MOE, 2005). Among these learning areas, 'Language Arts' is composed of Mandarin Chinese and English, focusing on the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to develop basic communicatory competences, as well as knowledge of culture and social customs. The two languages, Mandarin Chinese and English, share the weekly classroom hours. At the primary level, more time is devoted to Mandarin Chinese because it is the language used for the teaching of other subjects, and less (approximately 1-2 hours weekly) is provided for learning English. In junior high school, on the other hand, at least 6 to 8 hours weekly are typically equally divided between Mandarin Chinese and English (see Table 2).

The average time (3-4 weekly hours) spent learning English includes one Supplementary Slot (for example, see Table 3), an official after-school revision class. Given the strongly rising trend of learning English, most junior high schools are desperate to further increase the classroom hours dedicated to the language, which somewhat compromises sessions deemed 'not so important' (for instance, replacing the Hakka language class with an English session in the Hakka school). Some schools, such as bilingual schools (i.e. English and Mandarin Chinese), have

created new class formats to achieve their bilingual visions, while some others have replaced extracurricular activities with English sessions, or even added Saturday classes for high-ability students (for instance, in elite urban schools). By such means, 4 to 5 weekly hours tend to be devoted to English education in junior high schools.

Table 2: Subjects and weekly teaching hours

Subject	*Primary School*			*Junior High School*	
	Grade I, II	III, IV	V, VI	I, II	III
Language	*4-6*	*5-8*	*5-8*	*6-8*	*3-5*
Mathematics	2-3	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-5
Health & PE	2-3	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-5
Life Curriculum	6-9	0	0	0	0
Social Studies	0	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-5
Arts & Humanities	0	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-5
Science & Tech.	0	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-5
Integrative Activities	2-3	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-5
Flexible Learning	2-4	3-6	3-6	4-6	3-5
Total hours	22-24	28-31	30-33	32-34	33-35

(MOE, 2004, p. 30)

In addition to formal English education, the attendance of after-school revision classes in cram schools must be addressed. Cram school attendance is a distinctive academic learning culture within Taiwanese society. As a result, and in prospect of the importance of English proficiency for Senior High School entry, engagement in after-school revision classes in cram schools has become very widespread among junior high school students. Cram school attendance is useful for many as a 'cultural tool' (Wertsch, 1998) for dealing with the growing complexities and difficulties of English as a junior high school subject. However it does not guarantee academic improvement, particularly given the reluctance to attend of many young people – most of the attendees are pressured by their parents – as well as perhaps by the passivity of the pedagogy in cram schools, which sometimes deters full participation.

Given recent emphases on local identities within Taiwanese society, implementation of a 'home soil' (*xiang-tu*) curriculum that engenders mother-tongue education for an hour per week has engaged the public's attention as a means of preserving and promoting ethnic cultures and dialects. However, this hour-long cultural lesson, classified as optional, has not actually been implemented within schools because of the overt focus on enhancing academic competence and, in particular, due to the humble status of the Hakka language (which will be addressed in detail later). One could argue that an implicit linguistic hierarchy seems to have emerged as a by-product of mother-tongue education implementation. Certain social and

cultural forces, such as ethnic cultural variations, seem to have interacted with the national and local school curriculums, impacting students' language learning processes.

3. THE HAKKA CASE-STUDY

3.1 The Hakka junior high school

Following the Grades 1-9 Curriculum, the Hakka School under study has five English classes and six Mandarin classes per week, including one supplementary slot; the remainder of the classes usually take place in the mornings, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: The Hakka School class timetable

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
07:30~08:00	Morning Session (reading time & morning assembly)				
08:10~08:55	Life education	Science & Tech.	Science &Tech.	Geography	*Mandarin*
09:10~09:55	Math	Science & Tech.	Math	*English*	*Mandarin*
10:10~10:55	*English*	Math	PE	Scout Activities	Computer
11:10~11:55	*Mandarin*	*English*	*English*	History	Math
12:00~13:00	Lunch Time & 'Siesta'				
13:15~14:00	Performing	Civics	Health Ed.	*Mandarin*	PE
14:15~15:00	Geography	Counselling	Extra Curriculum	Math	Arts
15:15~16:00	Music	*Mandarin*	Class Meeting	Science & Tech.	Home Economics
Supplementary Slot					
16:20~17:10	*Mandarin*	Science & Tech.	*English*	Math	

Note: Weekly classes are 39 hours in total.

To concretise our argument regarding language learning situations in schools, we compare the allocations of English language learning hours within the four participant junior high schools. As noted earlier, these four schools were chosen to represent the four ethnic groups in Taiwan. Each class in the four school settings had a fixed class timetable, following a formalised schedule that complied with the Grades 1-9 Curriculum guidelines. However, flexibility existed across the schools, reflecting their individual school visions and related commitments. As seen in Table 4, all four schools had the same numbers of English classes per week, in terms of formal and supplementary sessions. The Suburban School, however, had a unique format, incorporating biweekly and weekend English classes for high-ability students, highlighting its status as an elite school. In contrast, the Indigenous School was the only school emphasising ethnic culture as subject matter (though devoting

only one optional hour per week to it), including tribal language, performance (e.g. singing and dancing) and craftwork. This school also devoted two more hours per week to extracurricular activities than the others did and provided for athletic training practices every afternoon, underlining its commitment to a full school day involving culturally organised activities.

The Hakka School, on the other hand, did not provide lessons on ethnic, cultural or linguistic matters. The unique low-status identity of the Hakka mother tongue and culture seem linked to this absence of ethnic and cultural subject matters in schools.

Table 4:The comparison of school class timetable

	Urban	*Suburban*	*Hakka*	*Indigenous*
English classes per week	4	4 + *(2)	*4*	4
English supplementary class per week	1	1	*1*	1
Weekend English classes	0	*(2)	*0*	0
Extracurricular activities	1	0	*1*	2
Ethnic culture learning	0	0	*0*	1

Note: *Suburban's weekend English classes are taught fortnightly. *Ethnic culture learning includes mother tongue acquisition. (Lin, 2008)

3.2 The Hakka low-status identity

Compelling anthropological studies on the Taiwanese social groups support the fact that a common language has been particularly pivotal for the Hakka identity (Cohen, 1968; Martin, 1996). However, the linguistic hierarchy documented in Taiwan's history seems to have played an important part in the Hakka people's failure to recognise their own distinct ethnicity. Initially, the phenomenon of the Hakka population's low-status identity (more frequently termed the 'invisible Hakka', or *yin-xingke-jia*) arose from historical tension between the ethnic groups mentioned earlier, particularly between the Hakka and their Hokkien neighbours in the western plains, leading to a suppressed Hakka identity. This social phenomenon has been accelerated by the gradual extinction of the Hakka dialect, as

> 'spoken Hakka has accepted a great number of loan words and is losing place to Hokkien and Mandarin' (Yang, 1991, cited in Martin, 1996, p. 192).

Notions of a collective 'invisible' Hakka identity crystallised following documented riots between the social groups, largely over scarce land resources. Recent political influences on the prioritisation of languages spoken by the different social groups have appeared to engender further deterioration of the Hakka identity. Mandarin,

promoted as the national language, has become a high-status language, while Hakka and other minority dialects have become low-status languages.

The dying Hakka language supports the notion of the 'invisible' Hakka. Evidence suggests that urban Hakka migrants tend to conceal their ethnic identities, speaking the Mandarin and Hokkien languages in order to gain cultural recognition from the urbanite mainlanders and the Hokkien. Mr. Yuan, an English teacher from the Hakka School, was a participant in the broader Taiwanese socio-cultural study (Lin, 2008). His early education may help to depict the relationships between Hakka language use and social identity. Mr. Yuan, an ethnic Hakka born in a Hakka community, was brought up by his grandparents and educated in a nearby city for over 18 years, beginning with Year 4. He related his experience in urban life, in terms of the Hakka language and identity, as follows:

> People liked to ask me to speak a few lines of Hakka as long as they acknowledged my Hakka identity. I have grown up like this […] So, in the past, when they (i.e. urban Hakka) grew up and did not speak Hakka, they tended to become ''invisible Hakka'' because lots of them chose to become invisible due to their humble status within Taiwanese society.

Mr. Yuan further noted that Hakka students tended to believe that they were not Hakka as long as they did not speak the Hakka language. The prevailing 'invisible' Hakka identity seems to invoke the issue of language choice within school settings, due to the value asymmetry attached to Hakka language use.

3.2.1 Hakka students' linguistic behaviours and identities

Such asymmetrical language statuses, together with the notion of the 'invisible' Hakka identity, were found to be associated with Hakka students' pursuits of increased social statuses through academic achievement (Lin, 2008). Some of these issues are demonstrated in students' experiences in the Hakka School. Some high-ability students were found to reject speaking Hakka (their native language) because of its low status, apparent inferiority, and associated cultural valence. A teacher's account of students' linguistic identities at a Hakka School may be helpful here. Ms. Mei, a Hokkien English teacher married to a Hakka man, has painstakingly tried to learn the Hakka dialect in order to improve her communication with family members in the Hakka community. She was fully aware of the importance of speaking the Hakka language in order to formulate self-recognition and to promote local identities. At work, she tried to rebuild students' self-esteems, as well as supporting her personal learning objective, by encouraging students to speak in Hakka; meanwhile, during the daily pedagogical practice, she requested that students translate English vocabulary into Hakka. Based on her classroom experience of nearly six years at the Hakka School, Ms. Mei contended that:

> Speaking Hakka seems to represent ''low achievers''. There used to be high and low ability classes five years ago […] (now mixed-ability classes) I found those low achievers tended to speak Hakka, but students from the high-ability class were not willing to

> speak Hakka with me. They said (*an-shia*) (Hakka dialect) which meant ''very shameful'' (*hen-diu-lian*). They felt it was shameful to speak Hakka […] very ''lousy'' (*nan-ting*) which did not sound like a ''high-class'' (*gao-ji*) language.

It was intriguing to discover that the high-ability students at the Hakka School tended to denigrate their mother tongue as something *'very shameful'*, *'lousy'*, and not sounding like a *'high-class'* language. It could be argued that the Hakka language was being used to define not only ethnic and social group boundaries but also social status categories within the Hakka community. Asymmetrical values are attached to the use of Hakka, Mandarin and English, entailing both language choices and identities.

In terms of linguistic identity, Hakka students' language behaviours and identities from within the social sub-groups to which they belonged were well-captured by Tajfel and colleagues (Tajfel, Jaspars, & Fraser, 1984, p. 5):

> In our judgment of other people, in forming stereotypes, in learning a second language […] we do not act as isolated individuals but as social beings who derive an important part of our identity from the human groups and social categories we belong to; and we act in accordance with this awareness.

Based on Vygotsky-inspired socio-cultural theoretical perspectives, Penuel and Wertsch's (1995) mediated-action approach to identity, which considers learning inseparable from issues of practice, community and meaning (thus, highlighting the notion of 'identity in practice'), also helps to conceptualise identity as a continuous process of on-going development, operating with mediating means. In the case of the Hakka community, identity represents negotiation of the meanings of experiences in different social communities that result from speaking or not speaking the Hakka language. Within Taiwanese society, Mandarin historically has the highest social status. Whether or not to speak Mandarin in the Hakka School is a socially important question. By speaking in Mandarin with peers or teachers, high-ability Hakka students claim higher social positions, matching the superior academic statuses to which they aspire. High ability Hakka students' specific language choices convey signs of the speakers' claims to certain social positions, while the Hakka language implies a low-status Hakka identity. High ability Hakka students' use of Mandarin could be interpreted as speech camouflage, hiding their true low-status identities. Such identities are mediated, co-constructed and, perhaps, reinforced by certain non-Hakka teachers' classroom practices when, according to Ms. Mei, they proscribed the use of Hakka during class:

> They would warn students not to speak Hakka. Those who speak Hakka in class will be punished (chuckles) […] because they think students who speak Hakka are doing that ''on purpose'' (*ke-yi-de*) (a naughty behaviour).

In contrast to Ms. Mei's use of the Hakka language, which seeks to help students 'bridge' (Rogoff, 1990) home and school knowledge in everyday pedagogical practice, some teachers' negations of Hakka use within classroom settings not only denigrate the already humble Hakka identity but also give rise to potential linguistic

(and perhaps ethnic) discrimination. Given the asymmetric values attached to different languages, issues involving the Hakka language and identity in practice do have strong implications here, especially as English has become a new form of high language. Emerging competition among the five languages in Taiwanese society, as well as the resulting social inequalities, should not be underestimated.

3.2.2 Emerging language competition and social inequality

Five different languages, including the principal language of instruction (Mandarin), the target foreign language (English) and three ethnic dialects (Hokkien, Hakka and indigenous), are used in Taiwan; they are schematically compared in Table 5, which highlights a hierarchical linguistic order and beneath which there are growing tensions. The values (1 through 4) do not suggest a rank order based on empirical research; rather, it is based on historically situated social statuses, which may be considered widely accepted viewpoints.

Table 5: Ranking of languages among Taiwanese ethnic groups

Language	*Hokkien*	*Mainlanders*	*Hakka*	*Indigenous*	*Feature*
English	2	2	*2*	2	International
Mandarin	1	1	*1*	1	National
Hokkien	3	3	*3*	3	Neo-political
Hakka	N/A	N/A	*4*	N/A	Ethnic dialect
Indigenous	N/A	N/A	*N/A*	4	Ethnic dialect

Note: N/A indicates that the dialect is not used or taught in the social group. (Lin, 2008)

Although over-simplified, this ranking points to the reality that learning either English or ethnic dialects, for some students from certain social groups, may not offer equal benefits, even if students are provided with standardised national or school curriculums. It could be argued that the tension concerning social identities among the Mandarin, English, Taiwanese and various native languages places students from certain social groups in a quandary over how to allocate their language priorities. Emerging language competition and, hence, social inequality is at stake; this must be addressed during the growth of multiculturalism and plurilingualism within Taiwanese society.

As Huang (2000, p.146) noted, in Taiwan, 'local languages are facing stiff competition on two fronts'. The Hakka dialect, as is described in the present discussion, is in conflict with Mandarin as the official, or national, language, as well as English, a robust competitor, especially as Taiwan moves toward further engagement in international trade and politics. As Fishman (1989, p.126) stated:

> The tension between the requirements of modernization and those of authentification. The one [...] is constantly straining toward newer, more rational, more efficient solutions to the problems of today and tomorrow. The other [...] is constantly straining toward purer, more genuine expression of the heritage of yesterday and of long ago.

Fishman's delineation of such a linguistic dilemma reminds us of the potentially conflicting themes of language and both localisation (purer) and globalisation (newer), suggesting the inevitability of continuously emerging linguistic competition, such as that occurring in countries such as Canada, Australia and Wales. In Taiwan, with the increasing political status of the Hokkien people and the Taiwanese language following the local Taiwanese political party's (or DPP, Democratic Progressive Party) first ever presidential win in 2000, the Hakka minority language in Taiwan is, now, encountering three fronts of competition, rather than two.

Although home-soil or mother-tongue education, which is embedded in school curriculums, aims to celebrate ethnic identities and to preserve minority languages from extinction, 'the heritage of yesterday' (in the Fishman's sense) still elicits less attention from students than other languages do, especially English. It could be argued that the emerging inequality will remain an issue as long as the mother-tongue educational policy is enforced, as only students from minority groups must spend time learning native languages that they may not value on a personal level or that they may deem unworthy of speaking, due to a loss of presence in socially organised activities with which the students may be involved.

Given this, it is little wonder that institutional settings have responded to the mother-tongue education policy with mixtures of indifference and resistance. As Mr. Zhao, the senior English teacher and chief administrator of the Student's Academic Office in the Hakka School, stated,

> 'the mother-tongue education policy is optional, so we do not enforce this policy… They (Hakka students) still learn the Hakka mother tongue at the primary school level.'

Arguably, the Hakka School should have been providing Hakka language instruction, but was not. The reconceptualisation of this policy in the Hakka School exemplified how school curriculums and learning mediate global-political forces and individual identities. Practical action, as was seen in the Hakka School, is in response to the quandary of language competition where, imperceptibly, global and political influences are at work in the way students draw upon and speak various languages as they manage their social identities at home, with friends and at school.

3.2.3 Challenges in plurilingual education

From socio-cultural perspectives, language is viewed not only as a tool for daily communication but also as a significant focus for the development of thinking, identity and personal development. Language learning and human development must be viewed as paired natural processes that cannot be separated into individual entities (Donato, 2000; Fleming, 2010; Lantolf, 2000; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Lin, 2008; Lin & Ivinson, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2011). These insights are well-

supported by recent neo-Vygotskian scholars' convergent works on language learning and development, which argue that language learning does not take place in a social vacuum. In other words, language learning is a socio-culturally constituted practice, whereby culture plays an important part in the process of L1 and L2 acquisition and EFL learning. In Taiwan, EFL learning was found to take place in rich social contexts, constituted or shaped by students' surrounding social, cultural and historical situations. Similarly, Hakka students' native language educations in schools were found to be interrelated with various social forces, leading to linguistic identity clashes and latent social inequalities among students from different ethnic groups. These findings remind us of the notion of 'identity in practice' (Penuel &Wertsch, 1995) and the importance of conceptualising language learning processes as inseparable from issues of practice, community and meaning. However, it is daunting to see that there has been very little recognition of such processes in Taiwan, leading to negligence of the impact of linguistic competition and identity clashes on both local plurilingual and intercultural education.

4. CONCLUSION

In the context of students' EFL learning experiences in four different school localities, which represent the four ethnic groups of Taiwan, this paper focuses on findings from the Hakka School to exemplify two key findings. First, Hakka students' emerging linguistic identity clashes appear to impact their language learning processes in relation to both English and the Hakka ethnic dialect. Second, to preserve the Hakka dialect, which is in immediate danger of extinction, students are encouraged to engage in mother-tongue education; this, however, is also a source of emerging inequality. EFL learning does not take place as an isolated practice, but is constituted and shaped by students' surrounding social, cultural and historical situations. While English is the lingua franca of global commerce and a symbol of high aspiration, thus increasingly essential for achievement of business success, mother-tongue education, which is a more recent educational policy in Taiwan, is intended to bridge the linguistic gap gradually emerging between Hakka generations (as well as the generations of other ethnicities) due to the considerable shift of the younger generation from their ethnic dialects to Mandarin and English. In comparison with their urban counterparts, there is a case for arguing that minority students, such as the Hakka students, are positioned unequally by policymakers who encourage them to save endangered languages, regardless of linguistic priority. While we have for some time referred to an 'urban-rural divide' in English language education in Taiwan, a new and worrisome dimension is presenting among other social groups in Taiwanese society.

The Council of Europe is committed to valuing linguistic and cultural diversity, in an attempt to pursue quality and equity of education for learners from all different social groups. Given the above findings from the Hakka case in Taiwanese society, challenges may emerge pertaining to the quandary of language priorities and sub-

sequent identity clashes, should this policy be implemented in plurilingual regions in Europe. Because it could be argued that the cultural contexts of Taiwan and the European countries are very different, a direct comparison of language learning in the two regions would not seem appropriate. Findings from the Hakka case do have strong implications here, however, and should not be underestimated. As argued above, language learning must be viewed as social, psychological and cultural processes that involve issues pertaining to practice, community and identity. Here we would follow Goullier's (2011) suggestions that, to ensure value and management of individual plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires, we must take into account the multiple relationships of learners' uses of languages with their languages of origin (i.e., mother tongues), languages learnt in school (e.g., English as a foreign language) and languages used in the community or at the state level (e.g. Mandarin Chinese).

Given the complex situations of language learning processes, questions and obstacles remain as to the implementation of plurilingual and intercultural education policies in Taiwan. Future attention may be given not only to the macro, functional modes of language acquisition but also to the micro, developmental and sociolinguistic aspects of identity formation in language learning processes, which involve learners' negotiations of the meanings of experiences with memberships in social communities through fluency in particular languages. By doing so, we may expect to truly embrace linguistic and cultural diversity through the support of plurilingual and intercultural educational policies.

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