

# Some Language Problems of Formosa

*John Whitehorn*

The language situation in Formosa nowadays is very complicated. In the mountains there are 150,000 people of Malayo-Polynesian race divided up into ten different tribes with their mutually unintelligible languages. Those in the twenty-five to forty-five age-group speak Japanese, although they cannot read it with any great measure of understanding. The children and a few of the adults are now being taught Mandarin Chinese, the National Language, to a slightly higher standard, with six years of primary schooling for all and increasing opportunities for the most intelligent children to have secondary education of some sort. But it should be noted that Chinese, of any dialect, is much more difficult for the mountain people to learn than Japanese was, because of the nature of the languages.

The next group to arrive in Formosa were those of Chinese race who began coming across from the mainland in the seventeenth century. There are now some six million of these 'Formosan-Chinese', who may conveniently be called Taiwanese, from the Chinese name for Formosa. These are divided into those who speak the Chinese dialect variously referred to as Fukien, Hokkien or Amoy and, on the other hand, the Hakka-speakers. Within both these divisions there are negligible dialectal differences as between the north and south of the island. The majority of these people, except the very old and young, speak Japanese; and educated people are often more at home in that language than in their mother tongue, especially when speaking of matters that are in any way technical. The young are being taught Mandarin and many adults too have at least a hearing knowledge of it. There is also an inordinate desire in this group for a knowledge of English! Educated Hakkas are still more polyglot with a knowledge of the Fukien dialect. Few Fukien-speakers have occasion to learn the dialect of the Hakka minority, who number about 600,000.

The last arrivals are the two million 'mainlanders' who have come in the last six years — the Kuomintang army and officials and others. They speak Mandarin, but not always very purely, with a great mixture of other dialects from all parts of China.

Among all these people the only indigenous Church is the Presbyterian Church of Formosa, which embraces the majority of the Christian 1% of the population. But recently large numbers of missionaries — Protestant and Roman — have flooded in and gathered groups of converts round themselves. Most of the members of the Presbyterian Church are (Fukien-speaking) Taiwanese and have their Bible and other Christian literature in their own language. Only one in ten uses the character versions, while nine out of ten use the simple version in roman script. Some Hakka Christians too use a form of roman script for the language, but they can also without much difficulty read Mandarin character script (with a Hakka pronunciation in reading aloud), Hakka being closer to Mandarin than the Fukien dialect. The 'main-

lander' Christians, of course, have Mandarin character Bibles and other literature.

To turn now to the Malayo-Polynesian mountain people; Christian work amongst them has only been allowed in the last ten years, so Bible translation work for them has not yet got very far. The following table shows the state of affairs approximately:

Tribe	Population	Proportion of Christians	State of Translation Work
Taiyal	20,000	high	Canadian studying the language.
Sediq	15,000	high	American translating St. Mark.
Bunun	18,000	medium	Taiwanese pastor O' Bun-ti at work since 1948. St. Matthew & Hymn-book printed in roman script. Catechism issued in Mandarin Phonetic Adaption. St. Mark & St. Luke in printing.
Ami	47,000	high	American studying the language.
Paiwan	40,000	10 %	Hymnbook and Gospel extracts & Catechism in Mandarin Phonetic Adaption.
Drukai	2,000	low	none
Pyuma	2,000	very low	none
Tsou	2,000	? nil	none
Kanakanabu & Saaroa	300	very low	none
Saiset	1,500	medium	none
Yami	1,800	high	none

(Notes: The Sediqs have usually been classified with the Taiyals, but the languages are mutually unintelligible.)

The Drukais and Pyumas are often classified with the Paiwans. In some books mention is made of the 'Tsarisen' tribe: this is a misunderstanding because the Drukais and north-west Paiwans refer to themselves as *katsarishian*, meaning 'people of the mountain slopes'!

The indications in the third column are, of course, only very rough. 'High' means that there are churches in most villages. The Paiwan '10 %' comes between 'medium' and 'low'.

Apart from some small sects of Chinese origin, Christian work in the mountains has been confined to the Presbyterian Church, and all those working on the languages co-operate with that Church. A Roman priest has started learning Paiwan, and others may have started on other languages more recently: it is not known whether they would attempt translation work.)

My own work has been among the Paiwans. When I arrived in 1952 the Gospel had been preached to them in the north-western part of the tribal area for six years and there were about 1,000 Christians. They had some Japanese Bibles and hymn-books, which they could read to some extent but not understand well. One or two of the preachers had translated some hymns from the Japanese and had written them down in the nearest approximation they could get to the Paiwan sounds

with the Japanese syllabary of fifty-two symbols (ka, ki, ku, ke, ko, etc.). This, of course, was very far from satisfactory. For example, I remember being told that the word for 'spouse' was *tsukuru*, only to find later that this was a Japanisation of *tsəkəl*. (An interesting example of the opposite process — the reduction of a Japanese CVCVCV loan-word to the typical Paiwan CVCVC — is the word *vakits*: this comes, via *baketsu*, from 'bucket'!)

Since the use of Japanese script was naturally frowned upon by the government, it was decided to reduce the language to a roman script, as had been done already for the Bunun language by Pastor O'. It was found possible to use an alphabet of twenty-five letters, and the hymns which the Paiwan preachers had translated were written in this alphabet. The forty hymns were duplicated, with the Mandarin character hymn derived from the same English original on the opposite page. The idea of this diglot was to make the innovation more acceptable to the government officials by suggesting that we were encouraging the people to learn the official language along with their own. 450 copies of this hymnbook were sold and a fair number of people gained an ability to read the roman script, although no systematic literacy campaigns were undertaken in the circumstances.

But the use of roman scripts was increasingly frowned upon by the government and it was found necessary to make a change. Some officials had already suggested that we should use the Mandarin phonetic script. This is a system of thirty-nine symbols which can be written beside a character to give its pronunciation, to which the shape of a character gives no clue. This system was pioneered by missionaries on the mainland, and is now used in the primary schools for teaching children the characters and their pronunciation. But once the characters are known the phonetic symbols are no longer used. They are to be seen sometimes beside the characters for the names of roads or of stations on the railway; and there are Scriptures printed in Mandarin character-plus-phonetic, but they are bulky and little used. Only now that the government has decreed that when the Bible is read in public in the mountains it must be read in Mandarin, the preachers can read aloud from this phonetic script, which is comparatively easy to learn, even if they can't understand the characters and the hearers can't understand what they are saying!

This Mandarin phonetic script, then, was designed just to give the pronunciation of Mandarin. But experiments had already been made with the adaptation of it to fit other languages. A Christian member of the National Language (i.e. Mandarin) Promotion Committee, a government-sponsored organisation, had adapted it for writing the Fukien Chinese dialect and Taiyal. He has produced a Mandarin Chinese-Fukien Chinese dictionary using this adaptation and one or two booklets, but I doubt whether they are being used. But with his help we also made an adaptation for Paiwan, and since then others have been similarly made for Bunun and Sediq.

The adaptation for Paiwan took the following form. For the three full vowels (a, i, u) we could use the Mandarin Phonetic symbols unchanged.

For the weak vowel (ə) we made a new symbol by adding a stroke to the 'u' symbol. This was because there are some words with dialectal differences involving alternation of 'u' and 'ə' — e.g. *gadu* or *gadə*, meaning 'heights'. But there are not many of these words, and it might have been better to make up a new 'ə' symbol quite unlike the 'u' symbol.

We could take over unchanged the symbols for 'm', 'n', 'l' and 's'. Only we have had some trouble with 'l'; I still think that the Paiwan 'l' and the Mandarin 'l' are virtually the same sound, but Taiwanese teachers apparently teach in the schools an incorrect pronunciation of the Mandarin 'l'; so the children ask why the one symbol has different pronunciations in Mandarin and Paiwan.

Symbols for 'v' and 'ng' are not needed in standard Mandarin, but have been used at times on the mainland for certain Mandarin dialects, so we have adopted them.

For the Paiwan flapped 'r' we have used the symbol for Mandarin 'er', although in Mandarin the sound is restricted in its positioning and cannot be used as a full consonant in the way that the flapped 'r' is used in Paiwan.

In the stop consonants Mandarin has a distinction between aspiration and non-aspiration — e.g. 'ph' and 'p' — while Paiwan has an unvoiced-voiced distinction — e.g. 'p' and 'b'. Here we followed the usage already adopted for the adaptation of Mandarin Phonetic to Fukien Chinese and used the symbol for the Mandarin non-aspirated 'p' to represent the Paiwan unvoiced 'p', and added a twiddle to this symbol to make a new symbol for the Paiwan voiced 'b'.

The same was done with the pairs 't', 'd'; 'k', 'g'; and 'ts', 'dz'; the distinction being made in each case by a similar twiddle on the voiced member of the pair. This is perhaps rather academic, since the layman is unaware of any connection between, for example, 'b' and 'p'. Entirely distinct symbols might have been easier to learn and have reduced the number of printer's errors. But fortunately 'b', 'd' and 'g' at least are not so common.

We did, however, get into a further complication with the 't', 'd' and 'c', 'j' pairs. In southern dialects of Paiwan the distinction between 't' and 'c' and between 'd' and 'j' is clearly audible, but in the north-west where I worked (this being the area where the great bulk of the Paiwan Christians are) it is far from clear. This was not merely a matter of *my* ear, because if I asked about this point my informant would say the word over to himself several times before deciding in favour of one or other of the consonants concerned. (This point is also illustrated by the way the Japanese syllabary has been used for representing these sounds. Southern Paiwans represent *ta* by Japanese *ta*, and *ca* by Japanese *chya*; whereas north-western Paiwans represent both *ta* and *ca* by Japanese *ta*.) In view of the confusion and apparent free variation between the members of these pairs, it seemed best to make the symbols similar. In the romanisation we had represented 'c' by 'tt' and 'j' by 'dd'. In the Mandarin Phonetic adaptation we made the distinction by the addition of a stroke in each case. Unfortunately, as the distinction between 't' and 'd' was only made by a twiddle, the

result was a series of four similar symbols, which do cause some difficulty: —

t — basic form	d — basic plus twiddle
c — basic plus stroke	ɟ — basic plus twiddle and stroke

Paiwan has another stop consonant not found in Mandarin, a glottal stop in the north-west but a uvular stop elsewhere. For this we made a new symbol by adding a stroke to the 'k' symbol.

Similarly we added a stroke to the symbol for the flapped 'r' to represent the rolled 'r'. And a stroke across the 'i' symbol gave the consonantal 'y'.

One entirely new symbol was required, for 'dr', a retroflex 'd' with strong 'r' quality.

Mandarin Phonetic has a series of symbols for diphthongs and vowel-plus-nasal endings. Some of these might be used for Paiwan, but in fact only those for 'ai' and 'au' have been retained, and even these have not been consistently used, since the diphthongal quality of such vowel combinations in Paiwan is not clear. The use of 'ai' or 'a-i' and of 'au' or 'a-u' seems to be equally acceptable.

This then is the Mandarin Phonetic Adaptation used for Paiwan. As a linguist I was appalled at the idea when it was first suggested, the phonetic systems of Mandarin and Paiwan being so very dissimilar. But such freedom of adaptation was allowed that I think the resulting system is quite respectable linguistically. (It has been pointed out to me that a possible precedent is the adaptation of the Greek alphabet to the Slav languages in the 9th century!)

Since the Paiwan Christians had only just tackled the task of learning the roman script, I did not expect them to react favourably to having to change over and learn another script. But the M.P.A. has the advantage that they have learnt half the symbols in school or at Mandarin classes for adults, whereas with the roman script they had to start from scratch. So whereas only 450 copies of the roman script hymn-book had been sold in a year (admittedly under the shadow of a government threat to ban roman script), the first edition of 500 copies of the same hymn-book reissued in M.P.A. was sold out in a couple of months. This edition had been written by hand and duplicated, but plans were made to have type made and reissue it in printed form. With this type we printed a booklet called "Light on the Christian's Path", containing a bare outline of the life of Jesus from extracts from the Gospels and the Passion Narrative from St. Mark in full; also a catechism, and the forms for the services of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

It is said that literacy campaigns should not be initiated unless there is the prospect of adequate literature to follow up with. And there was no immediate prospect of that in this case, as I was due to return to England for theological studies at that point (July 1954) after my preliminary preparation for translation work. We therefore did no more than teach the church leaders the new script and leave it to them to teach others who wished to learn. I hope to find out how matters stand when I return to Formosa next year.