

REPORT ON SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL,  
AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC ISSUES  
THAT IMPACT  
THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING POPULATION  
OF TAIWAN

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## Contents

- 0 Introduction
- 1 Demographics
- 2 Diagnosis of hearing impairment
- 3 Remediation
- 4 Identity
- 5 Social welfare
  - 5.1 Legal rights
  - 5.2 Stipends, services, and subsidies
- 6 Education
  - 6.1 History
  - 6.2 Legal requirements
  - 6.3 Funding
  - 6.4 General trends
    - 6.4.1 Mainstreaming
    - 6.4.2 Oralism
    - 6.4.3 Transition services
  - 6.5 Schools for the deaf
  - 6.6 Special classes for the hearing impaired
  - 6.7 Provision for post-secondary education
- 7 Economics
  - 7.1 Legal rights
  - 7.2 Vocational training
  - 7.3 Employment
  - 7.4 Income
- 8 Christian faith
- 9 Sociolinguistic issues
  - 9.1 Attitudes toward the deaf, deafness, and TSL
  - 9.2 Fluency and language contact
  - 9.3 Interpreters
- 10 Dialects
- 11 Literature and videos for the deaf and hard of hearing
  - 11.1 Discussion
  - 11.2 Summary
  - 11.3 Areas for further study
- References
  - Chinese references
  - English references

## Abstract

This report provides an introduction to policies, institutions, and social attitudes that affect Taiwan's hearing-impaired population. The report consists of (1) an overview of public provision for the hearing impaired in Taiwan and (2) a discussion of social attitudes toward the hearing impaired and Taiwan Sign Language. Factors with the potential of influencing the use of translated or indigenous material in Taiwan Sign Language are given particular consideration.

### 0 Introduction

The hearing impaired population of Taiwan is a marginalized minority. The assumption, common among Taiwanese, that culture is necessarily linked to ethnicity contributes to their marginality. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Taiwan are not regarded by the hearing population as possessing a distinct culture since hearing impairment is not correlative with ethnic origin. Hearing impairment is regarded as a physical disability, not a cultural trait. Yet the hearing impaired are treated as a collective by both public institutions and Taiwanese society. This report provides an introduction to the policies, institutions, and social attitudes that contribute to the demarcation of Taiwan's hearing impaired as an identifiable subpopulation of Taiwan. The two strands that comprise this introduction are, first, a diachronic and synchronic overview of the public provision for the hearing impaired, specifically in terms of social welfare and access to education, and, second, a discussion of social attitudes toward the hearing impaired and Taiwan Sign Language. It is my intent to consider factors that might mitigate or enhance the utility of translated and indigenous material in Taiwan Sign Language. More broadly, this report provides a summary of factors that would affect a language development program among Taiwan's hearing impaired population.

### 1 Demographics

As of mid-2002 the official deaf and hard of hearing<sup>1</sup> population in Taiwan was 82,558 (Ministry of the Interior 2001). This represents 0.37 percent of the population of Taiwan and 11 percent of Taiwan's official disabled population. The official figure likely seriously underestimates the actual number of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

### 2 Diagnosis of hearing impairment

Taiwan has a relative shortage of audiologists in comparison to other developed countries. The ratio of audiologists to the general population in Taiwan is approximately 1:200,000. The ratio in the U.S. is approximately 1:22,000. In Australia the ratio is roughly 1:30,000, and in Canada 1:50,000 (Cheng [1998]). Probable effects of the audiologist shortage in Taiwan are the lack of detection of hearing loss and the misdiagnosis of the hearing impaired.

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<sup>1</sup>In the United States and other English-speaking countries, the term "Deaf" is used to refer to a unique culture or identity, usually national, of individuals with hearing impairments. In some of these same contexts, notably the United States, the term "deaf" is used in reference to individuals with severe hearing impairment while "hard-of-hearing" is used in reference to individuals with mild to moderate hearing loss. It is not clear what, if any, the preferred autonym of Taiwanese who identify with Taiwan Deaf culture is.

### **3 Remediation**

Between 1988 and 2002 approximately 400 hearing impaired individuals received cochlear implants in Taiwan. More than two-thirds of these were elementary and preschool children (Lin and Jang 2002). The Children's Hearing Foundation (CHF), the National Women's League Foundation for the Hearing Impaired (NWL), and the Shenghui Society are local organizations at the forefront of promoting cochlear implants.

CHF provides auditory-verbal teaching for deaf children in Taipei and Kaohsiung and intends to extend its services to Ilan and Taichung. CHF estimates that it had served 575 patients by early 2001. Patients range in age from infants to 14 (Chang 2001). Between 1997 and 1999 a rehabilitation curriculum for hearing impaired children was implemented by National Taiwan Normal University and NWL, presumably in Taipei (Lin and Jang 2002).

### **4 Identity**

As noted, Taiwanese do not perceive the deaf and hard of hearing as possessing a distinct language or culture. Likewise, many of Taiwan's deaf and hearing impaired do not regard themselves as possessing a unique culture, language, or identity (Susan Duncan, personal communication). According to Chang (2002), factors that contribute to the self-identity of the hearing impaired in Taiwan are the attitudes of family, friends, teachers, educational experience, parental values, and interaction with other hearing impaired individuals.

### **5 Social welfare**

#### **5.1 Legal rights**

The government of Taiwan and most Taiwanese regard the deaf and hard of hearing as physically handicapped. The rights of the handicapped to medical services, obstacle-free environments, education, transition services, and employment are guaranteed in the Additional Articles of the ROC Constitution (1997). Article 10 of the Additional Articles (1997) states:

The State shall guarantee for physically and mentally handicapped persons insurance, medical care, obstacle-free environments, education and training, vocational guidance, and support and assistance in everyday life, and shall also assist them to attain independence and to develop.

The rights of the handicapped to an education and transition services are reaffirmed in the Special Education Law (1984, rev. 1997). The Protection Law for Individuals with Disabilities (rev. 1990, 1997) provides for employment quotas, residential, institutional and community care for the disabled, and subsidies for national health insurance and disability-related equipment purchases such as hearing aids. In addition, it reaffirms the right to obstacle-free environments and transition services. The disabled are defined by the Protection Law as "...the autistic and people with serious facial injuries or major organ malfunction" (Government Information Office 2000 Social welfare). This is interpreted to be inclusive of the deaf and hard of hearing.

## 5.2 Stipends, services, and subsidies

According to Wanne (2002), more than 50 percent of the total national social welfare budget is dedicated to services for the disabled. In Taiwan, social welfare for the disabled falls into one of five categories: benefits or public assistance, residential/institutional care, medical care, rehabilitative services, and job training and opportunities. Taiwan's deaf are said to regard the last two categories as most critical, specifically the accessibility of sign language interpreters, the subsidization of hearing aid purchases, and vocational training (Wanne 2002).

The national government provides monthly cash stipends for the disabled as well as various services. The monthly stipend is NT\$3,000 (approximately US\$85). Civil service exams for the disabled were instituted in 1996. Seven regional service centers provide vocational, educational, and recreation services and thirty-eight training institutes (both public and private) provide training in life skills (2000 figure). The telecommunications network in Taiwan provides TDD services.

At the local level, the primary public service targeted at the deaf and hard of hearing community is sign language interpretation. Interpreter services are largely, perhaps solely, limited to Taipei City and Kaohsiung City. In 2000 Taipei employed four full-time employees with sign language skills. Interpreter services are provided at the Taipei City Hall and the municipal Bureau of Social Affairs' employment resource center for disabled citizens. The Bureau of Social Affairs established a 24-hour sign language interpreter service for the greater Taipei area in October 2002. The purpose of the service was to assist the deaf in communicating with city bureaucracies. In Kaohsiung, interpreter services are provided at the city hall and for municipal conferences.

Subsidies are a crucial component of government benefits for the disabled at both the local and national levels. At the national level subsidies are provided for primary through tertiary education. National health insurance is subsidized. For the severely disabled, full subsidies of the health insurance premiums are provided as well as the free treatment of serious injuries. The severely disabled are also eligible for long-term care at an institution for the handicapped. For the moderately disabled, there are discounted premiums for national health insurance. In addition, the moderately disabled are required to pay only a nominal fee for outpatient services. However, despite these subsidies the lack of access to adequate communication services continues to prevent the deaf from accessing appropriate health care (Wanne 2002). In 1998 medical subsidies for the disabled totaled US\$16.6 million.

For the hearing impaired, hearing aid purchases are subsidized every three years and fax machine purchases are subsidized every five years. Although not a subsidy per se, the government budgets significant amounts for the research and development of equipment for the disabled (Wanne 2002). Subsidies are otherwise provided to Taiwan's disabled in the form of discounted fares on city buses and on-island flights, income tax deductions and low interest business loans.

A smattering of benefits and subsidies are provided for the disabled in specific cities. Housing benefits vary by municipality. Subsidies provided by the Kaohsiung city government include: (1) the subsidization of the tuition of disabled children enrolled in primary or secondary schools or legal nurseries, (2) annual subsidies for the purchase of equipment related to the disability, (3) a bus service for the disabled, and (4) parking IDs

for disabled city residents. Taipei provides free parking in public parking lots for the disabled as well as other benefits.

## **6 Education**

### **6.1 History**

In 1889 William Campbell, an English Presbyterian missionary, established a School for the Blind in Tainan. After the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, the Chinese government ceded control of Taiwan to the Japanese. The Japanese authorities soon assumed responsibility for the School for the Blind. The school became affiliated with the Tzu-Huey School and was renamed the Institution for the Blind. In 1915 a department for the mute was established and the school was renamed the Tainan School for the Blind and the Mute. Presumably, the department for the mute provided instruction for both mute and deaf students. It was not until 1917 that a second school for the deaf, Taipei School for the Deaf, was established. In 1922 oversight for the Tainan School for the Blind was assigned to the Tainan *cho* (district) authorities. The school was renamed the Tainan Cho School for the Blind and Mute to reflect the change in administrative oversight.

Both the Taipei School for the Deaf and the Tainan School for the Blind and Mute used Japanese Sign Language (JSL), but reflecting the divergent places of origin of the teachers at the two schools, the Taipei school used the Tokyo dialect of JSL as its medium of instruction while the Tainan school used the Osaka dialect.

After World War II, the San Francisco Peace Treaty ceded oversight of Taiwan to the Republic of China. The Tainan Cho School for the Blind and Mute was renamed the Taiwan Provincial Tainan School for the Blind and the Mute. Among the mainlanders who arrived in Taiwan in the late 1940s were two teachers from the Nanking School for the Deaf, Lu Chou-ou and Chiang Su-nung. In 1950 Lu and Chiang established the China School for the Deaf in Keelung, where Lu, who was himself deaf, served as the principal. Most of the teachers at the school were graduates of the National Nanking School for the Deaf. The school later relocated to Taichung and then to Hsinchu. Shortly after the second move, the school stopped accepting deaf students. Meanwhile, Chiang and three of the other teachers from the school established the Chiying School for the Deaf in Kaohsiung. The Chiying School only provides elementary education.

In 1956 the Tainan Provincial School for the Blind and Mute established a campus in Fengyuan, a suburb of Taichung. The campus became an independent school four years later. To reflect its new status, its name was changed to the Provincial Taichung School for the Deaf. It relocated to Taichung in 1979 in response to the limited enrollment in Fengyuan. The Tainan school was renamed the Taiwan Provincial Tainan School for the Deaf in 1968 and enrollment at the school was restricted to hearing impaired students. Instruction was provided for kindergarten through senior high school students. In 1985 the school in Tainan moved its junior high school and vocational senior high school to Hsinhua, Tainan County.

The mainstreaming of hearing impaired students gained popularity in Taiwan in the 1980s. Taipei was the first city to provide classes for the hearing impaired in regular schools. Other locales gradually established their own special classes for the hearing impaired. Now most hearing impaired students in Taiwan are enrolled in special classes at regular schools. It was also in the 1980s that the movement toward the adoption of

oralism (the use of speech by the hearing impaired) began. More recently, influenced by Lin Bao-Guey and other theorists, schools for the deaf have adopted the total communication method. “Total communication” refers to the use of speech and, in the Taiwan context, Signed Mandarin in communication by and with the deaf.

## **6.2 Legal requirements**

The constitutional and legal basis of the right of the mentally and physically handicapped to an education was referred to in Section 5.1. In addition to reaffirming the right of the handicapped to an education, the Special Education Law also provides part of the legal framework for the mainstreaming of handicapped students. The law specifies that at the preschool level physically and mentally handicapped children should study with children who are not handicapped. It also reaffirms the right of the handicapped to transition services, defined as “guidance for education, living, employment, psychological guidance, social welfare, and other related professional services” (cited in Lin 2002:2).

## **6.3 Funding**

According to Article 164 of the ROC Constitution, a minimum of 15 percent of the national budget, 25 percent of the Taiwan provincial budget, and 35 percent of the municipal and county budgets must be allocated to education. Expenditure on education by all levels of government at all levels accounted for 18.5 percent of the total budget and 15.3 percent of the national budget in the 1998 fiscal year (Ministry of Education, Bureau of Statistics 1999).

These expenditure requirements were superseded by Article 10 of the Additional Articles of the ROC Constitution (1997), which simply states, “Priority shall be given to...funding for compulsory education.” In 2000 the passage of a draft law of Educational Budget Allocation and Management (教育經費編列與管理法) by the Legislative Yuan marked a move back toward stipulated percentages. The draft stipulates that the education budget shall not be less than 21.5 percent of the average national budget of the three previous years. According to Cheng ([1998]), additional legislation requires that at least 3 percent of the national educational budget and 5 percent of local governmental educational budgets be allocated to special education. In the 1998 fiscal year, special education accounted for just 0.94 percent of total educational expenditures (MOE Bureau of Statistics 1999).

## **6.4 General trends**

### **6.4.1 Mainstreaming**

The goal of mainstreaming handicapped students has been reflected in Taiwan’s national educational policy since 1945 (Chuang 2001). A nationwide survey in 1976 revealed that most handicapped students were enrolled in regular schools (GIO 2000 Education). A similar survey in 1993 found the same state of affairs; the majority of handicapped students were enrolled in regular schools (GIO 2000 Social welfare). Although the Special Education Law only stipulates the mainstreaming of handicapped preschool children, provision is also made in the educational system for mainstreaming at other grade levels. According to the ROC 2000 Yearbook (GIO 2000 Education), “special education students may be recommended for entrance to senior high school in

accordance with the Special Recommendation Measures of Advancement Governing the Age and Years of Study for Special Students.”

For parents of hearing impaired children, mainstreaming continues to be the most popular educational option. Most parents with hearing impaired children are reluctant to enroll their children in schools for the deaf due to the perception that the education at schools for the deaf is of poor quality and the stigma of mental retardation with which students at schools for the deaf are labeled. In a 2000 survey administered to teachers and parents of children at the three municipal schools for the deaf in Taiwan, Lee (2002) found that most parents and most teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the mainstreaming of hearing impaired preschool children.

Mainstreaming is one of the primary aims of the Taiwan’s hearing impairment remediation movement. The Children’s Hearing Foundation has as one of its stated goals to allow children to enroll in regular schools after “some years” of auditory-verbal therapy (Chang 2001).

#### **6.4.2 Oralism**

Regular schools promote oralism (the use of speech by the hearing impaired) in special classes for the hearing impaired and among hearing impaired students who are enrolled in special education classes (Lin and Yang 2002). In schools for the deaf, oralism forms one component of the total communication teaching method.

#### **6.4.3 Transition services**

The provision of skills and resources needed for integration into the society is a central aim of government education policies for the handicapped. In educating the handicapped, emphasis is placed on transition services. Lin (2002.2) defines policymakers and educators’ perception of transition services as “...a coordinated set of activities including early intervention, special education, post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation, and aging caring.” For deaf and hard of hearing students, transition services most often take the form of vocational training in junior and senior high schools.

### **6.5 Schools for the deaf**

In the 2001 academic year there were twenty-three special schools in Taiwan with 601 teachers, 603 classes, and 5,989 students (MOE Bureau of Statistics 2002). Three of the special schools are municipal schools for the deaf-*qi cong* (啓聰) schools—located in Taipei, Taichung, and Tainan. There is a preschool for infants and toddlers attached to the Taipei Municipal School for the Deaf. In the 2000 academic year the total elementary and above enrollment at the municipal schools for the deaf was 1,025. This represents approximately 0.028 percent of the total student enrollment in Taiwan’s primary and secondary schools (GIO 2002 Education). In addition, the private Chiying School provides an education for elementary deaf and hard of hearing students in Kaohsiung. And the Hui Ming School and Home for Blind Children in Daya, a Taichung suburb, has some multiply handicapped students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Schooling at the Taipei Municipal School for the Deaf Infant and Toddler preschool is five days per week; children are accompanied by their mothers. Oralism is encouraged. Children are taught to sound out vowels and consonants.

Schools for the deaf provide education at the kindergarten through secondary levels. Significant numbers of students in the schools for the deaf attend senior high school. According to one survey, a majority (81.14 percent) of the graduates of the junior high school for the deaf enroll in senior high school (cited in Lin et al. 2002). The date of this survey is not provided. It is also not clear if the percentage refers only to graduates of the Taipei junior high school for the deaf or to graduates of the junior high schools for the deaf in Tainan and Taichung as well.

The deaf schools have adopted the total communication teaching method. In practice what this means is intensive oral training with younger children and communication in Signed Mandarin with those students who fail to become adept at lip-reading. Referring to the senior high school at the Taipei municipal school, Wang (2002) states, "In classroom [sic], 'grammatical sign language' [Signed Mandarin] is used between teachers and hearing impaired students....The teacher address [sic] hearing impaired students by gesturing the student's name word for word in grammatical sign language while saying the student's name at the same time." Taiwan Sign Language is used by students with peers, not in the classroom setting. Hsing (1998) notes that the students are often the ones who teach the new teachers Taiwan Sign Language. Increasing numbers of students at the deaf schools are multiple handicapped (Chang 2001), exacerbating parents' concerns that their children will be stigmatized if they attend a deaf school.

At the secondary level, an emphasis is placed on vocational training. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals seem to feel that the training currently being provided is adequate. In a recent survey, there was a general consensus among deaf adults that there is "ample" vocational training for deaf students at the junior and senior high school levels (Hsing 1998).

Private schools with deaf students (the Hui Ming School and the Chiying School) are reporting the same shift in demographics as the public deaf schools, namely, increasing numbers of multiple-handicapped students. Like the public schools, the private schools provide intensive oral training for their students at all grade levels.

## **6.6 Special classes for the hearing impaired**

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), in the 2000 academic year there were 92,492 students in 4,783 special classes for the disabled or gifted in 2,670 mainstream schools. In addition, there were 1,061 resource rooms, which provided services for 33,766 elementary and high school students. In 1998, 4.7 percent of the special classes were for hearing-impaired students, who constituted 1.75 percent of the students enrolled in special classes (Cheng [1998]). This suggests that in 2000 there were approximately 225 classes for the hearing-impaired, providing services for approximately 1,600 students or 0.04 percent of the total elementary and high school student population. According to a recent survey, a majority (76.29 percent) of the junior high graduates of special classes for the deaf enroll in senior high school (cited in Lin et al. 2002).

## **6.7 Provision for post-secondary education**

The MOE provides higher education subsidies for the physically handicapped. In 1997, fifty-six junior colleges and universities were granted subsidies for 873 handicapped students, of whom 248 were hearing impaired. According to the Republic of China yearbook 2000 (GIO 2000 Education), subsidies were granted for 1,153 handicapped students in 1998. The yearbook does not specify the number of hearing impaired students who received subsidies.

## **7 Economics**

### **7.1 Legal rights**

The Protection Law for Individuals with Disabilities (rev. 1990, 1997) mandates employment quotas for the physically disabled. Specifically, the law stipulates that 1 percent of the employees of private businesses with more than a hundred employees must be disabled individuals and that 2 percent of the workforce of government offices, public schools, government enterprises and other public institutions with fifty or more employees must be disabled individuals. According to the Ministry of the Interior's Department of Social Affairs in June 1999, all affected employers were meeting or had exceeded their employment quotas (GIO 2000 Social welfare). Social activists are less sanguine about the rate of compliance (cf. Wanne 2002).

Employers who violate the employment quota are required to pay a monthly fine equivalent to a worker's base monthly salary (US Department of State 1999). The fines are paid into special accounts for handicapped welfare administered by city and county social services department. These funds are designated for making workplaces handicap-accessible, paying the first three months' salary of disabled employees, and underwriting half the salary of each disabled employee hired above the mandated quota (GIO 2000 Social welfare).

### **7.2 Vocational training**

According to Shue and Shue (1994, cited in Lin 2002), most hearing impaired individuals in Taiwan lack the vocational skills to obtain employment near their place of residence. Deaf associations in Taiwan occasionally hold employment seminars for the deaf and hard of hearing. Chow and Tseng (2002) refer to four employment seminars held in 2001. Common topics at these seminars are employers' perceptions of deaf employees, work opportunities for the deaf, deaf schools' job placement programs, and government assistance in job placement. In 1999 some Taipei Rotary Clubs began to hold leadership training camps for deaf youth (Chow and Tseng 2002).

Vocational training is sometimes targeted at the deaf and hard of hearing outside of the school context. In 1997 the National Association of the Deaf ROC began to offer classes in producing documentaries. Twenty films were produced between 1997 and 2000 (Deaf filmmakers 2000). The Chinese National Association of the Deaf (CNAD) recently proposed training the deaf in Surface Mount Technology, the process by which electronic components are attached to PCB material (Chow and Tseng 2002).

### **7.3 Employment**

The majority (75.9 percent) of individuals with disabilities in Taiwan over the age of 15 are not in the workforce. In 2000 according to Ministry of the Interior estimates, a

fifth of the disabled (19.1 percent) were employed and 5 percent were unemployed (cited in Lin 2002:3). Over the last decade official estimates of the percentage of hearing impaired individuals who are unemployed have varied widely (see table 1). The disparities between the estimates suggest that none of the estimates is reliable.

Table 1. A Summary of Three National Studies on Working of Individuals with Audio/Listening Impairments in Taiwan

Item	Taiwan Governmental Department of the Social Welfare (1992)		Department of the Internal Affairs of the ROC (1995)		Taiwan Governmental Department of the Labor Affairs (1996)		Average of the Employment Rates Employed (%)
	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)	
Categories of Disabilities Audio/listening impairments	75.0	25.0	31.3	68.7	59.9	40.1	55.4

(from Lin 2002:3)

In a reanalysis of a study of the utilization of transition services by disabled youth (age 17–25) (Lin, Chen, and Lin 2000), Lin (2002) concludes that the factors which correlated most highly with the need for transition services by the hearing impaired were the quality of interagency cooperation, work experience, the severity of the hearing impairment, and employment status. According to a survey by Sheu, Lin, and Shyu (cited in Lin 2002), parental assistance is often a crucial factor in the procurement of employment by the hearing impaired.

#### 7.4 Income

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals are typically paid less than hearing coworkers. The 2000 Census of the Needs of the Disabled revealed that half of the disabled recipients of social welfare benefits are near the poverty line (cited in Wanne 2002). Based on data from Lin, Chen, and Lin (2000), Lin (2002) concludes that most families (92.3 percent) of the youth with hearing impairments are of low socioeconomic status. However, this figure reflects the subjects' self-estimates and subjects were only given a choice of "high" or "low" status, and the subject sample included only twenty-six hearing impaired youth.

#### 8 Christian faith

In the late 1970s a Japanese missionary from the Toyo Roa Kurista Dendo Kyokai (Christ Oriental Deaf Church) founded a fellowship for the hearing impaired in Taipei. He later founded a similar fellowship in Tainan. These fellowships disbanded after the missionary returned to Japan. In December 1990, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) started the Kaohsiung Sign Language Church. The evangelistic efforts of the Kaohsiung church have included gospel outreach programs at deaf schools, family counseling, and classes in flower arranging. As of 1997 the church had thirty-one baptized members (Pan 1997). In recent years the PCT has founded an additional two deaf churches: the Special Love Sign Language Church in Taipei and the Sign Language Church in Tainan. Also, a church for the deaf in the Taipei area and a church for the deaf in the Taichung area are associated with Deaf Ministries International.

## 9 Sociolinguistic issues

### 9.1 Attitudes toward the deaf, deafness, and TSL

In Taiwan, the value placed on Taiwan Sign Language (TSL) is context-dependent. On the one hand, there is widespread interest in and curiosity about TSL. Learning TSL is regarded as an interesting pastime for hearing individuals. It is quite common for sign language classes offered by government agencies and schools for the deaf to be fully enrolled. Sign language clubs are a popular extracurricular activity on many college and university campuses (Hsing 1998). It is not uncommon to see sign interpreters in interpreter boxes on Taiwanese television programs; airline safety announcements are interpreted. On the other hand, the deaf and hard of hearing are stereotyped as incompetent workers and undesirable colleagues and they are actively discouraged from using TSL. There is a privileging of Mandarin as the language of communication for the deaf and hard of hearing.

The term *jianquanren* (健全人) ‘robust person, normal person’ is used to refer to people who are not mute or hearing impaired. The implication is that the deaf are neither normal nor robust. The term *yakou* (啞口) ‘mute mouth’ refers to individuals who are deaf (Chao 1992). The deaf regard this term as derogatory. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals usually only appear in the news when they are accused of committing a crime.

There is a strong desire on the part of parents that their deaf child be regarded as “normal.” Normalcy is assumed to equate with oral communication and educational mainstreaming. Regarding oral communication, Yang (2002) states,

Parents...thought that the deaf children using sign language was not conducive to communicating with them; they wanted their deaf children to learn oral communication, without using sign language....Hearing parents severely forbade their children to use sign language and instead [insisted that they] use oral speech with hearing parents at home....Hearing parents...beat and scolded their children when they used sign language without speech...

The extent of this type of severe discrimination against the use of TSL is unclear. However, as noted there is a widespread reticence on the part of parents of deaf children to enroll their children in schools for the deaf.

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals who sign are regarded as intellectually deficient and languageless. Often deaf and hard of hearing signers also regard TSL as wrong, “ungrammatical,” or deficient and regard Signed Mandarin as the signing standard. Teachers at the schools for the deaf commonly concur with these assessments. The deaf are often embarrassed to share TSL with newcomers.

Linguistic attitudes and the availability and acceptance of surgical remediation contribute to the discouragement of the use of TSL by the deaf. Relatives and educators regard Mandarin as the preferred language for communication by and with the deaf and hard of hearing. TSL is suppressed and Mandarin and Signed Mandarin are encouraged, reflecting the belief that a deaf child who uses TSL will be less motivated to speak. Specifically, it is feared that he or she will be less likely to speak Mandarin. Signed Mandarin is promoted as an alternative to TSL since it is felt that Signed Mandarin will

better enable the deaf child to learn how to speak and to read Mandarin (Susan Duncan, personal communication; Wayne Smith, personal communication).

Cochlear implants are increasingly regarded as a universal cure for the hearing impairments of Taiwanese children. It is assumed that cochlear implant surgery should be the option of first choice and, post-surgery, children should undergo auditory and speech therapy but not be taught TSL as a supplementary means of communication. Duncan (personal communication) describes the result of the deprivileging of TSL as

less support for educational remediation efforts—...speech or Sign instruction—than there ever was. The census [enrollment] at the schools for the Deaf is down and so their funding is being cut. The first faculty who are let go are those who are Deaf themselves.

## **9.2 Fluency and language contact**

Deaf and hard of hearing Taiwanese exhibit a wide range of proficiency levels in TSL. They range from native signers of TSL to mainstreamed individuals most of whose interaction is with the hearing. The latter acquire TSL as a second language if at all (Susan Duncan, personal communication).

## **9.3 Interpreters**

As of 1999, there were eleven certified sign language interpreters in Taiwan (Smith 1999c). According to Taipei City Councilor Chiang Kai-shih (江蓋世), there were 100 certified sign language interpreters in Taiwan in 2002, fourteen of whom resided in Taipei City (Huang 2002). In Chen Yi-jun's opinion (personal communication), Chiang grossly overestimates the current number of certified interpreters. In the late 1990s, Liang Rung-huei (1997) developed a computerized glove that recognized and interpreted simple TSL sentences signed by the wearer. The glove is not commercially available.

## **10 Dialects**

In the literature Taiwan Sign Language is described as possessing two dialects, centered on the Taipei Municipal School for the Deaf and the Tainan School for the Deaf with differences primarily in the area of the lexicon (Smith 1989:1; Chao 1988:9–10). However, Jean Ann (personal communication) argues for the existence of a third dialect in Kaohsiung associated with the Chiying School, less similar to either the Tainan or Taipei dialects than the Tainan and Taipei dialects are to each other. Ann provides evidence suggesting that dialect differences are phonological as well as lexical. It is unclear if the variety of TSL used at the Taichung school is sufficiently divergent from other dialects to warrant description as a distinct dialect.

## **11 Literature and videos for the deaf and hard of hearing**

There is no Taiwan Sign Language Scripture translation. There is an ongoing video Scripture translation in Japanese Sign Language, which is estimated to be about 50 percent lexically similar to the Taipei and Tainan varieties of TSL.

### 11.1 Discussion

One mark of the marginalized status of hearing impaired individuals in Taiwan is the guesswork involved in estimates of the hearing impaired population. Given the local shortage of audiologists, the official population figure of 82,558 must be interpreted as an underestimate. Students who attend schools for the deaf or benefit from resource classes for the hearing impaired in regular schools represent just 0.07 percent of Taiwan's elementary and above student population (2,600 of 3.6 million). In contrast, figures from the US Department of Health and Human Services (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation 1996) indicate that 0.18 percent of children born in the U.S. in six of the years between 1982 and 1993 were hearing impaired. The discrepancy between the U.S. and Taiwan figures suggests that approximately 0.11 percent of Taiwan's school age population may be hearing impaired but undiagnosed as such. This represents roughly 4,000 children.

Despite the marginality of Taiwan's deaf and hard of hearing, they are treated as a distinct subpopulation by legislation, public institutions, and social attitudes. Although Taiwan's laws, institutions, and social attitudes differ in their perceptions of the hearing impaired—the laws generally regard the hearing impaired in a positive light and enumerate the benefits to which they are entitled while the general population regards the hearing impaired with prejudice—they concur in regarding hearing impairment as a physical handicap. Individuals with hearing impairments are only marginally differentiated from the larger handicapped population.

In Taiwan deafness is perceived as a physical disability. With the advent of cochlear implant technology, the assumption that cochlear implantation is a cure-all for hearing impairment, for children at least, has gained currency. Many Taiwanese assume that the deaf and hard of hearing population ought to decline and hearing impaired individuals ought to be assimilated into hearing culture. This perspective is augmented by the negative stereotype of deaf individuals as dishonest and mentally retarded. There is an element of shame or embarrassment about deaf family members and a corresponding desire to conceal, ignore, or ameliorate the hearing impairment. One method of concealment is through the mainstreaming of deaf children in regular schools. Concern for the academic success of the deaf child is secondary to the desire that the child conform to social norms. The performance of the mainstreamed hearing impaired child depends on various factors, including the degree of hearing impairment, family support, self-motivation, and the quality of instruction and the availability and quality of resources for the hearing impaired in the regular school.

Taiwan Sign Language is not regarded as a real language by most Taiwanese. The popularity of Taiwan Sign Language classes has not altered this perception. The prevalence of Taiwan Sign Language clubs on college campuses may cause college age and young adult Taiwanese to conceptualize the language as physical exercise, associating it with the physical skills required by other popular extracurricular activities such as dancing and intramural sports. The hearing impaired are considered languageless except for any ability they possess to communicate in Mandarin or Taiwanese or in Signed Mandarin, itself construed as a stepping stone toward communication in Mandarin.

Official recognition of Taiwan's indigenous sign language does not exist. In Taiwan there is no legal equivalent of the 1988 resolution of the European Parliament on

sign languages. The 1988 Resolution unequivocally states, “sign language... can be properly be regarded as a language in its own right.” Despite this absence of legal recognition, Taiwan’s Ministry of Education has made some efforts at standardizing Taiwan Sign Language since the 1980s through the publication of lexicons and other material. These publications tend to incorporate lexical and grammatical elements of Signed Mandarin (Wayne Smith, personal communication).

Government publications on Taiwan Sign Language do not seem to be regarded as authoritative reference works by native signers. Native signers of TSL primarily learn the language through peer interaction in educational institutions or classes for the deaf. The hearing impaired acquire the sign language from their classmates rather than their teachers since the primary manual system used by the teaching staff at schools for the deaf is Signed Mandarin. The divergent places of origin of the original staff at the Taiwan’s schools for the deaf suggests that local varieties of sign language in Taiwan may possess significant linguistic differences. A paper by Hope Hurlbut (in progress) is expected to shed light on the lexical differences between Taiwan Sign Language varieties.

Taiwan Sign Language is the only accessible language option for profoundly deaf individuals in Taiwan. This primarily physiological fact suggests that Taiwan Sign Language will continue to be maintained by a significant percentage of Taiwan’s hearing impaired population despite the general absence of efforts by governmental and educational authorities to promote this indigenous sign language and its suppression in many families.

## **11.2 Summary**

The primary factor that would influence any language development program among the hearing impaired in Taiwan is the lack of official support for the maintenance of Taiwan Sign Language. Taiwan Sign Language is not taught or encouraged even in the schools for the deaf. The obvious significance of this fact for a language development program is compounded by the fact that in Taiwan outside of the school setting there is a real paucity of opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to meet and interact.

## **11.3 Areas for further study**

There is an absence of research on proficiency in either TSL or Mandarin among the hearing impaired population of Taiwan. No published research has been done on intelligibility between Taiwan Sign Language varieties. Hope Hurlbut’s paper on lexical differences between varieties of Taiwan Sign Language (referred to earlier) is a first step in that direction. There has not been any research on literacy rates among Taiwan’s hearing impaired. The present study provides a broad overview of social and educational factors that would impact any language development program among the hearing impaired. Any studies on the sociolinguistic situation of the deaf and hard of hearing population of Taiwan, particularly on matters of language proficiency and language use, would be welcome contributions.

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