

Language Contact in Saisiyat

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Saisiyat, a Formosan language spoken in western Taiwan, is made up of two dialects: Taai known as the Northern dialect – spoken in Wufeng township, Hsinchu county, and Tungho referred to as the Southern dialect – spoken in Nanchuang and Shihtan townships, Miaoli county.

The Saisiyat have lived in close interactions with other ethnic groups, including the *Taokas* (Western plains), the *Atayal* and the *Hakka* and centuries of language contact have resulted in acculturation and borrowing. For over a hundred year, Saisiyat has also been influenced by the language policies imposed by different governments. Taiwan was politically dominated by the *Japanese* for 50 years (1895-1945) and Saisiyat has borrowed words related to cultural material from Japanese. For about fifty years (1949-1987), the governmental policy dictated *Mandarin* as the only official language to be used on the island. This has, of course, accelerated the loss of this language among the younger generation.

Saisiyat has been deemed as a highly endangered language. However, the situation regarding language contact and language shift has never been really investigated and the situation reported in previous studies regarding its facing extinction needs to be tempered. The Taai and the Tungho dialects of Saisiyat have actually experienced quite different fates due to dissimilar language contact situations. The Northern Saisiyat is largely assimilated by Atayal, another Formosan language, which is spoken in most of the Wufeng territory. The Southern dialect, on the other hand, is still actively used though the influence of Hakka, a Chinese language, genetically unrelated, is noticeable in some villages/communities. The Hakka first settled in Nanchuang during the Qing dynasty and from the 1940s, they started to inhabit the Penglai area and later Tungho. Years of language contact have led to extensive borrowing and language shift from Saisiyat to Hakka in Penglai and Baguali in particular. Saisiyat in small settlements like Siangtianhu, where the Hakka have not penetrated, has remained little affected.

Population census, as of April 2014, is given in Table 1 that shows the dominance of the Atayal in Wufeng County and that of the Saisiyat in Nanchuang county.

Table 1: Population Census in Hsinchu and Miaoli counties¹

County	Township	No. of persons	Southern Min	Hakka	Formosan	
				Haixian/Hailu	Saisiyat	Atayal
Hsinchu	Wufeng	5,341	(--) ²	1,269	741	3,331
Miaoli	Nanchuang	10,972	76	8,806	1,542	548
	Shihtan	4,836	(--)	4,698	133	5

Table 2 depicts language use in the Tungho Saisiyat communities.

Table 2: Language use in the Tungho Saisiyat communities

	Siangtianhu Shihtan	Tungho	Penglai/Baguali	
Language	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese
Contact	Mandarin Chinese	Hakka	Hakka	Hakka
		Atayal	Mandarin Chinese	Mandarin Chinese
			Mandarin Chinese	

The present talk is based on extensive research on Saisiyat (see Zeitoun *et al.*, to appear and Zeitoun *et al.*, in preparation). It intends to assess language contact in Saisiyat and examine the respective influence of Atayal, Hakka, Japanese and Mandarin on this language and examine the changes that these have induced at different levels, semantic, phonological and morpho-syntactic.

Selected references

- Zeitoun, Elizabeth, Tai-hwa Chu, and Lalo a Tahesh Kaybaybaw. To appear. *A Study of Saisiyat Morphology*. Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press.
- Zeitoun, Elizabeth, Tai-hwa Chu, and Lalo a Tahesh Kaybaybaw. In preparation. *Saisiyat Dictionary*. Ms

¹ Based on data partly available on the CIP webpage
(<http://www.apc.gov.tw/portal/docList.html?CID=940F9579765AC6A0>)

² Unavailable data.