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Simultaneous promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism? Unpacking conflicting orientations of language as problem, right, and resource in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT
The Bilingual 2030 policy in Taiwan has garnered both support and criticism since it was introduced in 2018. Specifically, while the policy has been lauded for its vision to enhance Taiwan's competitiveness through English, its existence stands in sharp contrast with the multilingual reality of Taiwan and the fundamental principles upheld in the National Languages Development Act. In this paper, we adopt Ruiz's (1984) framework of language orientations to analyse how languages in Taiwan are positioned at the level of the state. The findings show that the manifested language orientations are multilayered and conflicting, carrying the following features: national languages as right and resource, English-centric bilingualism as resource, and Mandarin as problem, right, and resource. Although the government argues that bilingualism and multilingualism can be developed in parallel, we contend that this arrangement not only perpetuates the linguistic status quo (the dominance of Mandarin) but also exacerbates existing language hierarchies in Taiwan (national languages further marginalised by the elevated status of English). To strengthen multilingualism, we stress that state-level language policies need to be sufficiently discussed as an integrated whole so that consistency in language planning is ensured and interactions between the teaching and learning of different languages are optimised.

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Introduction

Language policymaking in multilingual jurisdictions is never an ideologically neutral process, but rather often a battlefield of class, race, and identity politics (Davies and Dubinsky 2018; Leung 2016). State-level decisions on language, essentially, require delicate balances of power and often involve 'not only the strategic need for enhancing global engagement and sustaining linguistic diversity', but also 'complex demographic and socio-cultural realities' resulting from internal and cross-border migration (Gao 2016, 691). In East Asia, what further complicates such decisions is balancing the rise of English, the dominant language(s) in each state, and the revitalisation of the many indigenous languages in this region (Kirpatrick and Liddicoat 2019).

The situation in Taiwan is no exception, where the linguistic landscape is described as 'a sinophone ecology marked by ethnolinguistic diversity' (Chen 2020, 124), the result of several waves of

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immigration in history. Building on Ruiz's (1984) language orientations framework, this study examines language politics in modern-day Taiwan, with a focus on unravelling complex dispositions exhibited towards a set of national languages. This is done by positioning two sets of language policies side by side, one on Bilingual 2030 and the other on the recent legalisation of national languages in Taiwan. A set of interconnected questions is proposed to address this concern:

RQ1: What does the promotion of bilingualism mean under the Bilingual 2030 policy?

RQ2: What implications does the legislation of national languages have for the promotion of multilingualism?

RQ3: What kind of linguistic future is envisioned under the simultaneous promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism?

In what follows, we first offer an overview of language policy and planning in Taiwan, paying particular attention to language politics since the 1950s. This leads to the conceptual framework, where Ruiz's (1984) orientations to language planning are explained. In the research design, we detail the official documents selected and how critical discourse analysis was conducted to yield intersecting ideologies underpinning the policies. The findings reveal three patterns: (1) national languages as right and resource, (2) English as resource, and (3) a conflicting problem, right, and resource orientation ascribed to Mandarin. We contend that while giving English the central stage (with Mandarin assumed) under the bilingual policy is possible, it restricts alternative ways of envisioning what bilingualism could mean and undermines all efforts to advance multilingualism in Taiwan. We thus stress that state-level language policies need to be sufficiently deliberated alongside each other – as an integrated whole and with issues of colonialism, nationalism, and neoliberalism in mind – to ensure consistency in language planning and to optimise interactions between the teaching and learning of different languages in Taiwan.

Language policy and planning in Taiwan

Language issues in Taiwan have been described as heavily ethnic-based,[1] and this reality is further complicated by a dynamic interplay between sociolinguistic, economic, and nation-building concerns (Dupré 2014, 2019; Ferrer and Lin 2021; Scott and Tiun 2007; Wu and Lau 2019; Yap 2018). In this section, we review the literature on language policy and planning (LPP) in Taiwan after the Nationalist takeover at the end of WWII, with a focus on language politics in recent decades, to show how LPP efforts have been deeply influenced by processes of decolonisation and democratisation (Dupré 2019; Price 2020).

Role of Mandarin in constructing Taiwan as the Republic of China

Officially known as the Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan has been and continues to be a site of linguistic struggle. The connection between Taiwan and the ROC is political, as the ROC was established in Taiwan when the Kuomintang (KMT), aka the Chinese Nationalists, retreated to Taiwan after losing the war against the Chinese Communist Party. To strengthen the legitimacy of the KMT's rule, several mechanisms were introduced under the Martial Law (1949-1987), a major one being linguistic control (Chen 2006; Scott and Tiun 2007). During this period, *Guoyu*, or Standard Mandarin, was constructed as an ethnolinguistically neutral language for communication, administration, and development (Dupré 2014, 2016; Price 2020; Scott and Tiun 2007; Yap 2018).

Characterised by pro-unification ideologies, the initial goal of the *Guoyu* policy was to eliminate the influence of Japanese; the emphasis then switched to removing other mother tongues (Dupré 2014, 2019; Tiun 2013; Wu and Lau 2019). The objective was to strengthen one ethnicity, one language, and one writing system. Education was the main tool for expanding the Mandarin-speaking population, often involving punishments[2] (Price 2020; Scott and Tiun 2007; Tiun 2013). Mandarin has consequently developed into a unique variety in Taiwan, with distinct phonological, syntactic, and orthographical features (Khoo 2021), and also with a different system of phonetic

symbols (Zhuyin Fuhao, or Bopomofo) from China's Hanyu Pinyin. Ironically, the state promotion of Mandarin did not accentuate the sense of 'Chineseness' among the Taiwanese; instead, it facilitated a burgeoning Taiwanese identity (Dupré 2013).

From Mandarin-only to Mandarin-plus

Following Taiwan's political liberalisation in the 1980s, language reforms have played a key role in achieving transitional justice, contextualised in the broader process of *bentuhua*, or Taiwanization, advocated primarily by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) formed one year before Martial Law ended (Dupré 2013; Price 2020; Scott and Tiun 2007). The *bentuhua* movement started from calls to de-Sinicize Taiwan, especially via Tâi-gí, the indigenised Southern Min spoken by the largest population. The focus later shifted to the promotion of linguistic diversity, founded on liberal conceptions of language rights, equality, and other democratic values (Chen 2010, 2020; Dupré 2014, 2016, 2019; Huan-Wells 2022; Kamakura 2023; Khoo 2021; Tiun 2013). This move to multilingualism and multiculturalism can be viewed as part of Taiwan's internal reconciliation trend, which has become more distinct as more New Immigrants from Southeast Asia arrive (Chen 2020; Cheng 2021).

Two interconnected events are critical in building the legal foundation of languages in Taiwan: the drafting of the Language Equality Law and the National Languages Development Act (NLDA) in the early 2000s. The former was about enhancing the status of Tâi-gí, Hakka, and indigenous languages, while the latter sought to move beyond the promotion of equality to deepening their usage and development (Dupré 2016). These efforts faced many obstacles, and discontinuation occurred when different political parties were in power (Chen 2020; Wu and Lau 2019). Promoting diversity, for some, was viewed as ideologically-driven, raising concerns of igniting interethnic distrust and damaging social harmony (Dupré 2016). It was not until 2019 that the NLDA was established.

Aside from pursuing legislation, substantive grassroots efforts have been dedicated to the revitalisation of local languages, the standardisation of their writing systems, and the implementation of mother tongue education (Dupré 2016; Price 2020; Tiun 2020). The native languages of New Immigrants are also included as an option in the national curriculum today. Yet, serious challenges persist: some stem from the lack of quality teaching materials and teachers; others originate from difficulties in sustaining language networks between families, schools, and communities (Chen 2006, 2010, 2020; Dupré 2014; Scott and Tiun 2007). Squeezed between Mandarin and English, mother tongues are increasingly used only as second or third languages (Chen 2020; Ferrer and Lin 2021; Hsu 2021; Price 2014; Tiun 2020).

English, competitiveness, and the struggle for international recognition

In Taiwan, foreign language teaching has historically been equated with English. Since 1968, English has become a middle school subject, with much attention given to the teaching of grammar and reading (Chen 2006). In the past three decades, globalisation has intensified the spread of English, and Taiwan's export-oriented economy contributed to language policies favouring English (Price 2014; Wu and Lau 2019). In most of the 2000s, the emphasis was not only on enforcing *bentuhua,* highlighted in 2.2, but also internationalisation (Chen 2006, 2010, 2020; Price 2014; Scott and Tiun 2007). One of the best-known policies the DPP implemented was Challenge 2008, aiming to deepen Taiwan's internationalisation via (1) implementing English language education in elementary schools, (2) launching the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), and (3) experimenting with English-medium instruction in higher education. Such efforts, however, had moderate impact on making English accessible to all. Contrarily, concerns related to low language esteem and worsening urban-rural/class-based divides grew stronger (Chen 2006, 2020; Lee 2020; Price 2014; Wu and Lau 2019).

Despite the limited effect of these English-centred policies, the perceived value attached to English remains high (Chen 2020). This zest is reflected in recurrent calls for making English an official language, with the most recent being 2017 when Mr. Lai, the then premier and now president of Taiwan, made the proposal again. Due to insufficient public debates and the lack of justification for bestowing such privileged status to English, the proposal was repackaged as the Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030 (National Development Council 2018). Subsequent documents refer to the policy as Bilingual 2030; nevertheless, the goals of the policy remain unchanged (Chang 2025; Her 2022; Lee 2020; Liao, Ho, and Her 2024).

For Chang (2022), Bilingual 2030 projects an imagined community founded on English, underpinned by ideologies of English supremacy, neoliberalism, and linguistic instrumentalism. An important note to mention is that Taiwan's interest in internationalisation is not just economic but also political (Chen 2006, 2020; Hsu 2021; Price 2014). According to Price (2014) who looked into the role of English in Taiwan between 2000 and 2008, raising English language competence was positioned 'as key to enhancing Taiwan's political and economic visibility on the world stage' (572). Hsu (2021) also identified a similar discourse surrounding Bilingual 2030 where English is portrayed as more than an economic instrument, performing 'a symbolic disavowal of China's claims of a shared Han and Sinitic cultural allegiance' (357) that binds the island to the mainland, and unveils Taiwan's attempt 'to speak its own terms of existence to a global audience' (ibid). Whether such moves signal independence from China, further dependence on English-speaking powers, and/or inter-dependence with a larger international community is unclear.

Conceptual framework: Ruiz's language orientations

In this section, we revisit Ruiz' (1984) framework of language orientations to explore its potential in analysing language policies in Taiwan. In the field of LPP, this framework has provided a simple yet explanatorily powerful entry point into the understanding of discourses surrounding language and has been applied to multiple contexts, such as the analysis of discourses in policy texts (Aktürk-Drake 2023; Katznelson and Bernstein 2017), national curricula (Paulsrud, Zilliacus, and Ekberg 2020), state promotional materials (Delavan, Valdez, and Freire 2017), public sector institutions (Easlick 2022), and media text (Liu and Gao 2020).

According to Ruiz (1984), language orientations refer to fundamental dispositions towards languages and their roles in society. He identifies three main orientations: (1) the problem orientation (language-as-problem) views languages other than the dominant one as deficits to be fixed, (2) the right orientation (language-as-right) emphasises what is codified about language – as civil rights and/or human rights – to achieve social equity, and (3) the resource orientation (language-as-resource) positions languages as assets to be managed, nurtured, and developed. For Ruiz, the resource orientation is the most promising, as it has the potential to simultaneously serve the interests of the minority and the majority. Scholars have since sought to expand the resource orientation in several ways. For instance, going beyond intrinsic-extrinsic distinctions of resource, Lo Bianco (2001) explains how language can be mobilised to attain a variety of ends (i.e. intellectual, cultural, economic, and social). Many researchers have built upon Lo Bianco's view by widening the range of resources that a language can embody (see Easlick 2022; Katznelson and Bernstein 2017). Another important contribution is de Jong et al.'s (2016) concept of 'multilingualism-as-resource', where they reaffirm the multidimensionality of resource and call to 'holistically view multiple languages in relationship to one another' in language policy and planning (209).

Indeed, the resource orientation is not without limitations, a key concern being how the resource orientation can easily be co-opted by neoliberal or nationalist ideologies (i.e. the commodification and militarisation of languages) (Y.-L. Chang 2025; Delavan, Valdez, and Freire 2017; Katznelson and Bernstein 2017; Liu and Gao 2020; Petrovic 2005). Recent scholarship suggests that to foreground linguistic justice, having sociopolitical awareness is necessary by unpacking the following questions: What counts as resource? What languages are seen as resource? Who decides what is

resource? Resource for whom and for what? These questions help address issues of power in studying language policy and acknowledge that orientations are intersecting and multilayered, rather than stable, sequential, or mutually-exclusive (Aktürk-Drake 2023; de Hult and Hornberger 2016; Jong et al. 2016; Petrovic 2005). Taking a decolonial, humanistic approach, Kaveh (2023) goes on to highlight how scholars in the field should re-orient themselves to the users of language instead of the languages per se.

In Taiwan, Mandarin has remained dominant since the 1950s. While explicit emphasis on Mandarin may differ depending on which party is ruling, it has largely been constructed as a resourceful language not just politically but also culturally and economically (see 2.1). From the 2020 census, 96.8% of the population uses Mandarin as their primary or secondary language; no other national languages enjoy such vitality (National Statistics 2020). It is encouraging, however, that attitudes towards non-Mandarin languages have shifted from language-as-problem to language-as-right, thanks to the hard work dedicated by community-based language movements (Scott and Tiun 2007). However, there is little evidence that these languages are seen as a resource, and if so, what kind of resource they represent, especially when valued against Mandarin and English. This brings us back to the research questions of this paper, which seek to draw attention to the possibility and desirability of simultaneously promoting bilingualism and multilingualism in Taiwan.

Research design

We have thus far provided an overview of LPP efforts in Taiwan, followed by a discussion of Ruiz's (1984) language orientations that can be instrumental in unravelling the deeper ideological structures shaping Taiwan's language politics. We now detail the official documents chosen for this study and the approach taken for data analysis.

Data sources

In this study, we focus on recent state-level language policy documents in Taiwan. Table 1 lists the three documents that focus on the promotion of bilingualism, and Table 2 shows the two documents related to the promotion of national languages. All five documents were published in Chinese, some with English translation provided. The extracts presented in the findings are from the official English translation, unless otherwise specified.

Data analysis

This study adopted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal the language orientations embedded in the five policy documents. According to Fairclough (2016), discourses are 'semiotic

Table 1. State-level language policy documents related to the promotion of bilingualism.

Month & year	Name of document	Shortened form	Government body responsible	Length
Dec. 2018	Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030 [2030 雙語國家政策發展藍圖]	Blueprint	National Development Council (NDC)	13 pages
Sep. 2021	Bilingual 2030 [2030雙語政策]	Bilingual 2030	NDC, Ministry of Education, Directorate-General of Personnel Administration, Ministry of Examination, Civil Service Protection and Training Commission	32 pages
Jul. 2022	Bilingual 2030 (2021-2024) (First Amendment) [2030 雙語政策（110至113 年） 計畫 （第一次修正）]	First Amendment	NDC and Ministry of Education	69 pages

Table 2. State-level language policy documents related to the promotion of national languages.

Month & year	Name of document	Shortened form	Government body responsible	Length
Jan. 2019	National Languages Development Act [國家語言發展法]	NLDA	Ministry of Culture	N/A*
Jun. 2022	National Languages Development Plan (2022-2026) [國家語言整體發展方案]	NLDP	Ministry of Culture, Council of Indigenous Peoples, Hakka Affairs Council, and Ministry of Education	138 pages

* The NLDA contains 18 articles in Taiwan's Laws & Regulations Database.

ways of construing aspects of the world' (88). By taking a critical approach, we acknowledge that discourses in policy texts are normative as they officially assert how one should act, representing the authoritative allocations of values, norms, and goals. Policy discourse thus has significant ideological effects, (re)producing identities and demarcating what is thinkable and unthinkable.

CDA has been frequently employed in policy research to consider underlying issues related to power, ideology, and inequality (Johnson 2011; Wodak 2014; Wodak and Meyer 2016; Woodside-Jiron 2004). As noted by Taylor (2004), combining social analysis (the external relations of a text) with fine-grained linguistic analysis (the internal relations of a text) has been 'valuable in illuminating the politics of discourse in policy arenas and in exploring the relationship between policy texts and their historical, political, social, and cultural contexts' (435). In language policies, language is both the content and conduit of policy, which means that CDA not only could help illuminate the substance of a policy, but also how the substance came to be.

To enhance the qualitative rigour of our analysis, we shall first contextualise our own positionalities before articulating how we conducted CDA (Mullet 2018; Wodak 2014). The idea behind our collaboration is the product of an ongoing conversation that we have had on language policy issues in Taiwan since 2022. As language researchers of two different generations with specialisations across TESOL, bi/multilingual education, LPP, theoretical linguistics, English linguistics, Chinese linguistics and typology collectively, we have been closely and independently following and researching the intense developments of Taiwan's language policies long before we met; additionally, we have engaged in several public conversations on such topics, aiming to encourage deeper reflection on the role of language in society and foster open dialogues on such issues in Taiwan. Importantly, we speak from different but intersecting ethnolinguistic backgrounds: the first author, a bilingual in Mandarin and English, is of Holo-Hakka descent; the second author, a multilingual in Mandarin, Tâi-gí, and English, is of Chinese descent with parents from Shandong and Hunan, respectively. We take note of our privileges in having acquired the dominant language in the world, i.e. English, and the dominant language in Taiwan, i.e. Mandarin. We, too, are mindful of the fact that we have not been able to develop communicative proficiencies in our parents' native languages, a loss that prompts us to continually interrogate the language power dynamics in the larger sociopolitical context we reside in. Reflecting on questions of power, identity, and membership goes in line with Kaveh's (2023) call to adopt a praxis-oriented, humanising view in studying language policy.

Our analysis involved several stages. To be clear, there is no unifying way of doing CDA; our analysis, however, followed the curve of describing (analysis of text), interpreting (analysis of discourse), and explaining (analysis of social practice), stages that are cyclical and broadly informed by the works of Fairclough (2010, 2013, 2016), Wodak and Meyer (2016), and Woodside-Jiron (2004). At the preliminary stage, we independently read through all policy documents. This exercise was not new to us, but we chose to do it again to deepen our familiarity with the policy texts. With the help of NVivo, we zoomed into all mentions of each language (e.g. English, Mandarin, Tâi-gí, Hakka, and indigenous languages) in the policy documents, as well as the texts that surrounded these languages. The unit of analysis was a paragraph, or a string of semantically coherent sentences. We paid attention to linguistic features, including the use of vocabulary, metaphor, modality, voice, and text structure. We noticed a number of value markers that were weaved into the production of

such texts, such as adjectives showing how certain languages are perceived (e.g. 'precious'), verbs that indicate what is happening to those languages (e.g. 'facing extinction') and what should be done to them (e.g. 'saved'), or nouns that signify trends or visions associated with particular languages (e.g. 'globalisation', 'competitiveness').

At the next stage, we closely examined how the extracted texts are layered through repetition of ideas or references to other present and past documents. We also mapped out how powerful individuals, research studies, and statistics are strategically incorporated into the texts. As discourses may be operationalised in several ways, we highlighted where they generate new ways of seeing, acting, and being. Identifying processes of naturalisation, i.e. discourses that have attained a status of common sense, required us to go back and forth between different analytical stages, which is critical for increasing the trustworthiness of CDA (Mullet 2018; Woodside-Jiron 2004). Throughout our analysis, we had Ruiz's language orientations in mind and discussed the results of each stage until a sense of data saturation was reached. The final presentation of our analysis can be found in the findings, where we unravel how specific language categories – national languages, English, and Mandarin – are constructed, legitimated, and maintained (or contested) in modern-day Taiwan.

Findings

We detail three major orientations identified in Taiwan's state-level language policy and planning. The orientations are: (1) national languages as both right and resource, (2) English as resource, and (3) Mandarin as a combination of problem, right, and resource.

National languages as both right and resource

Matters pertaining to national languages in Taiwan are primarily discussed in the National Languages Development Act (NLDA) and the National Languages Development Plan (NLDP). According to the NDLA, national languages in Taiwan are defined as 'natural languages and sign languages used by the different ethnic groups in Taiwan' (Article 3). The spirit upheld in the NLDA is that all national languages 'shall be equal' and that their speakers 'shall not be discriminated against or face restrictions' (Article 4). Throughout the 18 articles in the NLDA, the frequent use of 'shall', accompanied by a central-government agency as the subject, indicates a state-level commitment to the matter. While exact named languages are not specified except Taiwan Sign Language in the NLDA, the NLDP – drafted by Ministry of Culture – provides a detailed list, including Mandarin, Tâi-gí, Hakka, and the indigenous languages spoken by the 16 Austronesian groups in Taiwan (the controversy surrounding the inclusion of Mandarin will be explained in 5.3 and in the discussion).

Specifically, 'national languages' in the NLDP is often used interchangeably with 'mother tongues' or 'local languages'. There are, nevertheless, subtle but significant differences between them. First, national languages differ from 'mother tongues' as the former has a legal foundation and thus a legal definition, whereas the latter broadly refers to all the first languages used by the various linguistic groups in Taiwan. Second, national languages are also not the same as 'local languages' because the latter does not include Taiwan Sign Language and most certainly excludes Mandarin. It is a term largely adopted by actors in educational contexts.

While the NLDA lays out the overarching principles for ensuring the transmission, revival, and development of national languages in Taiwan, the NLDP provides the rationale, strategies, timeline, and funding scheme for implementing the principles. Moreover, parliamentary discussions and the legal foundations of the NDLP are clearly outlined in the document. There is also a section dedicated to explaining how the NLDP would interact with other existing policies issued under the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, the Council of Indigenous Peoples, and the Hakka Affairs Council. A recurrent message gleaned from the NLDP is the risk of endangerment and

extinction that many national languages face. A key survey cited in the NLDP highlights that, except for Mandarin, all other national languages are under different degrees of threat. In particular, the use of Tâi-gí, Hakka, and indigenous languages across three generations has seen a 60%, 70%, and 90% decrease, respectively.

Aside from quantitatively demonstrating the challenges of revitalising the national languages, qualitative descriptions of such risks are also found. These descriptions are sometimes presented in prosaic words intended to arouse emotional reactions. The extracts below, taken from the first two sections of the NLDP, shed light on such sentiments.

> Premier Su announced at the National Languages Development Assembly that 'the government should strive to preserve those languages that could soon disappear. If the effort put into preservation cannot catch up with the speed of language loss, these languages will eventually become extinct, and like losing one's health, the situation will likely be too difficult to reverse. If, however, we work hard together, Taiwan will become diverse and dynamic in many ways, beautiful and filled with energy.' (4, authors' translation)

> Taiwan's richly diverse national languages and wisdom are the precious gifts that Taiwan can offer to the world. However, as society goes through changing waves, many languages have been disappearing rapidly. Specifically, as the majority of the younger population cannot speak their mother tongues fluently, there is a dire need to enhance their awareness of such issues […] saving these rapidly vanishing national languages therefore cannot wait any longer. (7, authors' translation)

The two extracts draw attention to concerns over irreversible language loss (e.g. 'disappearing rapidly', 'a dire need', 'cannot wait any longer'). A number of rhetorical devices are employed to generate a sense of action for bringing about change; for example, references to politicians (e.g. 'Premier Su') and the use of pronouns (e.g. 'we') suggest that preserving national languages is not only in the interest of authoritative figures but also that of the wider public. Additionally, the embedded metaphors (e.g. 'health', 'precious gifts'), qualifiers (e.g. 'beautiful', 'filled with energy'), and other cliches (e.g. 'wisdom') further unveil the overall positive orientations exhibited towards national languages in the policy texts.

In both the NLDA and the NLDP, national languages are often associated with 'culture', 'identity', and 'right/resource'. In the NLDA, for instance, the text opens with the recognition of the 'multicultural nature' of Taiwan. Turning to the NLDP, the word 'culture' is often attached to 'language' or 'multilingualism': languages are seen as carriers of culture that are together assets of a nation or the root of an ethnicity. In such discussions, the connection between 'culture' and 'identity' becomes more visible, too. Interestingly, while 'resource' displays a high frequency in the policy documents, it is usually about gathering resources *for* advancing the 'right' to use, learn, and teach national languages. Yet, the kind of 'right' mentioned goes beyond basic language rights: it is not that people have been prohibited from speaking their native languages, but that they aspire to promote their languages beyond the family space and wish to move them deeper into schools and communities. Specific strategies include the improvement of signage in public spaces, the development of dictionaries, corpora, translation devices, and digital content, as well as the hosting of academic events, professional development workshops, summer/winter camps, and other cultural exchange activities. These strategies show the efforts invested in making national languages more resourceful in the situation they are facing right now.

English as a resource

Unlike the national languages mentioned in 5.1, English has no legal status in Taiwan. Since 2018, however, English has received significant attention on the national level, especially via the Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030, Bilingual 2030, and the First Amendment of the policy. Although no explicit definition of bilingualism is provided either in the Blueprint or any related documents, the idea of bilingualism envisioned in Taiwan today is one that is heavily English-centric, a collective decision made by 'some legislators' and 'several academicians', who are all

unnamed, as well as the former president and the former premier of Taiwan (see p. 1 of the Blueprint). The English focus can be immediately identified in the policies and the reports that are cited, including the Action Plan for Creating an English-friendly Living Environment (2002-2007), the Plan for Enhancing National English Proficiency (2010-2012), and the British Council's assessment of Taiwanese students' English Proficiency. The emphasis on English is substantiated further by strengthening the relationship between one's English proficiency and soft power, as demonstrated in the opening lines of the Blueprint:

> English is currently the most important common language for international communication, and as developments in digital technology spread rapidly all over the world, English has become closely connected with all spheres of people's life. Under these trends, 'English proficiency' has become an essential ability for opening the gateway to globalization. Therefore, how to raise citizens' English ability to a more internationally competitive level has become a vital issue common to all non-English speaking countries. Taiwan certainly cannot except itself from this. (1, English version of the Blueprint)

According to the Blueprint, English is the key language considered in the vision of bilingualism. In particular, it is viewed as having profound association with 'international communication' and 'globalisation', but the association is mostly taken for granted, which can be seen in the repeated strong choice of words in the extract, such as '*the most* important common language', 'connected with *all* spheres of people's life', 'has become an *essential* ability', 'a vital issue common to *all* non-English speaking countries', and 'Taiwan *certainly cannot* except itself from this'. Different from the NLDA and the NLDP that highlight the government's responsibility for revitalising national languages in Taiwan, the quest for English, as indicated later in the Blueprint, is viewed crucially as a national movement, to be promoted by not just the government but the entire population.

Besides the Blueprint, Bilingual 2030 and the First Amendment likewise give English prime attention. Throughout the policy texts, the resource orientation of English stands out. For instance, there are many mentions of 'competitiveness', 'human capital', 'transnational business', 'supply chain', 'mobility', 'employment opportunity', and 'wealth'. A further note to make is that the resourcefulness of English is not just economic but political. This is especially explicit in the First Amendment of the bilingual policy.

> Promoting public diplomacy and enhancing the English proficiency of Taiwanese can help us convey ideas in a common international language. This enables Taiwanese to go abroad, establish wider connections with the world, and let the international community see Taiwan's existence and the values Taiwan represents. (2, authors' translation).

In this excerpt, the precarious condition of Taiwan is taken to the centre stage. As an independently functioning state that continues to fight for international recognition, the bilingual policy is envisioned as a way for Taiwan to showcase its successful story of being a liberal democracy, and thus be treated by the international community as a reliable global partner.

This brings us to the question of building English-centric bilingualism in multilingual Taiwan. To be clear, from the early phases of the bilingual policy, the Taiwanese government has been very much aware of the potential tensions the policy could have with the local language ecology. In the Blueprint, an attempt to balance the development of bilingualism and that of national languages is explained.

> Taiwan in the future will be a nation of diverse ethnicities and languages. The bilingual policy will be parallel to the pluralistic development of mother tongues, and its implementation will not constrain native language education. The Executive Yuan has already, in early 2018, submitted the draft of the Development Act of National Language to the Legislative Yuan for deliberation. This law will serve to effectuate equal rights of languages and cultures, help to promote the nation's pluralistic cultural development, and enrich the content of national culture. Therefore, promoting bilinguality will enable the nation to look forward. It will neither cause the dilution of existing culture, nor merely serve the convenience of life of foreigners in Taiwan, but will enable Taiwan's next generation to enter the future with greater competitive advantage. (5-6, English version of the Blueprint)

The extract shows that the promotion of English-centric bilingualism is positioned within a broader language planning scheme that seeks to advance multilingual Taiwan. It is, however, flawed in a number of ways. First, the terms 'bilingual policy' and 'bilinguality' contradict Taiwan's multilingual reality and the multilingualism legally sanctioned by the NLDA. Second, by using the future tense 'will' (line 1), it rejects the fact that Taiwan is *already* 'a nation of diverse ethnicities and languages' (ibid). Third, it sees bilingualism, not multilingualism, as the only enabler for Taiwan to 'look forward' (line 8). And fourth, the policy is unrealistically optimistic (e.g. 'will neither cause the dilution of existing culture, nor merely serve the convenience of life of foreigners in Taiwan' in lines 8-10), which seemingly suggests that the legalisation of national languages could offset all risks that grow out from implementing bilingualism, obscuring the hard work that is often required to maintain and cultivate meaningful multilingualism.

Over the years, the lack of thorough planning for the promotion of bilingualism has become the target of much criticism. Despite the government's efforts to fine-tune the policy (e.g. the comprehensive funding scheme was not detailed until the First Amendment was released), the changes made have been mostly dedicated to consolidating the Englishization of the education system and public services. In fact, English is the only language considered 'international' in the First Amendment, and Bilingual 2030 is packaged as the 'international language policy' to be developed in parallel with the NLDA and the NLDP (please refer to details in p. 2 of the amendment). Here, the narrow definition of what is deemed 'international' is another serious issue: while many would not deny the resourcefulness of English, it is myopic to see English as the sole linguistic resource for Taiwan to thrive economically. Even if the motivation is to strategically enhance Taiwan's visibility via English on the global stage, the obsession with English risks weakening the very political autonomy that Taiwan seeks to strengthen (Her 2022; Kamakura 2023).

Mandarin as problem, right, and resource

The role of Mandarin is somewhat ambivalent in modern-day Taiwan, even though it is by far the most dominant language and, for all intents and purposes, the *de facto* official language of the island. Specifically, while Mandarin seems to have a place in all five language policy documents examined in this study, discussions around Mandarin are quite limited in space and often conflicting. Although it tends to be treated as a resource, it is seen elsewhere as a problem or a threat to the well-being of local languages.

Here, we examine the role of Mandarin in relation to English and local languages. In the promotion of bilingualism, the status of Mandarin is taken for granted: almost all instances of Mandarin in the policy texts are about Taiwan already having 'advantages as a Mandarin-speaking nation', which its citizens should build upon by adding English to the equation. In these instances, Mandarin is viewed as an 'advantage' that Taiwan has in abundance, a resource that can be used for the exchange of other goods. For example, Mandarin-English interaction and instruction is advocated by encouraging Taiwanese schools to establish sister programmes with institutions abroad. Yet, the key message throughout the policy is that knowing only Mandarin is insufficient and relying on it poses tremendous risks, especially during the politically uncertain times when the bilingual policy was drafted (see p. 1 of the amendment where the impact of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', 'China–US trade war', 'Covid-19 pandemic', and 'advancements in digital economy' are highlighted).

The NLDA and the NLDP, however, view Mandarin in a different light. Though Mandarin is considered a national language (a right codified in law), it is singled out in statements such as 'except for Mandarin, all other national languages are at risk of endangerment' (a right that needs no further protection). More importantly, an underlying problem orientation is subtly associated with Mandarin, as seen in the extract below.

> According to the Ministry of Education's analysis of the 2020 census conducted by the Ministry of the Interior, more than 90% of Taiwanese children have Mandarin as their only primary language of communication. The

use of Tâi-gí, Hakka, and indigenous languages is mostly replaced by Mandarin. (1–2 of the NLDP, authors' translation)

As the policy text suggests, not only is Mandarin exempt from the danger of extinction, but it has also pushed many other national languages to the margins. While there is no direct accusation of Mandarin being the culprit, the juxtaposition of Mandarin with 'Tâi-gí', 'Hakka', and 'indigenous languages' indicate that Mandarin is the immediate threat, i.e. the language that is *doing the replacing*. Yet, the historical context in which Mandarin became the most dominant language in Taiwan is not mentioned in any of the policy documents. It is, therefore, not difficult to notice the mixed feelings projected towards Mandarin that characterise language policy and planning in Taiwan today.

There are other practical challenges created by the conflicting status of Mandarin. Note that among the national languages named by the Ministry of Culture in its interpretation of NLDA, Mandarin is the only one whose legal status has been questioned. For instance, NLDA requires that national languages be listed as compulsory courses under the national curriculum (Article 9). Given that Mandarin is a required course, the dilemma is whether students should study another national language, be it Tâi-gí, Hakka, indigenous languages, or Taiwan Sign Language, if Mandarin is already a national language. This issue was technically resolved by separating Mandarin as a compulsory course from the so-called 'local languages', one of which is still required, and thus sidestepping the legal issue. Nevertheless, granting Mandarin equal status as other minoritized national languages seems to only reinforce the status quo.

Discussions

The analysis of the policy documents shows that projected language orientations at the state level of Taiwan are conflicting and multilayered, manifested as: (1) national languages as both right and resource, (2) English as a resource, and (3) Mandarin as a combination of problem, right, and resource. Our findings indicate that orientations are neither clear-cut nor fixed (de Jong et al. 2016; Kaveh 2023; Petrovic 2005) and draw attention to complex power dynamics operating in the background (Hult and Hornberger 2016). What we see in the orientations are distinct ways of understanding the concepts of 'bilingualism' and 'multilingualism': On the one hand, 'bilingualism' under Bilingual 2030 is heavily centred on English (with Mandarin assumed), made evident in the repeated English-as-resource discourse throughout the Blueprint, Bilingual 2030, and the First Amendment of the policy. On the other hand, 'multilingualism', primarily discussed in relation to the NLDA and the NLDP, mainly refers to the principles and plans to consolidate the right orientation in the use of all national languages (Mandarin included) as well as advancements in their resource orientation.

In this paper, while we understand that accepting the reality of such conditions is a practical move, we question whether it is desirable, and to what extent it reflects the dreams, hopes, and needs of the Taiwanese people (Chang 2025; Liao, Ho, and Her 2024). The simultaneous promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism not only perpetuates the linguistic status quo (i.e. the dominance of Mandarin) but could also exacerbate existing language hierarchies in Taiwan (i.e. non-Mandarin national languages pushed to the periphery by the elevated status additionally given to English). In other words, despite efforts to strengthen linguistic diversity, the net effect is a (re)centreing of Mandarin and English, or what Scott and Tiun (2007) call 'Mandarin-plus' but with English added to the powerful side of the equation. This shift can be explained by practices in other contexts where discourses of nationalism and neoliberal logics dominate language policymaking (see Bayetova and Robertson 2025; Heller and Duchêne 2012; Sah 2021).

To map out possible intersections in the simultaneous promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism, in this paper we offer the following proposal: to open up spaces in how 'bilingualism' is

conceptualised. Specifically, we invite language policymakers, researchers, and educators alike to challenge the sense of '*ofcourseness*' (Woodside-Jiron 2004, 185) in what 'bilingual' means in Taiwan today. Indeed, the privileged status of high-resource languages such as English and Mandarin would likely not change overnight. Yet, to uphold values of social justice and acknowledge the increasingly improved efficiency of machine translation and AI technologies (Melitz 2016; Ricento 2015), we ask that aside from the English-Mandarin duo, what other types of bilingualism can be envisioned and encouraged (i.e. recognised as legitimate on the state level and deserving of state funding)? Additionally, what would their relationships be with the layered linguistic ecology in which they are located? In what ways can the interactions between different languages be enhanced? Echoing de Jong et al.'s (2016) concept of 'multilingualism-as-resource', these context-based questions will not be easy to address as they require detailed attention to different types of multilingualism in different communities in Taiwan. The focus, put simply, is to reject essentializing languages, their users, and the idea of bilingualism (Kaveh 2023).

Today, while languages used by the different ethnic groups in Taiwan and Taiwan Sign Language all have a legal basis in law, there is still much to be done to promote their recognition and revitalisation. Drawing on reflections shared by several researchers in the field, i.e. Aktürk-Drake (2023), Katznelson and Bernstein (2017), Kaveh (2023), and Petrovic (2005), deepening the right orientation and taking a more critical approach to the resource orientation are vital in advancing societal multilingualism in Taiwan. Regarding the former, putting the human first has been emphasised (Kaveh 2023), which entails ensuring the well-being of communities that rely on their languages for living a dignified life, especially those that have experienced multiple forms of oppression. Here, we highlight the need to return to indigenous transitional justice goals by strengthening indigenous autonomy in their own sovereign voices. Regarding the latter, much discussion in the existing research literature stresses the importance of diversifying how resources are understood and having ideological clarity on who the resources are serving (Katznelson and Bernstein 2017; Kaveh 2023; Petrovic 2005). For example, while the emphasis on English in the current conceptualisation of 'bilingualism' may be presented as a way to democratise access to the economic benefits of English, it undermines other forms of resource (i.e. cultural and intellectual) that marginalised communities have been trying to put forward.

Another language whose status should be critically re-examined is Mandarin. As the language that enjoys the most power and resource in modern-day Taiwan (National Statistics 2020), it may be necessary to consider whether Mandarin should be sanctioned as a national language at all, or to keep it included but explicitly placed in a different category (i.e. languages listed based on their vitality so that different revitalisation activities can be planned accordingly). Another option proposed by Her (2025) is to have Mandarin as a *de jure* official language, while making it explicit that having more than one official language is possible. Such a proposal, however, is highly politically sensitive as it may re-ignite fears regarding Chinese colonialism and further jeopardise the fragile conditions of the many minoritized national languages in Taiwan, the speakers of those languages, and the representation they seek (Chang 2025).

What we argue in this paper, at its core, is to continue foregrounding liberal conceptions of language rights, equality, and democracy (Chen 2010, 2020 Dupré 2014, 2016, 2019; Huan-Wells 2022; Kamakura 2023; Khoo 2021; Tiun 2013), and to see diversity as assets to be treasured and nurtured in Taiwan. In other words, tolerance and respect for diversity are what hold different communities together. Importantly, we also argue that such conceptions should be taken critically by addressing questions of power in language policymaking (i.e. who is learning/using whose language and why?). Doing so is necessary if the intention is to create reciprocal spaces for multiple ethnolinguistic groups to co-learn with each other. Such work does not simply imply attaining proficiency in a national language along with that of a so-called 'international' language, but fostering the development of lifelong multilingualism beyond tokenistic celebrations of diversity. As integration facilitates other forms of inclusion, rather than having one or two dominant languages to achieve unity in diversity, there could be many shared common languages in smaller yet overlapping circles to

tighten the linguistic fabric of a society. In Hult and Hornberger's words (2016), greater awareness of differences 'has the potential to reduce ethnocentrism and xenophobia as well as to enhance intercultural understanding' (40). As more and more immigrants from Southeast Asia call Taiwan home, the ways in which we think about 'national languages' and 'bi/multilingualism' would also need to evolve over time.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have given an overview of language policy and planning in Taiwan since the Nationalist takeover at the end of WWII. We then closely examined the two concurrent language policies since 2018, the Bilingual 2030 policy and the promotion of national languages via the NLDA and the NLDP. With Ruiz's (1984) language orientations as a guiding framework, our findings show that state-level language policy and planning in Taiwan today are multilayered and conflicting. We argue that while the simultaneous promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism may be workable, the results may not be desirable. In other words, giving English the central stage (with Mandarin assumed) in the idea of bilingualism not only restricts alternative ways of envisioning what bilingualism could mean but also undermines all efforts to advance the development of national languages in Taiwan. To strengthen multilingualism, we stress that all state-level language policies must be sufficiently discussed alongside each other, as an integrated whole and with issues of colonialism, nationalism, and neoliberalism in mind (S.-Y. Chang 2025; Y.-L. Chang 2025; Her 2022), so that consistency in language planning can be ensured and that interactions between the teaching and learning of different languages can be optimised.

Notes

1. The four main ethnicities are the Holo, the Hakka, the indigenous Austronesian peoples, and those who moved to Taiwan from China in the mid-20th century. The stereotypical corresponding languages they speak are Tâi-gí, Hakka, Formosan languages, and Mandarin, respectively. An additional category, the New Immigrants from Southeast Asia, can be viewed as a new ethnicity in Taiwan.
2. The punishments include caning (the palm or the hip), shaming, and fining. Another widely reported form of punishment was having dialect-speaking students wear 'placards of shame' at school (Sandel 2003).

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