

Languages of covid-19 prevention, identity, and solidarity in Paiwan and Rukai Communities

Chun-Mei Chen
National Chung Hsing University

Introduction

- This paper examines **social practices** of **language use** and identity construction in the era of **covid-19** in **indigenous Paiwan** and **Budai Rukai** communities, where Mandarin is used for public health communication.
- Paiwan and Budai Rukai are Austronesian languages spoken in Southern Taiwan.
- The multidisciplinary relationships among vital voices of the indigenous residents and social actions need to be recognized

Method

- Fieldwork in this study focused on a nexus analysis of linguistic forms, verbal expressions, and identity among Paiwan and Budai Rukai speakers.
- **Twenty indigenous speakers participated in the elicitation, questionnaire survey, and semi-structured interviews.**
- Data collection included public health messages from the local communities, the indigenous TV channels, and mobile cultural heritage and healthcare stations.

Results

- Indigenous languages were relegated to the background with regard to language use for covid-19 prevention.
- **Bilingual** doctors and youngsters of the indigenous languages translated Mandarin health mandates into indigenous verbal expressions for the sake of their community well-being, promoting **inclusive** indigenous language education in line with the communities where such messages were disseminated.

Indigenous Prevention, Identity, and Solidarity

Stage	Community	Linguistic and Cultural Prevention Resources
February 2020	Paiwan	' <i>pakiqecan</i> ': sheltering ceremony to expel evil spirits and protect tribal residents
March 2020	Paiwan	Bilingual YouTuber : inviting respected elders to spread verbal expressions in the Paiwan language, such as <i>pacacadjau</i> 'social-distancing', <i>kisuqem</i> 'wearing a mask', <i>pilimalima</i> 'washing one's hands', <i>kipucemel</i> 'seeing a doctor'
April 2020	Paiwan and Budai Rukai	Mobile signs and loudspeakers in indigenous voice; doctors in videos; Rukai tribe in Wutai Township closed all its guesthouses and shops
May 2020	Budai Rukai	Kucapungane tribe made calls for promoting tribal welfare and urged members to postpone orders and reservations from the outsiders

Discussion

- By viewing the **social network** established by the **identity** and **solidarity** through hindsight, the connections between social-semantic discourses (medical terminologies) and social practices (sheltering protection) can be observed and documented.
- The interactive and dynamic meaning-making process of health maintenance and pandemic prevention illuminated the interplay between **social practices** and the **ideological language** use to respond to public health messages in Mandarin.

Conclusion

- Challenges in language barriers have been transformed into prevention actions through dynamic relationships in the network
- Paiwan and Budai Rukai residents utilized their linguistic and cultural resources and formulated their identities, reflecting that cultural identity is dynamic in the pandemic prevention context.
- **This study contributes to a better understanding of linguistic practices and social interactions in pandemic prevention and identity construction.**

Indigenous languages in Taiwan



- **Mandarin Chinese** is the **dominant** language in Taiwan
- **16** indigenous languages recognized by the government: Amis, Atayal, **Paiwan**, Bunun, Puyuma, **Rukai**, Tsou, Saisiyat, Yami, Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Sediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanavu
- The indigenous Austronesian population is estimated at 570,000, about 2% of the island's total population
- **Paiwan** and **Rukai** languages are primarily spoken in **Southern** Taiwan