

A Study on Differences Between Taiwanese Mandarin and Mainland Mandarin in Vocabulary

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Abstract—There are many differences in pronunciation and vocabulary between Taiwanese mandarin and mainland mandarin, which are mainly due to the differences between the two sides in geography, history, politics, social culture and language environment. Coupled with lack of information communication during more than 40 years of cross-strait isolation, the differences in vocabulary, the most active factor reflecting social changes in language, is more prominent. Through investigation, it is found that the differences between Taiwanese mandarin and mainland mandarin in vocabulary are mainly as follows: different names for the same thing or phenomenon; same name for different things or phenomena; unique to one party, but the other party has no such thing or no corresponding fixed statement. In addition to the differences in meaning, there are some differences in the pronunciation of words in the same form on both sides of the strait. The main reasons for the differences in vocabulary include the influence of Japanese and hokkien, the different perspectives on things between Taiwan and the mainland and the different translations of foreign words.

Keywords—Taiwanese mandarin; mainland mandarin; vocabulary; differences; reasons

I. INTRODUCTION

Although both sides of the Taiwan straits take modern Chinese as the standard language (Mainland Mandarin in the mainland, Taiwanese Mandarin in Taiwan), under the influence of geography, history, economy, politics and other factors, there are great differences in their languages, especially in terms of vocabulary.

II. THE SPECIFIC MANIFESTATIONS OF VOCABULARY DIFFERENCES

A. Different Names for the Same Thing or Phenomenon

It refers to that the same thing or phenomenon has different names. It is divided into two cases. First, both sides or either side have/has more than one statement, resulting in the occurrence of different names for the same thing or phenomenon, as shown in "Table I".¹

As shown in example 1, "suan nai (酸奶)" is spoken in mandarin, while "you lao ru (优酪乳)" and "you ge (优格)" are

used in Taiwan. "yan chi bi ye (延迟毕业)" and "zhen zhu nai cha (珍珠奶茶)" are commonly abbreviated in Taiwan.

TABLE I. EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT NAMES FOR THE SAME THING OR PHENOMENON IN VOCABULARY BETWEEN THE MAINLAND AND TAIWAN

Example No.	Mainland	Taiwan
1	酸奶/酸牛奶(yogurt)	優酪乳/優格(yogurt)
2	摩托/摩托车(motorcycle)	機車/摩托車(motorcycle)
3	蝙蝠衫(bat-like shirt)	蝙蝠袖/飛鼠袖(bat-like shirt)
4	涂改液/修正液(white-out)	塗改液/修正液/立可白(white-out)
5	延迟毕业(Delayed graduation)	延遲畢業/延畢(Delayed graduation)
6	珍珠奶茶(pearl milk tea)	珍珠奶茶/珍奶(pearl milk tea)

Second, the same thing or phenomenon is expressed in different words on both sides, as shown in "Table II".

In "Table II", some words are abbreviated by one party and not used by the other party. For example, "jiao gui (交规)", "jiao guan (交管)" and "huan wei (环卫)" used in the mainland has no abbreviated form in Taiwan. "jiu ce yi (酒测仪)" used in Taiwan is not abbreviated in the mainland. The differences in some vocabularies are caused by different translation methods between the mainland and Taiwan, as shown in example 9, such as "ben chi (奔驰) — bin shi (宾士)", "wei ge (伟哥) — wei er gang (威尔刚)", "bo ke (博客) — bu luo ge (部落格)" and "dian lu duan lu (电路短路) — dian lu xiu dou (电路秀逗)". "dian lu xiu dou (电路秀逗)" is used in Taiwan, of which, "xiu dou (秀逗)" is transliterated from the English word "short". As shown in example 12, Taiwan has no special vocabulary for "dan ji (单击)" spoken in the mainland. As shown in example 15, Taiwan uses "fa huan (罚锾)", of which, "huan (锾)" is an ancient weight unit and a currency unit. Taiwan uses an ancient saying. In Taiwan, "sheng cai (剩菜)" is called "cai wei (菜尾)", the hokkien dialect, and "mu li (牡蛎)" is called "e'a (蚵仔)".

¹ Most examples quote Comparison Manual of Common Vocabularies Used in Cross-strait Life.

TABLE II. EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT NAMES FOR THE SAME THING OR PHENOMENON IN VOCABULARY BETWEEN THE MAINLAND AND TAIWAN

Example No.	Mainland	Taiwan
7	交規(traffic regulations)	交通規則(traffic regulations)
8	环卫 (environmental sanitation)	環境衛生 environmental sanitation
9	隔离墩(Jersey barrier)	紐澤西護欄(Jersey barrier)
10	酒精测试仪 (alcohol tester)	酒測器/酒測儀(alcohol tester)
11	收藏夹 (computer favorite)	我的最愛(computer favorite)
12	单击(click)	按一下(click)
13	踏板摩托车 (motorcycle)	速可達/小綿羊(motorcycle)
14	打的/打车/坐出租车 (to take a taxi)	搭計程車(to take a taxi)
15	罚款(fine)	罰鍰(hu á)(fine)
16	剩菜(leftovers)	菜尾(leftovers)
17	半决赛/二分之一决赛 (semifinals)	准決賽 (semifinals)
18	点球 (penalty kick)	12 碼球 (penalty kick)

B. The Same Name for Different Things or Phenomena

It refers to that the same vocabulary expresses different meanings in the mainland and Taiwan. It is divided into several situations:

1) *The word form is the same, but the meaning is totally different:* This kind of vocabularies is the same in word form but with quite different meanings, as can be seen from the “Table III”, so it often causes misunderstanding.

TABLE III. EXAMPLES OF SAME NAME FOR DIFFERENT THINGS OR PHENOMENA IN VOCABULARIES BETWEEN MAINLAND AND TAIWAN

No.	Example	Meaning in the mainland	Meaning in Taiwan
19	爱人	Spouse, referring to husband or wife	Lover
20	公车	Government car	Bus
21	同志	Referring to people with the same interests and ambitions, later mostly referred to as the general address of people.	Mostly referred to as homosexuals
22	高工	Title, senior engineer	Mostly referred to as advanced industrial schools in short
23	本科	Bachelor degree	Relative to the selection of subjects, referring to the main subjects of the school

2) *The same word form with different meaning range:* These words are exactly the same in word form between Taiwan and the mainland, but the meaning range is different.

a) *The meaning range of Taiwanese mandarin is wider:* For example, the term "qing shang (情商)" refers to EQ in mainland mandarin, namely, a person's quality in emotion, will, tolerance and

frustration and other aspects. While in Taiwanese mandarin, in addition to this meaning, it also means "to ask permission on a personal level". For example, a director repeatedly invites an actor for cameo appearance in a play.

b) *The meaning range of mainland mandarin is broader:* For example, for the word "yang qi (扬弃)", it only has the meaning of "abandoning" in Taiwan, while it refers to carrying forward positive aspects of things while abandoning negative factors in the mainland. "er yu (耳语)" has the meaning of "whispering in one's years" in both the mainland and Taiwan, but it also has the meaning of "quietly discussing because of dissatisfaction with some things" in Taiwan. "pin zhi (品质)" refers to a person's character and cultivation in both the mainland and Taiwan, but it is also used to describe the quality of products in Taiwan.

3) *The word form is the same, but the color of the word meaning is different:* "jian tao (检讨)": It is a derogatory term referring to checking the shortcomings and deficiencies in life, thoughts and work in mainland mandarin, while it is a neutral term referring to checking the discussion in Taiwanese Mandarin.

"di zhu (地主)": It is a derogatory term in mainland mandarin. It refers to a person who owns land, but does not work and lives by exploiting peasants. It has a strong political color. It is a neutral word in Taiwanese mandarin, simply referring to the owner of the land.

C. Some Words Are Unique in Mainland Mandarin, but There Is No Such Thing or Fixed Statement in Taiwanese Mandarin.

Here are some words unique to mainland mandarin that Taiwan does not have, as can be seen in “Table IV” below.

TABLE IV. SOME WORDS ARE UNIQUE IN MAINLAND MANDARIN, BUT THERE IS NO SUCH THING OR FIXED STATEMENT IN TAIWANESE MANDARIN

干红(dry red wine)	电子警察 (electronic police)	暖气片(radiator)
糖葫芦(sugarcoated haws)	自驾车(self-drive)	三废(the three wastes)
安检(security check)	黄绿标车 (environmentally unfriendly car)	脏乱差(dirty and disorderly)
空乘(flight attendant)	国道(national highway)	白色污染(white pollution)
春运(Spring Festival travel rush)	过路费 (toll)	三无产品(shoddy products)
甩站(don't stop at the station)	收费站 (toll-gate)	搞活动(to have a big sale)
错峰(Staggered Shifts)	减速带(deceleration strip)	明码标价(prices are fixed)
的哥(taxi driver)	代驾 (designated driving)	小票(receipt)
面的(taxi)	胡同 (alleyway)	豆奶粉(soy milk powder)
摩的(motorcycle-taxi)	电老虎 (large power equipment)	恶意透支 (malicious overdraft)

III. MAIN REASONS FOR THE DIFFERENCES IN WORDING BETWEEN THE MAINLAND AND TAIWAN

A. *The Influence of Japanese on Taiwanese Mandarin*

In 1985, after the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War, the Qing government signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki with Japan, and cut Taiwan to Japan. Taiwan began to become a Japanese colony. After the establishment of the "National Language Institute" by Japan, the Japanese was forcibly popularized. After being colonized for 50 years, the Taiwanese language has preserved many Japanese words and structures, such as *ou ba sang* (欧巴桑) and *bian dang* (便当). In addition, Taiwan has been in frequent contact with Japan and has always maintained more exchanges with Japan, and there are a lot of Taiwanese students studying in Japan. Therefore, the influence of Japanese on Taiwanese mandarin has never been interrupted, and there are constantly new Japanese words entering Taiwanese mandarin, such as *bao zou zu* (暴走族).

B. *The Influence of Hokkien on Taiwanese Mandarin*

Taiwan is a multi-ethnic region with four ethnic groups: Aboriginal, Minnan, Hakka and other provinces. Among them, Minnan ethnic group, the largest ethnic group in Taiwan, accounts for 73% of the Taiwanese population. Minnan ethnic group not only has a large population, but also has a much higher degree of economic and cultural development than other ethnic groups. With the absolute advantage in population, economy and culture, hokkien has become the most powerful language in Taiwan. In southern Taiwan, hokkien has even become the main language of communication. The hokkien language is so strong that it will naturally permeate into Taiwanese mandarin. Taiwanese mandarin absorbs many words from hokkien, such as "cha mou ren 查某人" (man), "ban shou 伴手 (gift)" and "cai diao 才调" (skill).

When some hokkien vocabularies entered Taiwanese mandarin, they also brought in the infiltration of hokkien. For example, Taiwanese mandarin has a word from hokkien, "俗仔 (su la)", which is roughly equivalent to "song (恫)" in mainland mandarin. It also borrows the hokkien pronunciation, read as "su la". In addition, under the influence of hokkien, the pronunciation of the Taiwanese mandarin words has no rhotic accent and there is rarely neutral tone.

- For example, without rhotic accent, when reading "画", mainland mandarin habitually adds "r", read as "hu à hu àr", while Taiwanese mandarin is pronounced as "hu à hu à", without rhotic accent.
- Use less neutral tone. For example, while reading words like "爸爸" and "婷婷", mainland mandarin will read the second character as neutral tone, read as "b à ba" and "t íng tíng", while Taiwanese mandarin will read as "bǎ bǎ" and "tǐng tǐng", without neutral tone.

C. *The Impact of Long-term Isolation and Non-contact Across the Taiwan Straits*

The 40-year isolation between the two sides of the Taiwan straits has enabled Taiwanese mandarin and

mainland mandarin to follow their own development paths without any communication. Different social development directions and different political, economic, cultural, and educational conditions have led to many differences in the development of vocabulary between the two sides.

Both of Taiwanese mandarin and mainland mandarin originated in the northern Mandarin in the 1930s and 1940s, but many words of that period have changed or replaced with other words in the mainland with the times, but they are still used in Taiwan. For example, for "you zhi yuan (幼稚园)", mainland mandarin has been changed to "you er yuan (幼儿园)", but it is still used in Taiwan.

In addition, differences in economy, politics, culture, customs and language environment also lead to differences in vocabulary between the two sides.

1) *The impact of economic isolation:* Because the economic development in Taiwan and the mainland is different, there are great differences in terms of economic vocabulary and expressions between the two sides. For example, "ji hua jing ji (计划经济)" is well known to the public on the mainland, while the Taiwanese is unfamiliar with it.

2) *The impact of political isolation:* The process and direction of political development are totally different between Taiwan and the mainland. Therefore, there are many differences in terms of political vocabulary between the two sides. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, the mainland created many words with strong political colors, such as "zou zi pai (走资派)", "hong wei bing (红卫兵)" and "chou lao jiu (臭老九)", while Taiwan which did not experience the cultural revolution naturally does not have such words.

3) *Impact of different customs:* As the saying "different winds in five miles, different customs in ten miles" goes, Taiwan and the mainland also have great differences in customs and habits, and the differences in these customs and habits are also reflected in the words. For example, Taiwan has the custom of "ban zhuo (办桌)", while the mainland does not.

4) *Impact of cultural isolation:* Taiwan uses more words of classical Chinese or with classical Chinese color. Many ancient words that are not commonly used in mainland mandarin today are still used in Taiwanese mandarin, such as "shang hao (商号)" (shop), "wu mei (午寐)" (nap), "tai ban (泰半)" (mostly), and "xiang yuan (乡愿)" (not distinguish between right and wrong, drift with the tide, self-praise).

D. *Different Perspectives on Things*

Some differences are caused by different perspectives on things on both sides of the strait. For example, for cabbage, "juan xin cai 卷心菜 (Mainland)" and "gao li cai 高丽菜 (Taiwan)", mainland mandarin is from the shape of the vegetable, while Taiwanese mandarin is from the original origin of vegetable. Cabbage was first planted in South Korea and introduced to China. South Korea is formerly known as Gao Li.

For disability, "can ji 残疾 (Mainland)" and "can zhang 残障 (Taiwan)", mainland mandarin is from its nature, a disease, while Taiwanese mandarin is from its influence, to bring some obstacles and inconvenience.

E. Different Translations of Foreign Words

Due to differences in thinking and language environment, Taiwan and the mainland often have different translations of the same foreign words, which also lead to differences in vocabulary between the two sides, as shown in "Table V" below:

TABLE V. DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS OF FOREIGN WORDS

Foreign language	Mainland	Taiwan
salon	三文鱼	鲑鱼
hotline	热线节目	叩应节目
Da Vinci (Italian Master of Art)	达·芬奇	达文西
van Gogh (a famous Dutch painter)	梵高	梵谷
punk(a rock music)	朋克	庞克

These words have exactly the same meaning on both sides of the Taiwan straits, but they become different words after being translated into Chinese. So is the translation of many people's names and place names.

In addition, when translating foreign words, one party often uses a free translation, while the other uses a transliteration, which leads to differences. For example, "ting zhuang pi jiu (听装啤酒)" in mainland mandarin is from English word tin, with transliterated ingredients, while in Taiwan, it is called "guan zhuang pi jiu (罐装啤酒)", which is a free translation. "ye hua qi (液化气)" in mainland mandarin is a free translation, while "ye hua wa si (液化瓦斯)" in Taiwanese is a transliteration.

Moreover, the mainland does not use foreign words, while Taiwan uses foreign words. Kiwifruit, native to China, was introduced to New Zealand in the early 20th century under the English name kiwi fruit. The mainland uses "mi hou tao 猕猴桃", so the fruit is named for its fluffy and monkey-like fur, while "qi yi guo (奇异果)" in Taiwanese is from a transliteration of the English word kiwi fruit.

F. Differences in Word-building

There is no big difference in word-building between Taiwanese mandarin and mainland mandarin. The difference is that some new affixes have emerged in Taiwanese mandarin, such as new words with "zu (族)" as an affix, like "bao zou zu (暴走族)", "ke yao zu (嗑药族)", "ji che zu (机车族)" and "shang ban zu (上班族)", and new words with "feng (风)" as a suffix, like "tian mei feng (甜美风)", "bo xi mi ya feng (波西米亚风)", "zhong guo feng (中国风)" and "xi ha feng (嘻哈风)".

In addition, there is a Chinese-foreign hybrid word formation in Taiwanese mandarin, that is, English abbreviations and Chinese components are mixed to form words, such as "A qian (A钱-cheat money)", and "K shu (K书)" (study hard), but the mainland does not commonly use this word formation.

IV. CONCLUSION

To sum up, geography, history, economy, politics and other factors work together to ultimately cause the differences in pronunciation, meaning, word form and word-building between the words of Taiwanese mandarin and mainland mandarin. This difference is a manifestation of the diversity of linguistic and cultural diversity. We should respect this difference and try to explore it as much as possible rather than ignoring or even defying its existence. Only in this way can we communicate better.

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