

Teaching and Learning an Endangered Austronesian Language in Taiwan

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Abstract

This study aims to provide a complete picture of the process of endangered language acquisition, which has not been well studied from the viewpoint of applied linguistics, by identifying how the contexts, development and variability are similar to or different from the acquisition of a majority language in a classroom setting.

This research describes the context of teaching Chinese adult learners in Taiwan an endangered indigenous language, the teachers' pedagogical approaches, the learners' perceptions and strategies, and the phonological and syntactic acquisition processes the learners were undergoing. We used both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer our research questions.

Our participants consist of a Yami language teacher, a linguist, and three groups of students, representing three stages of our Yami language courses at a university in Central Taiwan from 2005-2007. The data were collected following an ethnographical approach by interviewing the participants, taking fieldnotes, observing and videotaping classroom interactions, and examining the students' assignments and teachers' feedback.

The videotapes of the learners' production of the Yami language were further analyzed to determine phonological and syntactic acquisition processes and variability. For the investigation of developmental sequences, we examined how markedness and interference impacted phonological and syntactic acquisition. For interlanguage variability, we used a sociolinguistic variationist approach to compare the performance of beginning learners with intermediate learners to determine the factors that account for Yami interlanguage variation. Finally we also examined how turn taking patterns and mean length of utterance changed as learners progressed in their second language acquisition.

Introduction

According to Ethnologue (Gordon 2005), the total number of languages in the world is 6,912. Of the languages listed, 516 are classified as nearly extinct, as "only a few elderly speakers are still living." A language might be considered threatened when it is used only by socially isolated old folks, a socially integrated population beyond child-bearing age, and when it exists only orally, without literacy (Fishman 1991).

There are different levels of language endangerment in the world. Krauss (1992) defines three categories of endangerment: (1) moribund languages: no longer learned by children, (2) endangered languages: still learned by children but not expected to be learned by children within ten years, and (3) safe languages: supported by the state and having a large number of speakers. It is estimated that 90% of the world's languages will either be moribund or will have disappeared by the year 2100 (Terralingua, 2000). Thus, those endangered languages need to be accurately and efficiently documented and revitalized. An effective way of preserving an endangered language is through language teaching and learning.

A number of Austronesian language revitalization projects are related to language teaching and learning. One success story is the establishment of Maori immersion and bilingual schools (Hoover et al. 1992). Maori communities were specifically built to support Maori language use at home and in social institutions for children. Another case is Hawaiian revitalization, as described by Slaughter (1997), whose success was attributed to parents' positive attitudes and well-established immersion programs.

Some efforts have been made to develop web-based interactive language learning materials for Indonesian and Tagalog (Henry & Zerwekh 2002). Software for teaching these two well-documented Austronesian languages has also been produced, such as Hoven's (2003) MMInteraktif, an Indonesian listening comprehension software package, and McFarland's (2006) CAI program for teaching Filipino.

As a result of the ELDP grant from the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project, Rau, Yang & Dong developed e-Learning materials for Yami (2007), proposed a pedagogical model for e-Learning (Rau & Yang, forthcoming 2008) and provided a summative assessment of the impact of their e-Learning materials (Rau & Yang 2007).

Yang (2007), in her formative needs analysis of the Yami e-Learning program, provided feedback for our team to improve on its design. She also surveyed the attitudes of the Yami teenagers toward our e-Learning program and found that the third year junior high school students on Orchid Island had a more positive evaluation of our websites than did younger students. She reasoned that this might be due to the fact that they had pressure to pass the test of "certification of indigenous languages" so

that they could get the 35% bonus points on the Basic Competence Test, a High School Entrance Examination. However, since there are no textbooks for them to prepare for the test covering the four basic communicative skills in Yami, our websites might be the only resource available for their test preparation. Iraralay teenagers, who are the only competent Yami speakers on the island, expressed more willingness to use the e-Learning materials to study after school than those in other villages. Overall, the teenagers suggested that animation, films, and pictures on the website would be the three most important elements to attract their attention. Their greatest expressed learning difficulties were Yami vocabulary and spelling, so they suggested that we add two sections to our website: (1) introducing vocabulary with pictures and (2) providing dictation and typing games to practice spelling.

Although previous studies have informed us how to build a successful Yami e-Learning program, very little research has focused on the process of teaching and learning Yami. We believe our experience in teaching Yami as a second language in a classroom setting might also provide some insight into second language acquisition of less commonly taught languages.

This study investigated the context of teaching Chinese adults learners in Taiwan an endangered indigenous language, the teacher's pedagogical approaches, the learner's perceptions and learning strategies, and the phonological and morphosyntactic acquisition processes the learners were undergoing.

Context

Yami is a Philippine Batanic language, spoken by less than 4,000 indigenous people on Orchid Island (*Lanyu* in Chinese). According to Rau's (1995) sociolinguistic survey on Orchid Island, there was only one village out of six on the island where children still used some Yami in daily interaction. Yami has been offered as an elective in elementary school since 1998, but Yami is gradually being replaced by Mandarin Chinese. Chen (1998) has compared the language proficiency, language use and language attitude among three generations of Yami and found a language shift to Mandarin and a decline of Yami language ability as age decreases. Lin (2007) re-examined language use and language ability among Yami teenagers and found that while Yami is still spoken in Iraralay, the other five villages show continuing decline in the use of Yami by teenagers with their parents. However, Yami teenagers were found to have a positive attitude toward Yami language and identity and strongly support any efforts to promote or maintain their language. Be that as it may, most of the teenagers admitted that they prefer speaking Mandarin over Yami.

Rau & Yang (2007) describe a model of biliteracy continua of majority and minority languages in Taiwan and discovered a reversal of the relationship in each of

the four continua in comparison with Hornberger's model (2003). The less powerful communities in Taiwan are monolingual in a vernacular whereas the more powerful communities are bi(multi)lingual, with one of them being the official language. The addition of English literacy in the mainstream Taiwanese society tends to follow an L1 model, while the addition of Yami literacy on Orchid Island tends to follow an L2 model. In the acquisition of English in the mainstream Taiwanese society, the content is required to be "contextualized" and "authentic" for communicative needs. On the other hand, the content of online indigenous language textbooks for both elementary and junior high school students (http://www.alcd.nccu.edu.tw/index_0.html%20) is mostly "decontextualized" with direct translation from Chinese. Finally, due to early exposure or in many cases simultaneous exposure to English, the media of biliteracy in the mainstream Taiwanese society have become increasingly similar and convergent in terms of their language structures and scripts respectively, whereas the successive exposure to Yami literacy is viewed as dissimilar and divergent from the Chinese structures and character writing to which they are exposed very early in life.

All the above-mentioned shifts of contextual factors from Yami teenagers' language attitudes, language use, and language proficiency to the disadvantaged end of the power relations in the continua model have provided the context for our study.

The current study

The goal of this study is to provide a comprehensive description of the process of teaching and learning an endangered language, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the following research questions.

- (1) What is the process of teaching and learning an endangered language? Is it similar to or different from the acquisition of a majority language in a classroom setting?
- (2) What are the developmental sequences and interlanguage variability in Yami phonology and syntax?
- (3) How do turn taking and mean length of utterance change as learners progress in their second language acquisition?

Our participants consist of a Yami language teacher (Dong), a linguist (Rau), and three groups of students, representing three stages of our Yami language courses from 2005-2007. Jasmine, Betsy, Karen and Davis were among the first group of learners of Yami in the fall 2006 course at Providence University at the beginning of our project. Jasmine and Ann joined in the intensive summer course, learning Yami at the intermediate level with Karen, Davis and Eric at the National Museum of Natural Science in the summer of 2006. After our e-Learning program was completed at the

end of 2006, two new graduate students signed up for the language course in Spring 2007, while Karen and Davis continued to participate in the Yami course to serve as both researchers and learners.

The data were collected following an ethnographical approach by interviewing the participants, taking fieldnotes, observing and videotaping classroom interactions, and examining the students' assignments and teachers' feedback.

The videotapes of the learners' production of the Yami language were further analyzed to determine phonological and syntactic acquisition processes and variability. For the investigation of developmental sequences, we examined how markedness and interference effects impacted on phonological and syntactic acquisition. For interlanguage variability, we used a sociolinguistic variationist approach to compare the performance of two groups of learners to determine the factors that account for Yami interlanguage variation. Finally, we also examined turn taking patterns and calculated mean length of utterance to investigate how communicative quantity and quality changed as learners progressed in their second language acquisition.

Table 1. Teacher's pedagogical systems used during the teaching process

Teacher's pedagogy	Examples	Teacher's comments
<p>Corrective feedback and error analysis</p> <p>Teachers analyzed the students' grammatical errors and provided corrective feedback.</p>	<p>Episode 1 S1: mo magaga, maciavang namen pa jimo an? (Hey, magaga. Can you give us a ride?) S2: kamo mangay jino? (Where are you (plural) going?) T1: 只有一個人喔。(There is only one person.) S2: ka...(hesitated) (ka...) T1: 你。(You (singular)) S2: mo mangay jino? (Where are you (singular) going?) T1: ka, ka mangay... (ka, ka mangay...) S2: ka mangay jino? (Where are you going?)</p>	<p>“我本來一開始是要用溝通的方式，就後來馬上看見學生們都垮了，都垮掉了。結果我後來發現連那個句子我們光是唸過去，同學沒有辦法 process，都沒有處理分析那個句子，因為太快了，你們都還沒有達到那個境界，所以沒有辦法主動的產出那個句子，但是你可以被動理解。所以這時候用 Grammar translation 是好方法，所以我就開始回到文法翻譯，否則這課程是下不去的。” (Originally, I wanted to use a communicative language teaching method, but I immediately saw that the students struggled greatly and could not keep up. I found later that even in reading a sentence, the students were unable to process it, that they could not process the sentence because we were going too quickly. You had not reached that level, so you couldn't produce those sentences on your own. However, you could understand them passively. Therefore, it was the proper time to use the grammar translation method, so we began to go back to grammar translation, or we would not have been able to continue this course.) (Rau, December 11, 2006)</p>
<p>Explanation of grammar rules</p> <p>The teachers raised the students' grammatical awareness.</p>	<p>Episode 2 T1:我剛剛說 pasdepen 是主要動詞對不對？及物動詞，他為什麼是及物動詞？你是看到了那一個詞綴，你說他是及物動詞。(I just said that pasdepen is the main verb, right? A transitive verb. Why is it a transitive verb? You saw that affix, so you say it is a transitive verb.) Ss: (quiet) T1: -en 嘛，-en。好，那他的 agent，主事者是什麼？ (-en, -en. Ok, what about its agent, what is the agent in this sentence?) S3: nio。(You) T1: Nio，你們哪，主事者是你們。做這件事情的是你們哪。你們怎樣？你們 pasdepen，pasdepen 的意思就是...？(Nio, You! The agent is “you”. “You” is the agent doing the action. What is “you” doing? You pasdepen, so pasdepen means...?) T2: 把什麼東西放進去。(putting something inside.) T1: 她所以用把什麼，你有沒有發現，非常及物對不對？他之所以用把字句喔，把什麼東西放進去，可見得 pasdepen 是及物動詞阿。好，那什麼東西是放進去的受事者？o tatala 對不對？o tatala nio 受事者，語意上是受事者，可是他是整個句子的</p>	<p>“我想那個第一個：因為他們都有英文背景，由於英文的背景的關係，他們對於文法是敏感的，而且是知道有文法的，所以對於文法東西，就我的觀察是他們願意學習，而且希望學習，有這種需求，這是我的觀察。(I think first of all, because of their background in English, they were sensitive to grammar, and they knew that grammar is part of the language. Therefore, in terms of grammar, in my observation, they were willing to learn it, and wanted to learn it because it was necessary. This is my observation.) (Rau, December 11, 2006)</p>
<p>Reference to students' background</p> <p>Teachers changed their pedagogical approach to GTM, based on their perceptions of students' backgrounds & expectations.</p>	<p>T1: 她所以用把什麼，你有沒有發現，非常及物對不對？他之所以用把字句喔，把什麼東西放進去，可見得 pasdepen 是及物動詞阿。好，那什麼東西是放進去的受事者？o tatala 對不對？o tatala nio 受事者，語意上是受事者，可是他是整個句子的</p>	<p>”我是想說：我覺得是你們是已經有語言學的概念，語言基礎啦。所以你們可能在語法的方面大概可以很快的吸收，可以很快理解。(What I want to say is that all of you have the linguistic concepts, the language concepts. Thus, you can absorb and understand grammar quickly) (Dong, December 17, 2006)</p>

	<p>subject 主詞，因為它有 o 在那裡？(The Ba-construction is used. Do you see that? It is very transitive, isn't it? That's why she used the ba- construction (把字句), to put something in it. We can find that "pasdepen" is a transitive verb. Ok, what's the patient of this verb? O tatala, right? O tatala nio is the patient semantically; however, it is the grammatical subject in this sentence, because there is an "o" here.</p>	
<p>Grammatical terminology</p> <p>Terminology was used quite freely and students coped well with terminology.</p>	<p>Episode 3 T1: apia o tatala namen ang ? (What should we do about our boat?) Ss & T1: apia o tatala namen ang? (What should we do about our boat?) T1: 好，主詞在哪裡？(Ok, where is the subject?) S3: o tatala. (o tatala namen) T1: namen, o tatala namen 意思就是？(namen, o tatala namen means?) S3: 我們的船。(Our boat) T1: 我們的船。好，然後 ang ? (Our boat. Ok, and ang?) S4: 助詞。(Particle) T1: 助詞，意思是...？(Particle. Meaning...?) S4: (The student gave an inaccurate answer) T1: 我現在問 ang，ang 是什麼？語尾助詞，它意思可能是什麼？(I am asking about ang right now, what does ang mean? It is the sentence final particle. What's the possible meaning of this word?) T1: 疑問嘛。(Interrogative particle!)</p>	<p>“族語老師他可以應該要去學，雖然你不會教你的學生這些文法，但是你/要有這個概念。像形容詞前面都會有 ma-，(例如)很高很矮阿，什麼…。也可以引起學生們的興趣什麼的。”(For some indigenous language teachers, they have to learn grammar rules. Although you won't teach students these rules, you have to be equipped with the concept of grammar. For example, ma- would appear in front of all adjectives (stative verbs). For example, very tall and very short, etc. It may spark a students' interest in learning the Yami language.) (Dong, December 17, 2006)</p>
<p>Practicing grammar</p> <p>Teachers always led the course by practicing activities.</p>	<p>Episode 4 Practicing activity: "mangay tamo do _____." Rau provided photos of small boats (one and two-man boats) and big boats (six-man boat, eight-man boat, and ten-man boat) to illustrate the differences. Students asked what ships other people would like to take. Dong: mi tamo do mibekbek an, no mangay tamo do atlo so avat? (Should we take the motor boat or the six-man boat?) S4: mangay tamo do pikavangan. (Let's take the two-man boat.)</p>	<p>“我對於 Audio-lingual 這種的嚴謹的 drill，就是一個刺激一個反應，我是很喜歡這種東西。因為我覺得我喜歡有這種 practice。...我覺得這樣的練習是有其必要的，因為它可以看見可以內化一些規則。”(I like Audio-lingual because it has strict drills which are stimulating. I like it very much because I think I like this kind of practice. I think it is necessary to have this kind of practice because we can internalize some grammar rules through them.) (Rau, December 11, 2006)</p>
<p>Grammar and communicative ability</p> <p>Teachers believed grammar is the basis for communicative ability.</p>	<p>Episode 5 Exercise: Pretend that you were one of the five tourists. Write down a list of things that you are going to complain about to the hotel owner. Example: 1. ya masazówsaw no mahep, am ya mánnget no maraw. (It is so cold at night and so hot in the morning.) 2. ya abo o 網路. (There is no internet access.)</p>	<p>“我認為短時間的研究當然是文法翻譯最快。最快。因為你不用 actively, manipulating the language 你不用講出來，你只要被動的理解。被動的理解，只要有文法規則。”(I think the grammar translation method is the fastest way to know one language in a short time. It is the fastest, because you don't need to be actively manipulating the language, but can learn the language passively.) (Rau, December 11, 2006)</p>

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher's pedagogy

Following Borg's qualitative study (1998) on teachers' pedagogical systems and grammar teaching, we grouped the interview data into six major categories: error analysis, reference to students' background, grammatical terminology, grammar rules, practicing grammar, and grammar and communicative ability. Table 1 presents the teachers' pedagogy used during the teaching process. The second column lists five classroom episodes representing the five identified themes, while the third column lists the interview data of the two teachers' comments on their beliefs about teaching strategies. In the following paragraphs, we combine the interview data with the students' comments to illustrate the process of teaching and learning.

Corrective feedback and error analysis

This course was originally designed for communicative learning; however, Rau became aware of students' difficulties during oral activities and was also concerned about the short time of the course, so she shifted to grammar translation and audio-lingual methods beginning with Lesson Two. As Maslovaty (2000) suggests, teachers may change their pedagogies based on the dilemma they face, the teachers' personal belief systems as well as teaching context and, to a lesser extent, personal background characteristics.

In a change of her teaching strategy, Rau's focus was drawn to corrective feedback and error analysis. Episode 1 in Table 1 provides an example: as soon as a student made a mistake, Rau jumped in to help correct it.

At first, the teacher (T1) only offered the student (S2) a cue in Chinese “你 you (singular),” because she wanted to elicit the rule through an interactive discussion rather than simply supplying the rule herself. In fact, S2 offered the correct nominative form “ka” in her attempt, but after T1's prompt, she changed the plural nominative form “kamo” to the singular genitive form “mo”. After this, the teacher gave S2 the correct answer.

Rau mentioned she liked to offer “incidental corrections” during oral activities:

“喜歡的是，不是亂槍打鳥，但是是 incidental corrections，也就是在溝通的過程活動當中會出現個一些的問題，然後這些問題你把它綜合起來講，我喜歡是這一個。” (What I like is not a shotgun approach, but incidental corrections. I can generalize some common problems emerging from our activities; after that, we can discuss them all together. This is what I like to do.) (Dr. Rau, December 11, 2006)

This preference is drawn from her own experience in learning English inductively in junior high school. She says:

“我記得在我國中的時候，我的英文老師其實也是喜歡用 inductive 的方法，有的老師是喜歡用 deductive，先給一個規則，然後我們現在看看套用一下這個規則。在這個的練習裡頭，我個人是喜歡不要告訴我這些規則啦，我自己看就會知道。所以，我比較喜歡用歸納法而不喜歡用演繹法。” (When I was a junior high school student, my teacher also liked the inductive method. Some teachers prefer to use the deductive method, which is to offer a rule first, and then allow students to put that rule into practice. For me, I don't like people to tell me the rules directly since I can find out the rules by myself. For this reason, I prefer to use the inductive method rather than the deductive method.) (Rau, December 11, 2006)

Sometimes the teacher provided compressed grammar rules rather than asking students to explore the rules themselves, especially when the rules involved transitive and intransitive affixes. As Bauer and Nation (1993) suggest, the majority of affixes are regular and predictable, and therefore should be taught directly. S4 expressed how she felt about this technique:

“因為他怕我們不了解吧，不會講。所以先講一下再跟我們講吧，是不是這樣子？如果馬上拋給你馬上叫你回答會不會講不出話來？” (Maybe she was afraid that we couldn't understand or couldn't answer it, so she told us the rules before asking us. Is that right? If she threw some grammatical questions at you suddenly, you probably would not be able to answer, right?) (S4, December 21, 2006)

Although the students felt embarrassed when they were corrected, they still expected corrective feedback:

“對於老師的糾正我覺得 ok，可是當下會覺得不好意思啦，可是如果不糾正，自己會不知道有沒有唸錯。” (I felt that the teacher's correction was ok, although I felt embarrassed at that moment. However, if there was no correction, I would not have known my errors when I read out loud.) (S1, December 11, 2006)

Explanation of grammar rules

During each class, students repeated after Dong, modeling the native speaker's input. This was followed by Rau's explanation of grammar. This was a recurrent pattern in their team teaching. According to Brown (1994), a very limited portion of classroom speaking time may legitimately be spent in human “tape recorder” speech. Moreover, he also suggests that drills can offer students an opportunity to listen and orally repeat certain strings of language that may pose some linguistic difficulty either phonological or grammatical. Particularly, these exercises could help to establish certain psychomotor patterns (to “loosen the tongue”) and to associate selected grammatical forms with their appropriate contexts.

In Episode 2, Rau (T1) posed a grammatical question. After several tries, with Dong's help (T2), S3 provided correct short answers on case markers. A student commented that teaching grammar before they even learn to pronounce words properly would discourage them from speaking. However, repeating after the teacher encourages them to speak.

“我們如果不會唸的話，然後就先教文法，這樣其實我們在似懂非懂的時候，我會不敢唸出來。如果一開始我們大聲的一起跟著老師唸出來，這是一個很好的一個教學方式。之後我們在回答問題或教學活動，就比較不會害怕開口講。” (If you teach grammar first before we know how to read (Yami words), and we seem to know everything when we actually do not, then I would be afraid of speaking. If

we begin by repeating after the teacher out aloud, then it is a good teaching method. This way, we would be less hesitant to speak when we answer questions or join in activities later.) (S2, December 17, 2006)

Reference to Students' backgrounds

Rau believed her focus on grammar was related to the students' backgrounds. When Davis asked her about her choice of teaching strategy, she mentioned her perceived needs of the participating learner.

“因為在場的話，大部分的同學都是要寫論文的。這些人要寫論文，那我就想到 Eric 對不對?想到 Eric，那他一定要把雅美語的文法搞清楚他才能寫詞序的問題呀，對不對?然後像你做 reduplication 或者是 Karen 曾經做過 intonation 或者是那個在場的 Jasmine 也好，或者是誰?Ann 也好，這些人無論是做字典或者是 E-learning 都要將雅美語很快的時間將它的結構掌握，才能夠做一些有積極的貢獻。尤其是像 Jasmine，她是要寫教學活動(遊戲)，那你一定要先對雅美語很快的，要壓力鍋，要快煮，要煮出來才可以，所以我才用那個的一個策略的。” (Most of the students here wanted to finish their MA theses. Take Eric for example. He must clearly understand Yami grammar before he can write about word order, right? In addition, you worked on Yami reduplication and Karen worked on Yami intonation. Jasmine worked on E-learning and Ann worked on Yami dictionary. All of them need to master Yami structures before they can make significant contributions. Especially people like Jasmine - in order to create e-Learning games, she has to pressure cook, cook quickly; she needs to learn the language in a short time. This is why I applied the techniques that I did.) (Rau, December 11, 2006)

Many adult learners expect grammar in the L2 curriculum and treat grammar as the central component of language (Hinkel & Fotos 2002). Since this is the instructor's assessment of the students' needs, she adopted what she called “pressure cooker” method by focusing on grammar.

Grammatical terminology

Episode 3 shows that the teacher employed a translation strategy and used grammatical terminology often to explain the usage of affixes and case markers in Yami. S3 reflected the need for translating the Yami sentences into Chinese, especially when the language is written in the Roman alphabet:

“因為雅美語是用羅馬拼音來當做文字，所以我在看到課文的時候，我會很想知道些字意。” (Yami is written in Romanization, so when I read the text, I want to know the meanings of the words) (S3, December 9, 2006)

To teach students grammatical terms, Rau employed the self-questioning & answering technique. In Episode 2, she tried to explain the transitive verbal affix “-en” to students. S1 commented that the use of grammatical terminology helped her remember how to use -en:

“就是知道詞綴的意思就比較好記。-en 是及物還比較好記一點。” (After I learned the meaning of some affixes, it became easier for me to remember them. For example, it is easier to remember the transitive affix -en.) (Student 1, December 11, 2006)

Practicing grammar

Another common teaching method which the teachers always used in their course was language activities. In Episode 4, Rau provided photos of small boats (one and two-man boats) and big boats (six-man boat, eight-man boat, and ten-man boat) to illustrate the differences. Students asked what ships other people would like to take. After the students learned the topic “mangahahap, go fishing,” and finished an oral activity and grammar patterns, the teacher (T1) provided a sentence pattern “mangay tamo do _____.” and asked each student to fill in the blank.

Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) mention that classroom activities can enable students to perform spontaneously with the language, as well as experience increased empathy, heightened self-esteem and motivation, and lowered sensitivity to rejection, thus facilitating second-language acquisition. S4 expressed positive feelings toward these activities.

“我也覺得很好阿。因為你初學者不懂，你會害怕去造句，那裡已經都幫我們造好了，把它填進去就蠻簡單了。” (I think it is effective. As a novice, you will be afraid to make a sentence. This way, we can follow the sentence pattern. It is easier to fill in the blank.) (S4, December 21, 2006)

Rau also used rhythm and mnemonic devices to increase students’ long-term memory. She believed Yami songs could reinforce one’s memory of Yami language, so she taught a few songs. This strategy corresponds to Pomeroy’s (1974) belief that repetition naturally occurring in songs during the teaching process can make drill work easier and more pleasant. A student reflected on the usefulness of songs for language learning:

“因為你以後也會還會記得，就像我之前大學修那個日語，日語課。他唱那個 zo san, zo san (大象的歌)，我現在還記得，所以我知道大象大象，我還記得阿，所以會一種讓你記憶深刻，我覺得那個韻律會留在腦海裡比較久。” (You will still remember them in the future, for example, I took Japanese in college, and in class we would sing zo san, zo san (the elephant song). I still remember it now, so I still know elephant. Thus, it can give you a strong memory, and I think it can stay in my mind for much longer.) (S4, December 21, 2006)

She also taught students some effective tricks to remember Yami words such as matching Yami syllables with Chinese characters (see Table 2).

Table 2. Yami-Mandarin Chinese phonetic and phonological similarities words

Yami language	Mandarin Chinese
rangirang (rainbow)	讓一讓
kasingasingat na (It’s too expensive!)	嘎星阿星阿特納

Grammar and communicative ability

Although the teacher (T1) said she changed her pedagogical approach to a combination of grammar translation and audio-lingual methods, during classroom observations, we can still find that many communicative activities were employed, such as role-plays.

In Episode 5, the teacher asked the students to pretend that they were one of five tourists and asked them to write down a list of things to complain about to the hotel owners. The teacher (T1) believed that grammar translation is a short cut to grasp the knowledge of a language. Afterwards, the students can spend the rest of their lives developing communicative ability and improving their accent.

“我認為短時間的研究當然是文法翻譯最快。最快。因為你不用 actively, manipulating the language 你不用講出來，你只要被動的理解。被動的理解，只要有文法規則。” (I think that the grammar translation method is the fastest way to know a language in a short time. It is the fastest, because you don't need to be actively manipulating the language, you don't have to speak the language, but can learn the language passively. If you know the grammar rules of that language, you can learn the language passively.) (Rau, December 11, 2006)

This teacher's practice corresponds with the conclusion of a recent study by Lee and Wang (2002), “While communicative approaches have been greatly promoted in language teaching, grammar instruction can make a difference for L2 acquisition and speed up the learning process for adult learners.”

In summary, the instructor's teaching practices and the learner's expectations of learning a Taiwanese indigenous language is no different from teaching and learning English as a foreign language in a classroom setting.

Phonological acquisition

In this and the following sections, we focus on the developmental sequences and interlanguage variability in phonology and syntax. The Yami language class met for 100 minutes per week at Providence University. The data were gathered from the videotaped classroom sessions from March through mid-May and four videotaped guided conversations in Yami among the four students at four time intervals during the spring semester of 2007.

There are twenty consonants, four vowels, and four diphthongs in Yami (Rau & Dong 2006). Among all the segments, four consonants, /k, s, ng, z/, were identified as difficult for Chinese learners. Table 3 lists Yami consonants, where all the symbols represent standard Yami orthography.

Table 3 Classification of Yami consonants

Manner	Place of articulation							
	Labial	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal	
Stop	p, b	t	d		k, g			'
Fricative	v		s			h		
Nasal	m	n			ng			
Liquid		l	r					
Affricate				c, j				
Trill		z						
Glide	w			y				

The four phonemes are explained as follows.

1. /k/: a voiceless stop.
2. /ng/: a velar nasal.
3. /s/: a voiceless retroflex fricative [ʂ]. It is palatalized as [s] before the front vowel /i/, e.g., *siko* ‘elbow’, *sinsi* ‘teacher, loan word’. The /s/ occurring before any vowel other than a high front vowel /i/ in a loan word is pronounced as a voiceless alveolar fricative [s], e.g., *saki* ‘liquor’.
4. /z/: an alveolar trill [ʐ].

Some of most commonly found substitutions for the four phonemes are listed as follows, with the first row representing the target form.

/k/ → [k]	/ng/ → [ŋ]	/s/ → [ʂ]	/z/ → [ʐ]
/k/ → [kʰ]	/ng/ → [n]	/s/ → [s]	/z/ → [l]
	/ng/ → [g]	/s/ → [ç]	/z/ → [z]
	/ng/ → [ʔ]		

The percentages of correct production of the target forms are shown in Table 4. Among the four problematic phonemes, the trill /z/ is the most challenging (6%), followed by the retroflex /s/ (28%). The velar nasal in non-coda position has a wide variety of substituted forms, whereas the problem of the velar stop /k/ lies mostly in aspiration, which might be an interference from the English alphabet.

Table 4. Description of the realization of the four sounds

Phoneme	Production / Total tokens	%
/k/		
[k]	579/623	93
[kʰ]	44/623	7
/ng/		
[ŋ]	190/226	84
[n]	4/226	18
[g]	27/226	12
[ʔ]	5/226	22
/s/		
[s̺]	79/282	28
[s]	193/282	68
[ɿ]	10/282	35
/z/		
[ʃ]	8/204	6
[l]	112/204	90
[z]	4/204	3

To test which sound is the most difficult one to produce, a Jonckheere-Terpstra test, a nonparametric test for ordered differences, was used to confirm that /z/ is really the most difficult one for learners to pronounce ($p < .05$).

Based on the results above, we propose Eckman's (1996) Markedness Differential Hypothesis (MDH) might be an explanatory principle for the students' misproduction. MDH claims that the difficulty L2 learners might face can be predicted on the basis of a systematic comparison of the grammars of NL (Native language), the TL (Target language) and the markedness relations.

The alveolar trill /z/ is extremely marked because it is infrequent in languages of the world; besides, neither the learners' L1 (Mandarin Chinese) nor their major foreign L2 (English) have the trill sound in their inventories. Thus according to Eckman's (1996) Markedness Differential Hypothesis (MDH), /z/ is a difficult sound for the learners to pronounce.

In our following analysis of developmental sequence and variability, we only concentrate on the two variables with the most variants, /ng/ and /s/. A log-linear regression analysis, GOLDVARB, was used to test how proficiency and time account for developmental sequence and variability. The data were transcribed from the four guided conversations, recorded once every two to three weeks from March to mid-May 2007. Each conversation session lasted for 40-50 minutes.

Investigation of /ng/

Four separate VARBRUL analyses were conducted on the 226 tokens. The

results are listed in Table.

Table 5: Significant factors accounting for accurate production of (ng)

Factor Group	VARBRUL Weight (%)			
	[N]	[n]	[g]	[?]
<u>Proficiency</u>				
Low	.31 (75.8)	.80 (6.3)	.58 (14.7)	.81 (6.3)
Intermediate	.63 (91.6)	.27 (0.8)	.44 (9.9)	.27 (0.8)
Range	32	53	14	54
<u>Time</u>				
First	.30 (76.2)	.85 (9.5)	.72 (23.8)	.85 (9.5)
Second	.48 (83.6)	.50 (3)	.46 (10.4)	.50 (3)
Third	.56 (87.9)	.36 (1.5)	.52 (12.1)	.36 (1.5)
Fourth	.52 (86.1)	.49 (2.8)	.45 (9.7)	.49 (2.8)
Range	26	49	27	49
Total Percentage%	85 %	3.1 %	12 %	3.1 %

Students of intermediate proficiency tended to produce more target forms than did those of low proficiency. The ratio of correct pronunciation increased gradually; the third and fourth times were better than the first and second times as the VARBRUL weights indicate, with values above .50 for T3 and T4 but below .50 for T1 and T2. Furthermore, the phenomenon of substitution declined as time went by. It is noteworthy that the variant [g] decreased from .72 for Time 1 to .45 for Time 4.

Students of intermediate proficiency used the target forms more frequently (.63) whereas those of low proficiency tended to use the three substitutions (.80 for [n], .58 for [g] and .81 for [?]). Overall, the most frequent substitution for the target /ng/ is [g] with a total frequency of 12% as opposed to a little over 3% for either of the other two variants.

The most correct pronunciations of [N] occurred in word-final position, for example, *ikong* ‘what,’ *Maoyong* ‘person’s name,’ *manazang* ‘buy.’ The variant [g] usually appeared in word-middle position, such as, *Mangamizing* ‘person’s name,’ *pangananaoan* ‘classroom,’ *katengan* ‘know,’ etc.

The universal preference for an open or consonant-vowel (CV) syllable structure also occurred in the participants’ production. For instance, they would pronounce

Man-*ga*-mi-zing rather than Ma-*nga*-mi-zing; ka-ten-*gan* rather than ka-te-*ngan*.

Comparing the choice of substitution strategies by the four learners, language proficiency level has a much greater impact on deletion [ʔ] (Range= 54) and change of place of articulation [n] (Range= 53) than on change of manner of articulation [g]. The correct pronunciation [ŋ] increased from T1 to T4, whereas the other substitutes decreased from T1 to T4. Time intervals had a greater impact on suppressing the use of [ʔ] and [n] (Range=49) than on [g] (Range= 27).

Investigation of /s/

Three separate VARBRUL analyses were conducted on the 282 tokens with /s/. All loan words were excluded from coding, thus the target form is the retroflex [ʂ]. The results are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: Significant factors accounting for accurate production of (s)

Factor Group	VARBRUL Weight					
	[ʂ]	(%)	[s]	(%)	[]	(%)
<u>Proficiency</u>						
Low	.53	(31.6)	.44	(63.2)	.55	(4.5)
Intermediate	.47	(26.4)	.54	(72.3)	.46	(3.1)
Range	6		10		9	
<u>Time</u>						
First	.45	(24.4)	.48	(63.4)	.76	(9.8)
Second	.46	(23.7)	.55	(72.4)	.56	(3.9)
Third	.49	(27.3)	.47	(65.5)	.36	(1.8)
Fourth	.56	(34.2)	.50	(68.3)	.43	(2.5)
Range	11		8		40	
Total Percentage%	28.8		68.2		3.8	

Students of low proficiency actually produced the target form [ʂ] slightly more frequently than did those of intermediate proficiency, who preferred to use [s]. This is because there is a phonological variation and sound change in progress between (s) and (ʂ) in Mandarin Chinese (Rau & Li 1994, Rau 1996). There is a tendency for Taiwan Mandarin speakers to merge the two phonemes to /s/. For the low proficiency

students, the retroflex feature was more salient to them because their attention was recently drawn to this in Yami. On the other hand, intermediate learners tended to fall back on their L1 habit when they joined the course again. The low proficiency learners used the palato-alveolar [ɲ] as a substitute more often than did the intermediate proficiency learners. However, as time progressed, the target form [ɲ] increased from T1 to T4 (Range= 11), whereas the non-target [ɲ] decreased from T1 to T2 (Range= 40). The target [s], on the other hand, fluctuated among the four time intervals, but it was not really suppressed as time went by.

Acquisition of word order in Yami

The unmarked word order in Yami is verb initial; however, the subject is fronted to mark the present tense (Rau 2005). In this section, we present the results of word order acquisition in Yami, using the VARBRUL program analyzing the 250 tokens of word order data gathered from four tasks: (1) choosing the correct Yami word order with Chinese translation, (2) choosing the correct Yami word order without Chinese translation, (3) translating sentences from Chinese into Yami, and (4) sentence arrangement test. The four learners were asked to complete all four tasks at the fourth time interval. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: VARBRUL results of word order acquisition

Factor Group	VARBRUL Weight (Pi)	Correct tokens / Total tokens	%
Level			
Intermediate	0.68	171/250	68%
Low	0.54	135/250	54%
Task			
Sentence Arrangement	0.35	111/236	47%
Sentence choice (with Chinese translation)	0.68	90/116	77%
Translation from Chinese to Yami	0.50	20/32	62%
Sentence choice (without Chinese translation)	0.63	85/116	73%
Total		306/500	61%
Input probability = 0.625		Total Chi-square = 6.4959	
Chi-square/cell = 0.8120		Log likelihood = -307.427	
Maximum possible likelihood = -304.229			
Fit: X-square(4) = 6.395, accepted, p = 0.1773			

Table 6 shows that word order in Yami for Chinese learners is not as difficult as expected, as the percentage of accurate production is 63% (Input probability= 0.625). Although intermediate students performed a little better than low proficiency group in word order, both groups tended to provide the correct word order because both groups favored accurate production (0.68 vs. 0.54).

Among the four tasks, except for translation from Chinese to Yami, which had no effect on the accurate production of word order (0.5), the other three all affected production of word choice one way or the other. Sentence choice with or without Chinese translation promoted accurate choice of Yami word order (0.68 and 0.63). The sentence arrangement test, on the other hand, tended to inhibit accurate choice of word order (0.35).

The questions in sentence arrangement test were further analyzed by running Item-Analysis, following Rau (1999), and only 11 question items with a facility index above .50 and a discrimination index of 1 were chosen to form our instrument for further analysis.

The internal consistency reliability of the question items was also analyzed. The overall Cronbach's alpha is 0.98, which is much higher than the acceptable rule of thumb of .70, set by Nunnally (1978). In other words, the revised sentence arrangement test has a high reliability.

Table 10 shows the implicational scale of the learners' accuracy in the eleven questions. We can see that Davis (intermediate student) could answer all eleven questions correctly,¹ while the other two low proficiency learners could not arrange any of the eleven sentences into the correct order. Moreover, according to the implicational scale in Table 10, we can predict that Q5, Q16, Q27, Q39 are easier than Q14, Q19, Q26, Q28, Q47, Q51, Q52. (See Appendix: Sentence arrangement test)

¹ Davis created the sentence arrangement test and thus practice effect might have partially explained his perfect score on word order.

Table 10. The Implicational scale of the students' Yami language acquisition with the eleven questions

	Q5	Q16	Q27	Q39	Q14	Q19	Q26	Q28	Q47	Q51	Q52
Subject											
<i>Davis</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Karen</i>	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Chris</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Teresa</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

All question items came from Yami lessons of the beginning level (<http://yamiproject.cs.pu.edu.tw/elearn>). Since the first four questions were selected from the early lessons, they tended to be familiar to and memorized by the learners. Once the word order departed from SVO, it posed a challenge to our learners.

Turn taking and mean length of utterance

In this section, we examined the communicative patterns of the four learners in terms of their turn-taking and mean length of utterance. The data are based on the four guided conversations during the four time intervals. Table 11 provides the number of turns taken by the four students.

After calculating the turn taking rates among the four students, we found that Davis had more speaking turns than did the others (29.6%). On the other hand, Teresa had the least number of turns (19.8%). Karen and Chris had the same rate of turn-taking (24.9%).

Table 11. Number of turns by four learners

Subject		Turn tokens / %				Total
		Speaking		Silence		
Intermediate	Davis	145	29.6	345	70.4	490
	Karen	122	24.9	368	75.1	490
Low	Teresa	97	19.8	393	80.2	490
	Chris	122	24.9	368	75.1	490
Total tokens		486	26.1	1474	79.2	1960

In addition to observing the number of turns each learner took, we also calculated the mean length of utterance (MLU) for each learner. The total number of

words that a learner uttered was divided by the total number of turns that s/he took to derive the MLU. As shown in Table 12, the MLU was much longer in T1 (M= 7.53) because the learners tended to produce memorized frozen expressions. However, as their proficiency level increased, they tended to produce more spontaneous speech and thus the MLU decreased (M= 5.54). Chris had the longest MLU among the four learners (M= 6.27), which matched the Yami teacher's impression that he contributed the most to the guided conversations.

Table1 12: Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) among the four learners

	First time	Second time	Third time	Fourth time	Total
<i>Davis</i>	104/19 =5.47	191/34 =5.74	208/42 =4.95	238/50 =4.76	741/145 =5.11
<i>Karen</i>	108/10* =10.8	199/45 =4.42	177/29 =6.10	241/47 =5.13	725/131 =5.53
<i>Chris</i>	78/11 =7.09	176/29 =6.07	179/24 =7.46	175/33 =5.30	608/97 =6.27
<i>Teresa</i>	54/8 =6.75	197/32 =6.16	114/30 =3.8	218/37 =5.89	583/107 =5.45
Mean	7.53	5.60	5.58	5.27	2657/480 =5.54

In summary, the two male students demonstrated more willingness to communicate by either taking more turns or having longer MLU. The two female students, on the other hand, tended to have more fluctuation in both turn-taking and MLU across the four time intervals. Since the four students were always sitting next to the same gender throughout the semester, this might have had an impact on the turn-taking patterns.

CONCLUSION

This study presented the preliminary results of a longitudinal study of adult learners' acquisition of an indigenous language in Taiwan. We found that learning an endangered language by Chinese learners is similar to learning a less commonly taught foreign language in Taiwan.

In phonological acquisition, the trill was the most difficult phoneme to learn. It was not usually acquired within the first year and was usually replaced by [l]. We found systematic variation for the variables (ng) and (s), constrained by both markedness and interference. Furthermore, learners also tended to interpret Yami orthography based on their knowledge in English and thus pronounced /k/ as aspirated

[k^h] and trill /z/ as [z].

In word order acquisition, learners performed much better than expected, partially because the present tense, coded by the familiar SVO word order, is the norm in Yami conversations, and thus we did not test if the learners could distinguish between VSO and SVO in narratives. However, we still found perfect scalability in word order acquisition based on the 11 selected question items. Future studies on word order variability should collect narrative data from advanced learners.

Finally, we noticed that different learners adopted different learning strategies in foreign language acquisition. Some learners preferred to take more but shorter turns whereas others preferred to speak longer utterances. In general, their MLU averaged out as they produced speech more spontaneously instead of citing memorized frozen expressions.

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Appendix

Sentence arrangement test

1) Q5: malavayo sira pa ina ya na?

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

(她的父母親都還年輕吧?) Are her parents still young?

Correct answer: ya pa malavayo sira ina na?

2) Q16: mangay kamo jino?

① ② ③

(你們要去哪裡啊?) Where are you going?

Correct answer: kamo mangay jino?

3) Q27: romiag an kamo pa?

① ② ③ ④

(你要不要早餐?) Would you still like to have breakfast?

Correct answer: romiag kamo pa an?

4) Q39: ya aro o ya mibozo.

① ② ③ ④ ⑤

(好多人打籃球啊。) Many people are playing basketball.

Correct answer: ya aro o ya mibozo.

5) Q14: vazay ikong o mo?

① ② ③ ④

(你的工作是什麼?) What is your job?

Correct answer: ikong o vazay mo?

6) Q19: pa ji do kamo takey nimangay?

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

(你們還沒上山啊?) Didn't you go to the mountains?

Correct answer: kamo pa ji nimangay do takey?

7) Q26: kamo na niromiag?

① ② ③

(吃過早餐了嗎?) Did you have breakfast yet?

Correct answer: kamo na niromiag?

8) Q28: ciaha, rana namen ta mabsoy.

① ② ③ ④

(不客氣, 我們吃飽了。) Don't worry. We are full (satiated).

Correct answer: ciaha, ta namen mabsoy rana.

9) Q47: citoai na am, ko pisikingen inio.

① ② ③

(待會兒我要給你們考試。) I am going to give you a test in a moment.

Correct answer: citoai na am, pisikingen ko inio.

10) Q51: ipivatvatek pa ko jimo so mamood an?

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦

(借我筆好嗎?) May I borrow a pen from you?

Correct answer: mamood ko pa jimo so ipivatvatek an?

11) Q52: nivatvatkan malas ya ya ko.

① ② ③ ④ ⑤

(我寫錯了。) I wrote this wrong.

Correct answer: ya malas ya ko nivatvatkan