

# Switching to Taiwanese in Mandarin-dominant spoken media discourse in Taiwan: Evidence of association as the main motivation<sup>☆</sup>



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## Abstract

Code switching in public domains has become common in Taiwan. However, little is known about the actual use of Taiwanese in Mandarin-dominant spoken media discourse. This study explores the motivation behind speakers' choice of Taiwanese when they intended to achieve certain communicative effects in this setting. A detailed discourse analysis suggests that the main motivation is related to the association of Taiwanese or of some particular expressions in Taiwanese. Four types of association emerged. First, speakers switched to Taiwanese because of the association with certain social meanings created in certain social contexts. Second, speakers associated Taiwanese with individual people or cultural objects because it was one of the salient linguistic attributes of the people or cultural objects. Third, speakers associated Taiwanese with certain expressions of ideas because certain phrasing or some particular words in a lexicon in Taiwanese could more precisely, descriptively, effectively, and/or vividly express the ideas than those in Mandarin. Finally, speakers switched to Taiwanese because of the association with locally-developed items in a conversation.

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## 1. Introduction

Code switching (CS) generally refers to using more than one language variety in a conversation. Research on CS primarily focuses on two areas. One is structural, exploring features of the grammatical structures of CS and grammatical constraints on CS. The other is functional, exploring CS functions and social and discourse sequential motivations. This study focuses on the functional area. Considering CS a strategy to achieve communicative effects, this study investigates the motivation behind speakers' choice of Taiwanese to achieve communicative effects in Mandarin-dominant spoken media discourse in Taiwan. The detailed discourse analysis suggests that the association of Taiwanese or of some particular expressions in Taiwanese is the main motivation.

The study of CS in spoken media discourse in Taiwan is essential. Kuo (2009) indicates that social, cultural, and political changes in Taiwan have resulted in the frequent use of Taiwanese in public domains where Mandarin used to be

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the only language. However, little is known about the actual use of Taiwanese in the spoken media domain. This study fills this research gap by examining speakers' motivation for CS in this domain.

## 2. The concept of association in CS theoretical frameworks and in CS cases

The concept of association is one of the bases for formulating theoretical explanations, proposed by several important CS scholars. Gumperz's (Blom and Gumperz, 1972; Gumperz, 1982) influential CS study identified two types of CS: situational and metaphorical. Situational CS signals certain social situations or activities, while metaphorical CS reveals connotative information without a change in topic or situation. In both types, a code can be used as a signaling mechanism because it is associated with certain social meanings (e.g., social situations and social activities) as a result of the regular and constant use of the code in certain social contexts. In her Markedness Model, Myers-Scotton (1993) indicates that speakers use CS to negotiate or index the set of rights and obligations they attempt to implement in a conversation. A code can help achieve this effect because it is associated with certain types of interpersonal relationships as a result of the regular use of the code in a community when these types of interpersonal relationships are involved. In a more recent study, Muysken proposed "optimization strategies" (2013:711) to account for various types of and different approaches to language contact phenomena. When applying the proposed strategies to CS behaviors in different bilingual communities, Muysken added a fourth strategy, "backflagging" (2013:713), used to signal an original community identity by speakers who might shift their main language to a non-ethnic one. The premise for the strategy to be effective is also related to association: the switched code is symbolically associated with an indigenous identity. Although the three scholars' theoretical frameworks differ theoretically and methodologically, their studies are partially based on the concept of association because they suggest that speakers choose to switch to a code because the symbolic connections of the code with certain social meanings can help them achieve communicative or interpersonal effects. That is, association is motivationally relevant for speakers' choice of a code to achieve certain effects.

In addition to the association with certain social meanings, Bell's (1984) Audience Design and Giles and Ogay's (2007) Communication Accommodation Theory suggest the association of a code with individuals. Bell argues that speakers might accommodate to their audience or non-present audience by changing their language styles, particularly in public discourse such as social media, and that speakers might change their language styles based on the ideal attributes of an audience according to social norms or stereotypes. Giles and Ogay indicate that speakers might adopt their interlocutors' linguistic features to become more similar to their interlocutors or might emphasize the linguistic differences between them to detach from their interlocutors. The scholars' theoretical frameworks suggest that speakers achieve certain effects by CS because of the salient linguistic attributes associated with individuals in their awareness. In addition to associating salient linguistic attributes with the individuals in speakers' awareness, this study will show that the salient linguistic attributes can also be associated with cultural objects from the level of phonology to even genres (e.g., songs) in speakers' awareness. In both cases (the association of salient linguistic attributes with individuals and with cultural objects), association is again motivationally relevant for speakers' choice of a code.

In addition to theoretical frameworks, the concept of association is also revealed in CS cases. Grosjean (2010) indicates that some particular words in a lexicon in a language might express certain concepts better than those in another language. For example, the concept expressed in the American English word, "playground" (i.e., an environment where children enjoy playing), is different from that expressed in the French word, "parc" (i.e., an environment with rigorous rules and less desirable swing areas). Since the connection between "playground" and the concept of enjoyment did not exist in "parc" in Grosjean's cognition, it triggered his switch to English when he intended to express the concept more associated with "playground." Grosjean's study suggests that the association of a language with some expressions is also motivationally relevant for speakers' choice of the language for certain effects.

Compared with the aforementioned scholars, Auer's examination of CS cases does not seem to be directly related to the concept of association. Using the conversation analysis approach, Auer (1984, 1995, 1998) primarily argues that the meanings of CS should be derived from the surface structure and sequential development of interaction rather than from the external categories of CS established in a theory. Although the methodological background of Auer's studies is not directly related to the concept of association, the concept of the situated meanings of CS suggests that it is possible that the interpretation of the association of a code by participants might be dependent on the sequential environment in an ongoing conversation as well; that is, the formation of the association might occur at the internal sequential and structural level and is locally meaningful. For example, when a speaker switched to Taiwanese (e.g., *Bângkah*) in an ongoing conversation because it was associated with the social meaning of gangs and gangsters, the speaker might have intended to use the Taiwanese phrase for the effect of creating a humorous frame. When the speaker used the Taiwanese phrase for the effect of creating the humorous frame, regardless of the initial association of the Taiwanese phrase (i.e., social meaning of gangs and gangsters), the phrase might have been at the same time connected with the humorous frame by participants in the ongoing conversation. The locally-developed association between Taiwanese and the humorous frame might then be motivationally relevant for participants' choice of Taiwanese for other effects or purposes.

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