

A Linguist's Spinoff in Fostering Civic Engagement

Given their socio-economic status, the description and documentation of the understudied languages has often led to unexpected direct, or indirect impacts on the community; however, little has been discussed regarding the potential for community development. This paper addresses the advance in documentary linguistics in community collaboration as the foundations of interdisciplinarity. First, to capture undetected language-specific features, novel elicitation techniques can be further modified to inspire new knowledge production from alternative perspectives in different disciplines. Second, to increase its applicability in typological research, the participatory design to incorporate native speakers' feedback at the inception for a trial prototype can increase the likelihood to accomplish an inclusive design in the university-community collaboration. Last, the talent cultivation process for the research and field assistants in such collaboration can consolidate sustainable changes with respects to the subsequent collective action in the community.

When documenting the communicative behavior and language in use, alternative elicitation techniques with metaphorical translations can promote participants' engagement and responses. To recruit senior speakers of Taiwanese Min Nan¹ in my dissertation project entitled *Spatial Language and Cognition in Bilingual Minds: Taiwan as a Test Case* at the Department of Linguistics at the University at Buffalo-SUNY, I have translated the protocols of the referential communication tasks into a traditional role-playing game for children, called *pān-kong-hué-á* 'role-play game(s)', which managed to increase seniors' acceptance and engagement. Later, this culturally responsive approach has been incorporated into my postdoctoral research in fostering civic engagement at the National Sun Yat-sen University in a shrinking community, Yancheng in Kaohsiung City, Taiwan. From the perspective of a cognitive linguist, the basic civic skills—information, expression, taking actions and joining the public—is regarded as the way people deliver their opinions and the way people make decisions/take actions. In collaboration with the local Art Society, Sin Pin Pier Art Association, I have adopted the concept of game metaphor as cognitive reframing strategy to promote intergenerational engagement. The ongoing accomplishments show that a linguistic approach for civic engagement can escalate the levels and range of participation in the university-community partnerships and optimize its social impacts on sustainable community development.

References

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¹ Taiwanese Min Nan is a spoken variety of Min Nan (ISO 639-3), an understudied variety in the field of semantic typology. Based on the report from Yap's statistical analyses (2017), due to the dominance of Mandarin Chinese since 1949, the TMN-speaking population has drastically declined by losing native environment.