

Austronesian Formal Linguistics Association 27 invited talk:

From endangered language shift to maintenance: where do formal linguists fit?

Apay Ai-yu Tang

National Dong Hwa University

Many scholars have predicted an alarming decline in the number of the world's languages, especially endangered languages. Using Truku Seediq—a definitely endangered indigenous language in Taiwan as a representative example, this talk offers some insights into the psycholinguistic assessment of language shift as well as language maintenance, and suggests possible ways that formal linguists could contribute to benefit language communities.

The body-part and nature-image naming tasks being developed as parts of the Hawai'i Assessment of Language Access (HALA) project exploit the fact that the speed with which bilingual speakers access lexical items in their two languages offers a sensitive measure of relative language strength. A total of sixty-eight participants in four age groups have been tested. The results show an overt intergenerational decline and the need for urgent remedial action if Truku is to survive for another generation. To increase the frequency of language use and to arouse speaker's or learner's motivation to continue using or learning his or her mother tongue in the face of marginalization, this talk further presents the current work on indigenous language maintenance specifically at microscopic level and focuses on five actions that formal linguists could take to benefit language communities at this crucial juncture.

