

Chapter I Motivation

I was brought up in Taichung City, the largest town in Central Taiwan. I remember when I was little, every Central-Autumn Festival my father would take the whole family by car to Sun-Moon Lake, a scenic spot famous not only in Central Taiwan, but throughout all of China. There was a very big temple near the Lake called “Wen Wu Temple” (文武廟). After several years, I went to Sun-Moon Lake again by myself. Surprisingly, I found that, although the Chinese characters on the signpost remained the same, the translation under had been changed to “Men Mu Temple”, according to the Hoklo pronunciation, also known as Taiwan Southern Min. Political issues aside, I started to wonder what the local residents called this temple. Since the majority of people living around Sun-Moon Lake were Hoklo, the latter translation seemed to be more appropriate, since these people came earlier than those people who speak Mandarin Chinese.

Another interesting story is about my father’s hometown, “Ching-shui”(清水) in Taichung County. I only knew the place by the name “Ching-shui”, but recently another name “Gomatau” (牛罵頭) has become popular and is frequently heard especially in historical and cultural related events. Originally “Goma” was a village name of the Papora, an Austronesian plains group, for they were the first settlers in this area. After the Jia-wu War (甲午戰爭), Taiwan became a Japanese colony, and

this place name was then changed to “ Ching-shui” by the Japanese government, for the water in this area was clean and “Ching-shui” was also a typical Japanese style place name. To youngsters, these various names for one place might just be something interesting. But when we look into them, there are actually histories behind each one telling us the development history and the relationships among those ethnic groups during the time of development.

Place names and personal names have many things in common. When we study personal names, although they are countless, some naming patterns can be discerned in every culture. For Chinese, the family name can tell us something about this person’s origin, or where his or her ancestors came from, and the given name can convey many functions, such as the description of the baby, the expectations of the name giver, as a memorial for something or someone, etc. Different families may have their own naming patterns, so it is quite common that we find similarities among siblings.

Like personal names, place names are originally given meanings in the first place as well. But compared with personal names, place names tend to be more descriptive and objective, and they last longer and are relatively more stable (Li, 1998). As referents, place names significantly reflect the language and culture of the inhabitants. Therefore different linguistic rules and practices of different people can be seen in

place names' morphology and naming patterns.

There are three components of place names: history, geography, and language. Since place names must be expressed through language, language does play an important role in studying place names. However, because of the lack of systematic research, most literature on the place names of Taiwan is still first-hand field work data. As a person born in central Taiwan, we will focus on the place names of central Taiwan in this study. Through this sociolinguistic study, we hope to reconstruct a clearer and more complete picture of development in central Taiwan.