

Linguistic Atlas of Taiwan Project

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Abstract

Taiwan linguistics lacks the foundation upon which other, more mature language disciplines have been based: It has no historical-comparative grammars, no etymological dictionaries, and no linguistic atlases, for any of its language varieties. To begin filling in one of the fundamental lacunæ, Brewer's fieldwork project is a small contribution towards a linguistic atlas of Taiwan, a microscopic view of language distribution in which each lexeme is defined, not only by denotation, but also by an inventory of phonetic variants and seven informant background factors (age, sex, language use, ethnicity, education, occupation, and residential history).

Operating mostly on shoestring budgets for two decades, Brewer has collected 1,400 recordings of Southern Min and Hakka interviews; folk narratives supplemented responses to structured questionnaires. For data analysis, only off-the-shelf software and hardware have been used. Twenty years ago, the project started with Word for Windows vs. 2, FoxPro 2.6, and the beta version of ArcView; by now we have advanced to using Excel and – believe it nor not – ArcView 3.3.

Our presentation consists of a survey of the dialect geographical application of GIS software in Taiwan and a discussion of our incredibly slow progress towards a linguistic atlas of the island.

Keywords: *dialect geography, linguistic atlas, Taiwan, Southern Min*