‘What’s in a Name’: Implications of Linguistic Strategies and Labeling Practices in PRC/ROC Official as well as English-Language Media Discourse on the Cross-Strait Issue and Domestic Taiwanese Politics

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When adopting a social-constructivist view of reality, we can say that language is particularly powerful in (re)constructing existing perceptions and interpretations of social and political processes and phenomena. Following this epistemological line, our paper aims to examine ideological implications of linguistic strategies in discourse on the cross-Strait issue as well as on developments in Taiwanese domestic politics regarding the ever widening gap between trends of ‘localization’ (in terms of self-identification) and ‘(re)sinicization’, as they are reflected/(re)constructed in the English-language media in Taiwan/PRC. A second theoretical underpinning of this paper is the idea of speech acts as advanced in speech act theory in the discipline of linguistic pragmatics.

This linguistic theory provides us with powerful tools to analyze the essence of the problem across the Taiwan Strait, which lies indeed in the politically sensitive use of language, in particular, the use of two verbs, ‘to define’ and ‘to declare’. According to speech act theory, utterances perform specific actions through having specific forces. The illocutionary force of the performative verb ‘to define’ clearly changes the context of a state of meaning ambiguity to a clear definition. The force of ‘declaring’ also performs an act which shapes a new reality. Applied to our case in point, the crucial issues are the definition of terms such as ‘independence’, ‘status-quo’, ‘crossing the red line’ and the denotation of ‘China’ itself as well as the formal, legal declaration of Taiwan independence. The latter act would thus change the situation of ‘undefined status-quo’ or ‘de facto independence’ into a ‘publicly and legally declared independence’, which in itself would not change reality of governance as such, but would entail a shift in perception and an official acceptance of the ‘de facto independence’. The ROC would thus become a ‘de jure’ independent political entity. As Kenneth Lieberthal has it, “if military confrontation takes place, it would be because a place that has long declared itself independent was attacked for doing so again” (2005:53). From a mainland perspective, this would be intolerable or as the Beijing leadership prefers to put it, “this would cross their red line.” Paradoxical is that while the PRC has so far ‘accepted’ the current situation as it presents itself, a ‘de facto independence’ of Taiwan, it can not tolerate
the public and juridical use of language describing the same situation, as it would mean a loss of face for this growing superpower in our geopolitical world order.

Hence, this ‘war of words’ or ‘cross-fire by lips and combat with tongues’\(^1\) may lead to a conflict which moves beyond discourse. Any attempt at definition or proposal of a formula, which is unacceptable to one side or the other, prompts hostile rhetoric and in the case of the PRC, degenerates into intimidation tactics. These threats have already been substantiated with real deeds, as can be seen in the re-militarization moves on the mainland over the past decade as well as the PRC’s deployment of missiles in the Taiwan Strait at critical moments, such as the 1996 presidential elections on Taiwan or when former President Lee Teng-hui was perceived to be moving an inch too close to ‘declaring’ independence, in defining the cross-strait issue in terms of a ‘state-to-state’ relationship.

Over the last few years the PRC has refrained from military exercises in Taiwanese electoral times, as these only appeared to be counter-productive. As it seems, the Chinese leadership has now shifted to a ‘wait and see attitude’ in order not to tip the balance in favor of their most dreaded enemy, the pan-green\(^2\) alliance in Taiwan. However, several years ago, Gordon Chang predicted that the Beijing leadership might well resort to non-peaceful means, referring to declarations by former Premier Zhu Rongji that China would fight no matter what the odds, because the mainland's people would safeguard national unity ’with their blood and their lives' (2001). Chang’s doom scenario may have been particularly pessimistic, but one can only notice that four years later with the adoption of the anti-secession bill (15 March 2005), which provides a legal framework to initiate any retaliatory actions against so-called secessionists, thereby creating an explicit national mandate to use force if necessary, the basic idea underlying the rhetoric of ‘using non-peaceful means when all other means have been exhausted’, has not changed at all.\(^3\) Using the term ‘non-peaceful means’ just seems to be a euphemistic term for the above ‘blood and life’ metaphor. These verbal threats appear to be supported by intimidation in practice when considering the annual double-digit increase in military expenses and the increasingly accelerated pace of the missile build-up targeting Taiwan.

\(^1\) Literal translation from the expression in Mandarin
\(^2\) Political parties in Taiwan are often referred to in terms of colors, e.g. ‘green’ refers to the policies of the DPP party and therefore to the party itself. ‘Blue’ denotes the KMT. Alliances between parties have also received special terms, such as ‘pan-blue’ (KMT + PFP + New Party) and ‘pan-green’ (DPP + TSU).
\(^3\) Here again, we note an absence of specification as to the meaning of ‘all other means’. So far, Beijing might be hard put to demonstrate any other attempt besides their usual and most consistent insistence on the ‘one China principle’ as a necessary precondition to any cross-strait talks.
However, to avoid this next step to actual ‘non-peaceful’ conflict, and barring more recent explicit campaign rhetoric on the Taiwanese side (see further), both governments have mostly preferred to be extremely careful in their phrasing policies, because a ‘wrong’ use of territorial references could spark a cross-strait crisis instantly. As an editor of the *South China Morning Post* observes,

“In the long saga of across-strait relations, semantics have often been the dominant feature. Precise meaning in the utterances of both sides has frequently been covered by layers of obfuscation and ambiguity. At times this use of opaque language has been convenient for both Taiwan and the mainland and has helped to defuse rising tension” (Editorial, 1 Jan 2001)

Retaining ambiguity in reference terms has so far been a creative and especially strategic way of dealing with the problem, not only for the Chinese/Taiwanese authorities but also for the foreign community. US policy, for example, shows a great ambivalence in its keeping diplomatic ties with the PRC while at the same time adhering to its promises as stated in the Taiwan Relations Act. Language ambiguity in this Act leaves unclear who eventually determines Taiwan’s defense requirements and which concrete measures would be taken in the event of a cross-strait conflict. US as well as EU policy toward Taiwan and China is built upon carefully chosen nuances and discreet silences.

The PRC insists that in diplomatic documents to which it is a signatory the phrase is added “there is but one China”. While caving in to this precondition of accepting the “one China” policy, the international community gets entangled in the intricate language problems involved in discourse on Taiwan. The following terms thus become problematic: ‘country’, ‘state’, ‘province’, ‘nation’, ‘government’. As a foreign correspondent for *The Economist* puts it:

“There are a thousand ways of going wrong in discussing Taiwan, mostly because its political situation has created a through-the-looking-glass world of twisted semantics and dogmatic naming conventions. First, what is it? A sovereign nation by all appearances, but China (or ‘Communist China’ in the cold-war parlance of Taiwan’s government) sees it as simply a renegade province, to be returned in due time. [...] Journalists usually avoid the obstacle course by referring to Taiwan as an ‘island’ and moving on. But foreign governments are forced to lead a more delicate line. A State Department memo of ‘Do’s and Don’ts’ on Taiwan

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4 Without being more explicit, the US usually repeats its well-worn verse in the Taiwan Relations Act that the US would “consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means… a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the US.” (Campbell & Mitchell, “Crisis in the Taiwan strait?” in *Foreign Affairs*, July 2001)

5 One should not forget that this kind of cold-war discourse was used extensively in Western countries. Ample examples can be found in US magazines, e.g. “This is Red China Today” (cover of *Newsweek*, Oct 12, 1959); “the red rulers of China” (ibid. p.20); “the Red Chinese capital” (ibid. p.20); “Was it a triumph for US foreign policy or had the Reds outwitted us again?” (*Newsweek*, Oct 13, 1958); ‘Free China’ (*Newsweek*, Sept 29, 1958). By the 70s, however, this discourse had gradually changed into terms like ‘Peking, Communist China, the Chinese Communist leadership’ and ‘the Nationalists’. The KMT government in Taiwan adhered to this cold-war rhetoric until the 1986 lifting of the martial law.
Naming the ROC and its representatives in international events, like the Olympics, or in international organizations such as the WTO indeed involves a great deal of creativity. Controversies arise instantly, when the PRC terms Taiwan as a ‘regional’ economy, as happened on an official mainland Chinese web site when referring to the island’s status in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. This same Beijing-funded English-language APEC web site furthermore claimed that mainland China had had jurisdiction over Taiwan since 1949. As to the labeling of Taiwan in the WTO, former US president Clinton vowed that the US would not accept Beijing’s proposal to name Taiwan a ‘customs territory of China’ in documents related to the mainland’s entry into the organization (08 Sept, 2000). Although the PRC had hoped to downgrade the ROC’s status in the WTO to that of Hong Kong and Macau, Taiwan was promised to enjoy the same rights as all other WTO members and that its mission to the WTO headquarters in Geneva would be treated as a ‘permanent representation’ and not merely an ‘economic and trade office’ like the Hong Kong and Macau delegations. It is significant that the official and most complex English title of the ROC mission, ‘the Permanent Representation of the Separate Customs Territory of TPKM - Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu-) to the WTO’ was decided upon while still considering an appropriate Chinese label, which is one more instance of how sensitive the use of language is, especially the Chinese language, when dealing with the Taiwan case.

Finding the correct reference term for the island itself is not only a challenge for international organizations, foreign diplomats and media workers who are constrained by ‘diplomatically correct’ language use, but the language problem as to which label befits the territory, is mainly felt at the Taiwanese domestic level, given the sensitivity of its history and its ensuing quest for identity. Depending on where Taiwanese citizens find themselves on the continuum that spans feelings of allegiance to an aboriginal, a ‘nativist’ Taiwanese (Hoklo, Hakka), a mainland Chinese, or a ‘New Taiwan’ identity, the reference term can differ from respectively ‘Formosa’ to ‘Taiwan’, ‘the ROC’ and ‘the ROC on Taiwan’, the latter term being the official label. Divergence in definitions of the ROC within the island thus depends on how

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6 Among the list of ‘Dos and Don’ts’: “Since the American government does not recognize Taiwan as a country (“use ‘jurisdiction’ or ‘area’”), its officials (called ‘consultants’, since the staff of the pseudo-private American Institute in Taiwan [AIT] that serves as the de-facto embassy must temporarily resign from the foreign service) refer to Taiwan’s ‘authorities’ rather than ‘government’. When the American ambassador (‘AIT director’) meets his Taiwanese counterpart (‘director of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office’) to sign a treaty (‘AIT-TECRO agreement’), the meeting is ‘unofficial’.” (from A long footnote, The Economist, 7 November 98)
people identify with the ROC. The difference in use of these terms can be traced in news stories of the Taiwanese English-language print media, as analyzed in this author’s Ph.D. dissertation, which focused on the dynamics of language and ideology in the Taiwanese English-language media coverage of the Hong Kong handover. A particular and consistent choice for one of the alternatives may be most obvious hints to implicit meaning and underlying ideology.

Conclusions of this Ph.D. research have been confirmed by the growing trend since the late nineties to replace the term ‘ROC’ by ‘Taiwan’ and ‘mainland China’ by ‘China’. These changes were introduced gradually, first without much debate but by 2001 the political climate was considered ripe enough for this topic to be openly discussed even at government level. The first case in point was the decision by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to add the term ‘Taiwan’ to the international passports of every Taiwan citizen traveling abroad. MOFA spokesmen insisted that this move was made for reasons of clarity towards the foreign community, but it is widely believed it was equally invested with an ideological undertone, i.e. the expression of a sentiment that developed over several decades but that was muffled under the White Terror period (1950-80s), and that has received gradual official acknowledgement only since the lifting of the Martial Law in 1987, viz. a growing sense of ‘Taiwanese consciousness’.

More recently this name-change concern found its most explicit expression so far –at least on government level- in President Chen’s proposal to ‘rectify names’ at the occasion of a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) campaign rally one week before the legislative elections in December 2004. The president vowed to replace the ‘ROC on Taiwan’ by ‘Taiwan’ in state-owned enterprises and overseas representative offices (i.e. no embassies). As this proposal actually represented the prime campaign ticket of the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), the ruling party’s close ally in the pan-green alliance, President Chen is said to have introduced this eleventh hour election gambit not to lose voters to the TSU, which according

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7 An elaboration of the divergence in definition of ROC is given in the opinion article “The definition of ROC”, Taiwan News, 23/03/2001. It comes as no surprise that this naming issue appears in particularly this daily, which was the first Taiwanese paper to change its name from ‘China News’ to ‘Taiwan News’.

8 As an article in the China Times contends, “The Ministry of Foreign affairs has so far maintained a cautious posture on the issue of adding ‘Taiwan’ to ROC passports, because it involves ideological perspectives on the issue of unification or independence. Yet, the Executive Yuan Secretary-General Chou I-jen said that adding the word Taiwan to the national title on ROC passports is only a technical issue, done for convenience. He stressed that there is absolutely no relationship between this measure and any question of national identity and pointed out that if the national title ‘Republic of China’ were removed from the passport, this would involve the issue of national identity, but adding the word ‘Taiwan’ at the end of the national title is a way to make it more convenient for people from other countries to distinguish the two sides.” (China Times, June 19, 2001)
to some polls had been gaining in popularity the previous days. The proposal met with instant
negative criticism from the US Administration which stated this move would constitute a
unilateral change to the status-quo. In the immediate aftermath of President Chen’s name-
change proposal, the three English-language dailies in Taiwan explicitly aired their views on
this highly controversial issue as well as on the US reaction against it and other recent US
statements, not only in the op-ed articles but also through particular choice of news stories.

The salience of dissonance between the narratives in the Taiwanese English-language press
concerning this issue points at the sensitivities involved in the formal denotation of the island.
Indeed, the name-change proposal only made explicit a sentiment that has been growing over
the last decade and which has polarized the Taiwanese citizenry, viz. the choice between the
term ‘Taiwan’ on the one hand, as opposed to ‘China’ on the other, reflecting deeper
allegiances of identity. By the beginning of the 21st century, it has become increasingly
anachronistic to still adhere to the term ‘ROC’, except in collocation with terms pertaining to
the field of diplomacy, as so far the official name has not changed yet. For this to happen a
constitutional reform with the additional consent of three quarters of the national legislature
would be needed, which is currently unlikely. Yet, in the wake of the ‘greenification’ trend
sustained by the DPP government, several actions pointing in this direction have already been
undertaken, albeit with less fanfare. When looking at the use of the term ‘Taiwan’ in the
official English-language government publications, we note that for example, the Taiwan
Headlines until 2001 most consistently used to change ‘Taiwan’ into ‘ROC’ when taking
over articles from the English-language Taipei Times. Now they no longer seem to follow this
practice and instead prefer to keep the original article intact. It is also remarkable that since
the end of the nineties the Taiwan Headlines has shown a greater tendency to more
extensively use articles from the Taiwan News, an English-language daily which has
explicitly chosen a ‘Taiwan first’ or ‘pro-Taiwan self-determination’ perspective. Not until a
few years ago was this newspaper virtually absent from the Taiwan Headlines to the
advantage of the other English-language daily, the China Post, which up until today still
occasionally uses ‘ROC’ in headlines or in collocation with other terms belonging to the
world of diplomacy. Not surprisingly since the change of ruling party in 2000 Taiwan
Headlines has drastically reduced the number of China Post articles in their current repertoire.
The China Post practically appears to be cast into oblivion by the Taiwan Headlines editors.

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9 See footnote 2
10 Taiwan Headlines is a government compilation of Taiwanese media articles, published electronically
on a daily basis.
Another clear example of this ‘Taiwanization/localization’ trend is the name change of the English-language government publication from *Free China Journal*, over *Taipei Journal* (May 2000) to *Taiwan Journal* (Jan 24, 2003). That this trend was borne out of a growing concern for local issues may be clear from the following extract from its editorial:

“The confusion over national identity and a lack of concern about local conditions have become major impediments to national development. Under the current education system, courses on Taiwan history and geography tend to be placed on the backburner, which leads to the perverse phenomenon that Taiwan students know less about their origin and environment than about that of China and other nations. The authorities should take measures to reinforce localized education, starting with the introduction of local conditions and customs”. (Editorial “Revised name to reflect new realities in Taiwan”, Taiwan Journal, Jan 24, 2003)

The same concern is evident in the *Taiwan News* editorial of its 13 May 1999 edition, the first issue published under its new name “Taiwan News” (previously *China News*). The editor also underlines the need to “reflect the local voice” in the face of the growing internationalization of Taiwan:

“The change is being made in light of the growing internationalization of Taiwan and the recent development of Internet communications (…). The change will make a clearer distinction between our newspaper and mainland China news organizations. The change is also meant to convey our intention to reflect the voice of Taiwan more effectively.” (Taiwan News editorial, 13 May 1999)

It is evident that the underlying reason for these name changes is inspired by ideological interpretations of the very term that is invested with the largest degree of ambiguity, namely the proper noun ‘China’ itself. This word harbors several meanings but is often used without a proper awareness of its implications. First of all, there is a sizeable category of people in the international community that, while lacking sufficient understanding of Taiwan history, unconsciously takes over the interpretation as it is disseminated from the mainland, i.e. “China equals the PRC and Taiwan is part of it”. They therefore use the terms ‘China’/‘Taiwan’ without realizing the political implications and without knowing that the official name of Taiwan also contains ‘China’, viz. ‘the Republic of China’. Another category comprises those who are well aware of the political statements they make when reserving the terms ‘China’ for the PRC and ‘Taiwan’ for the ROC on Taiwan, since they are familiar with, but choose not to use the official proper nouns for both governments, i.e. the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China. The above-mentioned English-language dailies *Taipei Times* and *Taiwan News* were the first papers to distinguish between both terms (‘China’ and ‘Taiwan’) most consistently. A last category of interpreters consists of those who take an a-political approach, like some scholars in the field of Sinology, and choose to use “China” in an exclusively cultural sense, which embraces Chinese societies everywhere. They thereby acknowledge that there is a distinction between the concepts of ‘country’ and ‘transnational civilization and heritage’. By using all terms interchangeably (‘mainland China,
PRC, China’ to denote the mainland and ‘ROC, Taiwan’ as reference to the island) we avoid an explicit choice to prematurely name the ROC on Taiwan ‘Taiwan’ and the PRC ‘China’, which would imply a political statement, according to rules of performativity in speech act theory. However, this mixed use of terms does not facilitate the reading/interpretation process. Besides, taking the current ‘localization’ development into account, the term ‘ROC on Taiwan’, may end up in the historical dustbin, eliminating all confusion. It may only survive for use in diplomatic contexts at least until the end of the incumbent president’s term.

In addition to the ideological choice between several terms denoting the island, the interpretation/definition of the term ‘China’ itself has been the subject of a decade-long heated debate across the Strait. It seems to have been going on, albeit with different degrees of fervor, since the so-called ‘1992 consensus’, an agreement about ‘one China, different interpretations’. Beijing, which previously denied the existence of this consensus (May 1996), insisted in March 2001 that Taipei accept this deal before going to the negotiation table to discuss unification of China\textsuperscript{11}. Once again, we have two performative speech act verbs, ‘accept’ and ‘refuse’, which, for Beijing, determine the negotiation process, since the acceptance of this so-called 1992 consensus (which in itself also centers around language and meaning interpretation) is put as a precondition for the negotiation.

The ROC, however, is internally divided over the existence of this so-called consensus. It is in this debate that the partisan nature of the dispute over Taiwan’s identity emerges: whereas the opposition alliance hails the 1992 consensus, the ruling party denies its existence. The entire discussion was highly covered by the media, which chronicled every single move and change in interpretation. Amongst a multitude of articles, we refer to the article “Koo: cross-strait ties stymied by ‘China’” in \textit{The China Post}, 2 March 2001, for a discussion of the 1992 talks in Hong Kong between the Chair of the Taiwan Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF), Koo, and Wang, Chair of the SEF’s counterpart in Beijing, the Association for the Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS). Whereas the pro-unification supporters perceive China as divided, resulting in two entities (PRC and ROC), the pro-self determination group makes a clear distinction between China and Taiwan and begs for the island to be left alone and to be able to decide its own future, without intervention from external powers, be it China or the international community.

\textsuperscript{11} As an example, see article “Zhu Rongju reiterates ‘One China’ stance” in the \textit{China Times}, March 16, 2001
According to President Chen, this consensus, as conceived by Beijing, is based on an idea similar to the Hong Kong formula, “one country, two systems” in which ‘one country’ refers to the PRC. Accepting this 1992 deal would therefore be tantamount to selling out the ROC before the negotiations have even started. The article “Beijing's consensus is no deal” in *Taipei Times* (6 Nov. 2001) puts it as follows: “If the entire world believes China is synonymous with the PRC^{12}, and if Taiwan accepts Beijing’s ‘one China’ principle, then Taiwan -officially known as the ROC- will be gobbled up by Beijing in the international community.” Since Taiwan authorities argue that Taiwan is a nation-state, it cannot be shoehorned into a political formula that would erase or threaten its existence. The only agreement that was made in 1992, according to President Chen, was that the two sides “agreed to disagree on what exactly one China means” to facilitate the cross-strait talks. Given the 1992 formula consists of two noun phrases, ‘One China’ and ‘different interpretations’, it is only the second part which President Chen accepts as being part of the consensus, but not the ‘one China’ principle. The above-mentioned *Taipei Times* article quotes both Chen and his predecessor, Lee Teng-hui, saying “It was exactly because no consensus was reached on the meaning of ‘one China’ that we have “each side making its own interpretation”. In other words, there is only a ‘consensus without a consensus’.” The article explicitly suggests that the “one China, different interpretations” formula is a semantic trap set up by Beijing and concludes “It is meant only for domestic consumption within China and for deceiving the people of Taiwan. Internationally, there is only enough room for one China, not for different interpretations of it.” But even the international community is creatively ambiguous enough to verbally accept only one China and pragmatically deal with and thereby accept both territories, even though Beijing’s insistence on its version of ‘one China’ is interpreted by the green camp in Taiwan as nothing more than a verbal ‘annexation’ of Taiwan.

The definition of ‘one China’ is an ongoing saga with many episodes and constant changes to its formulation, but the intended meaning has on the whole and so far remained fairly constant on both sides of the Strait. To name just a few examples: In 1997, Beijing issued a tripartite definition of “one China”: 1) there is but one China; 2) Taiwan is part of China; 3) China’s only legitimate representation is the PRC. Three new phrases (*hsinsanju*) were coined by vice-Premier Qian Qichen in July 2000: 1) In the world, there is only one China; 2) The mainland and Taiwan are both part of it; 3) The sovereignty and the territorial integrity of

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^{12} This interpretation of ‘China’ was, once again, disseminated by Beijing, when during the APEC summit in Shanghai (Nov 2001), China’s Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan lambasted a reporter who referred to the former’s country as ‘Communist China’ and later on President Jiang Zemin himself used ‘China’ as an abbreviation for the PRC (*Taipei Times*, 6 Nov. 2001)
China cannot in any circumstances be divided. At the other side of the Strait, the official discourse at the end of October 2001 went as follows: the President hoped “to find a mutually acceptable definition of the ‘one China’ issue, provided that both sides should be accorded equal status, that there be no threat of force and that the freedom of choice of 23 million Taiwanese must be respected”. Upon taking up the mandate of chairman of the ruling DPP (July 21, 2002), President Chen stirred up some commotion when he became more outspoken. His sudden straightforwardness was inspired by his long-standing frustration with the absence of reciprocation to the olive palms he had extended to the PRC over the two years of his first term in the presidential office. On the contrary, in an effort to further isolate Taiwan on the diplomatic plane, the PRC did not stop courting the official diplomatic allies of the ROC and in July 2002 and March 2004 managed to ‘buy’ the friendship of the leaders in Nauru and Dominica respectively. More recently, money diplomacy has again been successful in luring away Grenada and Vanuatu as ‘friends of Taiwan’.

Since President Chen believed it was about time to redefine the basic principles for managing cross-strait relations, on July 30, 2002, he made a most remarkable speech to the DPP Central Executive Committee, in which he insisted that Taiwan walk its own path in keeping with the “Resolution Regarding Taiwan’s Future” adopted by the DPP Congress in 2001. President Chen reiterated that if Beijing openly renounces the use of military force against Taiwan - which it still refuses to do despite its insistence on a peaceful solution, a contradiction emptying its own rhetoric- it would be conducive to maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. As Taipei Journal editors indicate, “Taiwan and China long ago went their separate ways, whether from a historical, economic, political or cultural perspective” (Taipei Journal, 9 August, 2002). Some days later, the president voiced the same notion in a meeting of the Council of Taiwanese Chambers of Commerce in Asia and reiterated it again during a telecast to attendees of the World Federation of Taiwanese Associations taking place in Japan (August 3, 2002), where he stated that there is one country on each side of the Taiwan Strait. Already at that time, he suggested that consideration should be given to enacting a referendum law, should an island-wide vote someday prove necessary.

This newly coined turn of phrase instantly sparked strong reactions from Taiwanese pro-unification politicians and Beijing authorities, who interpreted/framed the speech as coming...
close to talk of independence and provided enough fodder for the local press, the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong as well as the government-controlled mainland Chinese press to discuss the various interpretations at great length. President Chen eventually released a statement through the DPP in which he indicated his remarks were taken out of context, oversimplified and thus created misunderstanding.

In fact, the president had only sketched a picture of the de facto situation across the Strait, as it is perceived by a large portion of Taiwanese citizens. The only difference was that this time the president used a more clear-cut and straightforward language, which came down to a definition of the status-quo: Taiwan is governed as a sovereign state like the PRC and is not perceived as a local government under the authority of the larger central government on the mainland. It is said to meet the four characteristics of statehood as stipulated in the *Montevideo Convention of 1933 on the Rights and Duties of states* in Article 1. The *Taipei Times* editorial on 9 December posits that the PRC seems to adopt a different definition of the status-quo. Beijing is said to be “trying to bury Taiwan alive with the term ‘status-quo’” and any move by President Chen is cast by the PRC as a change of the status-quo. Even though President Chen has spoken clear language, up until today various interpretations of his verbal acts have been sustained. Chen has been framed either as the ‘suspicious’ Taiwan independence advocate and trouble-maker or as a proponent of Taiwan consciousness and identity. These diverging perspectives are discernible on various levels, in the media (domestic and international media alike), among academics as well as public opinion in Taiwan and abroad.

Besides the obvious role of the speech act verbs ‘define’, ‘declare’, ‘refuse’, ‘accept’, and the meaning that is generated by the use of terms such as ‘China’, ‘PRC’, ‘mainland China’, ‘ROC’, ‘Formosa’, ‘Taiwan’, a host of other language phenomena are involved in the cross-Strait discourse. This paper also discusses some additional problematic lexical items, the use of fixed formulae and slogans, rhetorical devices such as generalization and reification, metaphors, vague or ambiguous terms, and strategies of demonizing ‘the other’ by using abusive terms, diatribes and hostile rhetoric (e.g. threats and intimidation tactics). All of the above are instances of language use by government officials or the public at large, which are reproduced in the media. Through, for example, press accounts, which are often filled with

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16 These four characteristics are: 1) permanent population; 2) a defined territory; 3) a government; 4) a capacity to enter into relations with other states.

17 The *China Post* has consistently projected implicitly as well as explicitly a negative image of President Chen, even before he was voted into office, whereas *the Taiwan News* has for many years been an ardent supporter of the DPP and defended President Chen’s policies. The *Taipei Times* has been adopting an increasingly critical stance against Chen for ‘abandoning his core principles’ especially after the Chen / Soong meeting in February 2005.
reported speech and copies of press releases, we can easily retrieve and analyze official discourse across the Strait.

Other lexical terms that are loaded are obviously those which refer to the inhabitants of the island. The above-mentioned article in the *Economist* maintains that the word ‘Taiwanese’ is used to describe someone whose family settled on the island before 1945 (often centuries before), a group that makes up about 85% of the population. The term ‘Mainlander’ refers to a minority group of those people (along with their descendants) who arrived with the forces of General Chiang Kai-shek. The American Institute on Taiwan staff has thus had to invent the painful neologism ‘Taiwans’ to refer to all of them together.\(^{18}\) Even though the latter term does not seem to have gained general adherence in the foreign community, it cannot be denied that terms such as ‘Taiwanese’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Mainlanders’ have their own implications. The term ‘Taiwanese’ can be used to solely refer to the ‘ben-di-ren’ (settlers before 1945), whereas the label ‘Mainlander’ is reserved for the ‘wai-sheng-ren’, the population group which arrived from the mainland after 1945. Even though these are the terms used for the different ethnic groups on Taiwan, one has to acknowledge that no straightforward distinction can be made, as “individuals undergo constant and mutual influence and change rather than belonging to a discontinued succession of isolated cases” (Corcuff, 2000). Corcuff’s “‘Les Continentaux’ de Taiwan: une catégorie identitaire récente” illustrates the intricate problem of ethnicity as well as the construction, preservation or elimination of ethnic frontiers.

An attempt at ethnic amalgamation or assimilation can be seen in the emergence of the term “New Taiwanese” (*shin Taiwanren*), coined by former president Lee Teng-hui when campaigning for the KMT candidate, Ma Ying-jeou, in the 1998 Taipei mayoral election. By including the Mainlanders into the ‘Taiwanese’ category, this slogan urged those who originally belonged to the ‘ben-di-ren’ category to expand their ‘we-group feeling’ to all Mainlanders living on the island and was useful in attracting support for Mainlander candidates. It is also argued that the origin of this new term is to be found in the former KMT’s agenda of eradicating the ethnic rivalries within Taiwan between the Austronesians, Hoklo and Hakka population, and the ‘Waishengren’ (Mainlanders) and thus ‘indigenizing’ the Mainlanders and homogenizing the population on Taiwan (Allio, 2000). No matter what the real intention was behind the coinage of this new term, it is clear that it served to refer to the entire Taiwanese population, irrespective of their ethnic descent, as opposed to the ‘mainland Chinese’ citizenry at the other side of the Strait, and thus clearly distinguished between two categories, ‘us’ on Taiwan and ‘them’ on the mainland.

\(^{18}\) Source: “A long footnote”, *The Economist*, 7 November 98
Related to the noun phrase ‘New Taiwanese’, are two other lexical terms, which equally mustered a great deal of attention from the media, viz. ‘localization’ or ‘Taiwanization’, which originally meant the appointment of people in government from subethnic groups other than the Mainlanders\(^{19}\). Since the early nineties, the KMT reversed its closed policy of reserving the key posts in government to the Mainlanders only to opening up these positions to other ethnic groups. This term is basically different from but closely related to the term ‘indigenization’, which refers to the shift in identity allegiance of the Mainlanders from Mainland China to Taiwan. It is this evolution that led to the label ‘New Taiwanese’, which, as explained above, was handy in its efforts to undo previous ethnic divisions. As the KMT had influenced people’s perception of their identity for 40 years, the ruling authorities thus continued to play a significant role in this meaning construction even after the democratization process had started (Allio, 2000). Obviously the process of ‘Taiwanization’ of the state institutions could not take effect without ‘indigenization’ and vice versa.

In recent years the three terms ‘indigenization, Taiwanization, and localization’ have all been used to refer to the course set by former president Lee Teng-hui. However, the essence of this policy and the way it was at first continued by KMT-chairman, Lien Chan, is not at all clear, as the diverging views in the following three articles reveal. According to an opinion article, published in the *China Post* (13 June 2001), the KMT-ideological stance of that time had deviated from Taiwan’s mainstream political view by backing off from the ‘localization’ policy, set and pursued by Lee Teng-hui during his twelve years in office as both national president and KMT chairman. Its author argues the following: “Essentially, the independence cause embraced by Chen and his party is identical with Lee’s ‘localization’ policy. Both theories are in pursuit of Taiwan’s identity, to be a separate political entity, independent of the Chinese mainland”\(^{20}\). The journalist thus equals the idea of localization to the ideology of independence, in the same fashion as the PRC rhetoric, disseminated worldwide, about President Chen’s discursive practices. Both concepts can indeed be related to each other but are not necessarily identical. Obviously there cannot be independence without a localization trend but the other way round (i.e. localization without independence) is, arguably, conceivable.

\(^{19}\) From 1945 to 1987 the government had reinforced ethnic rivalries by reserving the key positions in its institutions to the ‘Waishengren’ only. Yet, as a result of ‘Taiwanization’, 70% of the KMT membership of 2.4 million was Taiwanese by the late eighties, and by 1993, even the highest posts in government were filled by Taiwanese, including that of president (Lee Teng-hui), premier (Lien Chan) and president of the Judicial Yuan (Lin Yang-kang).

\(^{20}\) Opinion article in the *China Post*: “Lee’s aid to Chen leaves many questions”, 13 June 2001
The position of ‘localization’, as presented in the above-mentioned China Post article, is completely absent in the China Times article “KMT heavyweights speak out on ‘localization’”, which analyzes the meaning of ‘constructive localization’, as formerly used by Lien Chan, and refers to the publication “On the True Essence of Localization” by KMT Central Standing Committee member Huang Ta-chou’s. The Taipei Times uses the same term ‘Taiwanization’ to refer to the trend at universities of creating departments of Taiwan history to promote Taiwan-oriented values, as opposed to Chinese-oriented cultural education. Reinterpretation of Taiwan history has been a hot political issue since the lifting of martial law, as exemplified by the harsh debates and street demonstrations about the new junior high school textbooks on Taiwan history published in September 1997. On 13th July 1997, the China News devoted a two-page feature on this issue. That the discursive interpretation of history is a most powerful enterprise is once again clear when the Taipei Review devotes its main focus in the January 2003 issue on this debate. Taiwanese citizens who are concerned to establish a local identity feel uncomfortable about any attempt to classify Taiwan as part of China. But, although Taiwan has never been ruled by the PRC, it is still argued that the island is to a certain extent ethnically a Chinese society and culturally influenced by the mainland. Lee Yuan-tseh, nobel chemistry laureate and president of Taiwan’s Academia Sinica, suggests the following way out that “localization of Taiwan does not necessarily involve de-Sinicization.”

Other terms which involve ideological perspectives are nouns like ‘unification’, ‘liberation’, ‘secession’, ‘separatism’, ‘reunification’ as well as the adjectives ‘renegade’ and ‘breakaway’. The character of the PRC discourse on the cross-Strait issue carries a hegemonic potential in the sense that other versions of reality get muffled because of the diplomatic isolation in which the ROC finds itself. The term ‘unification’ is rarely found in the international media but is an option forwarded by Taiwanese who, even though they see their territory as an independent political entity, are willing to consider some kind of unity with the mainland, given their common cultural heritage and remote ethnic links. For them, the phrase ‘one China’ is a concept of the past, maybe the future, but not the present. The option of ‘unification’, as seen from this perspective, is based on a different premise about the

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21 According to Huang, the meaning of ‘localization’ should include three special qualities: 1) it should place Taiwan as the highest priority and espouse ‘Taiwan first’ to further build up the process and results leading to a common recognition of Taiwan as a single living body, and not a rigid ideology; 2) it should encourage the merging and cultivation of ethnic groups, and stimulate the potential and collective power of the people; it should not become a tool of fragmentation for the purpose of antagonism; 3) it should nurture the power of the native land, and be a source of motivation to promote development; it should never be a tight lock for sealing oneself off (China Times, July 5, 2001).

22 “Tzeng says colleges must help Taiwanization effort”, Taipei Times, 16 October 2001

23 Lee Yuan-tseh’s speech on the third International Conference on Sinology held in Taipei, June 2000
definitions of ‘statehood’ and ‘independence’ from the one informing the PRC’s position and shows a willingness to negotiate on an equal footing. Lieberthal (2005) touches on different possibilities to define ‘independence’. He constructs three types, an international, ideational and juridical definition. The first definition of independence means that other countries recognize the country as such, whereas the second definition refers to the local population which promotes the view of its territory as an independent political entity. The third definition denotes legal action taken to declare a territory independent. Lieberthal proposes a rather one-sided way to avert a possible war in that Beijing should embrace the international definition of independence, as it would then be clear that for want of international recognition Taiwan is not perceived as an independent entity, which entails China has nothing to worry about. Ironically, just as the Taiwan authorities state there is no need to ‘declare’ independence as the territory is already independent (based on the above-mentioned four characteristics of statehood as stipulated in the Montevideo Convention of 1933 on the Rights and Duties of states in Article 1), China is thus encouraged by Lieberthal to adopt an equally pragmatic attitude and by choosing the international definition of ‘independence’ it could completely ignore the ROC definition of the island’s status, provided the PRC can ensure that the island keeps deprived of international recognition. This presents, as Lieberthal suggests, an easy way out for China to refrain from resorting to non-peaceful means to solve the problem.

A diametrically opposed point of view to the ROC definition of ‘statehood’ underlies the use of the terms ‘separatism’, ‘secession’, ‘breakaway’ or ‘renegade’ province, as can be found in the official Mainland Chinese rhetoric and its media discourse. This type of dismissive appellation is often referred to in international news agencies and thus reflected in the world’s press. A most interesting article by Don Shapiro in the Taipei Review further elaborates on the foreign media’s lack of pursuing balance (1 March 2002). Since Beijing considers Taiwan to be a part of China, it can hardly accept Taiwan’s drive for self-determinacy and terms such as ‘separatism (fenliezhuyi)’ thus seem to be appropriate and natural from this perspective.

Tracing the history of solutions proposed by the PRC, we first note the term ‘liberation’24. As the Beijing leadership was convinced that the islanders were occupied by an illegitimate government this term was used until the late seventies to ‘emancipate Taiwan from this corrupt regime’ and accomplish their proletarian revolution. At the present time, one can still find this term occasionally in mainland Chinese discourse, be it in official speeches as reported in their English-language newspaper, the China Daily, or in individual language use.

24 Ironically, the same term ‘liberation’ was also used in the ROC by those advocates of independence who felt ‘colonized’ by the waishengren and oppressed by the authoritarian KMT-regime. Liberation became a reality with the lifting of the Martial Law and the legalization of opposition parties.
But as from 1979, the Beijing authorities officially gave up this explicit show of moral superiority and in a so-called move to show their willingness to negotiation, toned down the term ‘liberation’ to the formula of ‘peaceful reunification’.

Yet, this formula also implies a form of hierarchy, since the PRC consistently uses the ‘family’ metaphor, where the ‘Motherland’ is the catalyst for reuniting the entire family of Chinese, first initiated by the Hong Kong ‘return’ and followed by Macau’s ‘return’. Rhetorical devices such as this ‘family’ metaphor, found in noun phrases like ‘the embrace of the Motherland’, and repetitive use of the term ‘re-unification’, pregnant with the presupposition about the original status, help constructing this wishful thinking into a reality. Interesting to note, is that the ‘family’- metaphor is also used in the discourse of some overseas Taiwanese organizations, such as the World Taiwanese Congress, which was established in December 2000 and held its first plenary conference on March 17-18, 2001 in Taipei. As Chen Lung-chu, chairman of the Lung-chu Chen New Century Foundation and professor at New York Law School asserts: “In commemorating the anniversary of March 18[rotation of ruling party], it is time for all Taiwanese around the world to stand up courageously and to walk into the international arenas. As a famous song puts it, “Mother, your name is Taiwan” The Taiwanese must courageously call their Mother Taiwan, let their voice be heard worldwide, develop the Taiwan spirit, and build a first class island nation in the new century.”

25 It follows that the feeling of harmony and respect for the family is still very much alive in the mainland Chinese as well as the Taiwanese communities.

In the official PRC rhetoric which is reverberated in its media discourse, the final goal of ‘re-unification’ is presented as the definite will of all Chinese people. This essentializing strategy of reification, as it is called in discourse analytical terms, can also be traced in some English-language media texts on the mainland. The result of this reification and the implication of its hegemonic character is that worldwide discourse on the cross-Strait issue is indeed replete with references to ‘re-unification’, as this is the message disseminated by the PRC, which currently holds the added value of the huge magnet luring foreign investment. In view of the irresistible attraction of China’s extensive market the foreign business community as well as individual governments do not wish to ruffle the feathers of the potentially golden goose and are more willing to de-link politics from economic interests. As the saying goes, “where money talks, principles walk”. We refer to the present debate among EU member states on the lifting of the arms embargo against China, which is slated to happen by mid-2005 despite strong opposition from the US and Japan.

25 Source: Guest opinion article “Call Taiwan ’Mother’ ” in Taiwan News, 26 March 2001
As during the nineties the voice of the Taiwanese to determine their own future gained in strength and the power of the DPP overshadowed the fading KMT regime, the PRC started in 1995 to change its discourse of ‘peaceful reunification’ into a rhetoric of fighting against ‘separatism’ or ‘splittism’ to defend their view of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Abusive terms, demonizing the DPP government and its leaders, threats and intimidation tactics were used to keep the rising power of the DPP in check, but the increasingly hostile rhetoric only reached the opposite result. This drive has now culminated in China’s passing of the anti-secession bill, widely viewed as targeting Taiwan. The Taiwan Mainland Affairs Council insists on calling it the ‘anti-separation law’, which the MAC Vice chair David Huang explained does not carry the political-historical connotation of the term ‘secession’ as used in the US’ Civil War, which assumed the existence of a federalist state. As the law is seen in Taiwan to aim at arbitrarily defining the timing and means of using force against ‘splittist forces’ in Taiwan and elsewhere, it is believed that the status-quo in the Strait might be unilaterally changed any time the PRC sees fit.

Just as the British have been accused by the Chinese leadership of ‘lack of sincerity’ during the Sino-British negotiations about the Hong Kong handover and the ensuing attempts at democratization of Hong Kong by its last governor, Chris Patten, the same term is now used in China to condemn the DPP regime. The phrase ‘lack of sincerity’ seems to be nothing more than a code name for these negotiating partners' refusal of non-conditional surrender. In both negotiations with the British as well as with the Taiwanese authorities, the PRC has insisted on preconditions before coming to the negotiating table and has refused to accept any condition of discussion as equal partners from their opponents.

Another characteristic of the cross-Strait issue is, apart from the ambiguity in terms analyzed above, the intentional use of vague language, which, once again, was one of the features of the Sino-British talks. One example of vagueness or lack of specification in the cross-Strait discourse is the Beijing leadership’s threat of using non-peaceful means to reunification if some conditions are not met by the Taiwanese side. Two of these are extremely vague: 1) if the ROC keeps ‘procrastinating’ on the issue of national reunification 2) if the social order in Taiwan plunges into a condition of anarchy. How and by whom are these terms to be interpreted?

Source: Taipei Times article “Secession or separation? It’s more than just semantics”, 25 Feb 2005
Beside the ambiguity and vagueness of the above-mentioned lexical terms and noun phrases, the repetitive use of fixed formulae and slogans also typifies Chinese discourse, especially the language used in the cross-Strait issue. Formulaic expressions like “one country, two systems”, “one China, separate interpretations”, “state-to-state” relationship”, “the confederation model”, “No haste, be patient”, “middle-of-the-road policy”, “active opening, effective management”, “economic integration”, “united front strategy”, “three No's (with different items depending on what side of the Strait we are on)” are beloved items to be interpreted and reinterpreted in the media.

In conclusion, lexical choices, rhetorical and argumentation strategies as well as presupposition-carrying constructions (such as iteratives like ‘return’ and ‘re-unification’) and implied meanings, are all indications of explicit as well as implicit ideological language use which has proven to be the key issue in the entire cross-strait debate. Undeniably, language is a most powerful tool in the construction of social and political reality, in official discourse as well as media narratives. By constructing or perpetuating myths about issues pertaining to nationhood and identity and naturalizing particular viewpoints into general truths, the political actors who engage in hegemonic discursive practices are most successful in creating sensations of ‘insiders/outsiders’ and excluding alternative versions of reality. That “discourse is the power to be seized” (Foucault, 84) is also in this particular cross-Strait context the stake of the battle. And in their function as public stages, the media are the battleground par excellence where national and cultural identities are negotiated and given different meanings by different social and political actors.

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