Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project

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An Investigation of the Multilingual Landscape of Nanning, the Permanent Venue for the China-ASEAN Expo

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This research project offers a holistic and descriptive account of trilingualism and trilingual education in China. Policy changes have led to the introduction of English language teaching and learning in primary schools. These reforms pose particular challenges to communities in ethnic minority areas, where Putonghua often competes with the minority language, and English is often taught in under-resourced schools with teachers with the requisite training in short supply.

The project involves extensive and intensive research comprising investigations into school- and community-level practices, policies and perceptions relating to trilingualism in such key regions as Xinjiang, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Gansu, Guizhou, Guangxi, Qinghai, Jilin, Tibet and Guangdong. Using first-hand data collected from each region, the researchers examine language policies and curricula, as well as language allocation in the classroom and in the community, and analyse them in their specific historical, socio-political, demographical, economic, geographical and cultural contexts.

A distinctive feature of the project is its presentation of a new methodology and approach to researching such phenomena. This methodology encompasses policy analysis, community language profiles, as well as school-based fieldwork in order to provide rich data that facilitates multilevel analysis of policy-in-context.

This series of Briefing Papers presents information about different aspects of the project.

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An Investigation of the Multilingual Landscape of Nanning, the Permanent Venue for the China-ASEAN Expo

Background of the Study

Nanning is:

- The capital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, located in southwest China, between Guangdong, Guizhou, Hunan and Yunnan

- The permanent venue for the China-ASEAN Expo

- The venue for the China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit, Nanning International Arts Festival of Folk Songs and over 300 annual high-level conferences/forums

- An important city in advancing the process of building China-ASEAN free trade area and expanding economic and trade cooperation with the ASEAN countries

Total population: 6.86 million   Zhuang population: 3.39 million

Linguistic Landscape

Concept of linguistic landscape

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. The linguistic landscape of a territory can serve two basic functions: an informational function and a symbolic function (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Linguistic landscape in international research literature:

- Two special issues of *International Journal of Multilingualism* and *World Englishes* in 2006 and 2012

- *Linguistic Landscapes：An International Journal* (John Benjamins), edited by Elana Shohamy and Eliezer Ben-Rafael

- Dozens of monographs and proceedings, hundreds of related papers

Linguistic landscape in domestic research literature:

- Mainly comprises an introduction and review of international literature
- Few empirical studies: mainly focus on major metropolises, such as Beijing, Shanghai and small cities inhabited by ethnic people, such as Xichang
- From the Trilingual Education Project: Shan, F.F., Adamson, B. & Liu, C.Y. (2018). Linguistic landscape and social equality in an ethnic tourism village. In Gube, J.C. & Gao, F. (Eds.) *Education, Ethnicity and Inequality in the Multilingual Asian Context*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Significance of linguistic landscape research

- It is an effective way to understand the language ecology of a region.
- It can reflect language power distribution and the status of a linguistic group.
- The empirical data can provide a reference for policy-makers (Shang & Zhao, 2014).

Our study

- focuses on the under-researched topic of the linguistic landscape in both international and ethnic cities, thus having significant theoretical and practical implications
- contributes to the further development of the linguistic landscape of Nanning and provides insightful suggestions to the policy-makers in the government.

Research Design
Research questions

- What are the objective characteristics of the multilingual landscape of Nanning?
- How do people perceive the multilingual landscape of Nanning?
- How can the multilingual landscape of Nanning be further developed and improved?

Methodology
The study adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Research instruments:

- Photographs of 1042 signs in different areas in Nanning, including Minsheng Road Pedestrian Street, Xingning Road Pedestrian Street, Minzu Avenue (major avenue in Nanning), Zhongjian Road, Nanning East Railway Station, Wuming District (the region east of Jianshe Street, south of Yongning Road, west of Nongtan Road and north of Lingyuan Road)
- 187 questionnaires
- Interviews with 3 policy-makers, 2 Zhuang people, 2 strangers living in Nanning

Results

Objective characteristics:

- The use of written Chinese dominates (about 60.3%) and the multilingual nature of Nanning's linguistic landscape is not obvious.
- The use of written English and Zhuang in the linguistic landscape of Nanning is symbolic rather than functional. The lack of Zhuang signs and the use of signs translated in non-standard English restrict their informational function.
- Announcements for Metro stops in Nanning are made in both Mandarin and English, while announcements for bus-stops are made only in Mandarin.
- There is a great difference between official planning and public perceptions. The majority of Zhuang signs are erected by the government, while the majority of small businesses prefer English signs.

Public perceptions:

Agree to add more Zhuang signs = 58.8%

Agree to add more English signs = 89.9%

Agree that the linguistic landscape of Nanning should be more multilingual = 77%

Agree that the linguistic landscape of Nanning needs to be developed = 67.4%

All in all, the study shows that the linguistic landscape in Nanning is far from being fully multilingual, a view shared by the majority of participants interviewed.

Capitals of other ethnic minority autonomous regions (as Hohhot in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region) use trilingualism for public transport announcements: Mandarin, an ethnic minority language and English. Other international cities such as Beijing and Shanghai use both Mandarin and English. Compared with those cities, the application of multimodal signs used in Nanning needs to be improved.

There is widespread support for more bilingual or trilingual signs in Nanning. However, there are conflicting views on the way forward. The dominant position of Chinese is supported by the law and policy, but the government tries to popularize the use of Zhuang characters in signs. However, compared with Zhuang characters, many people, particular in the business sector, prefer English to be used in signs.

Policy Recommendations

1. Improve Zhuang people's sense of self-identity. Nanning has a large population of Zhuang people; however, the number of Zhuang signs is insufficient and the government should address this deficit.

2. Fully develop the informative function of signs using Zhuang and English, in order to enhance trilingualism in Chinese, Zhuang and English. In this way, more and more people would understand Zhuang characters. Also, as a regional international city, standard translation of English on public signs is essential to improve foreigners' experiences and their impression on this city.

3. Comprehensively promote multilingualism. Firstly, the government should encourage and supervise the use of bilingual or trilingual language signs by small businesses, and provide standard and/or idiomatic translation service. Zhuang characters should not only used in road signs, but also other signs, especially signs used for publicity. Secondly, pay more attention to the application of multimodal signs by embracing new media. The use of Zhuang signs should be extended into virtual spaces, such as WeChat and Microblog.

References

Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. (1997). Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(1), 23-49.

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