Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project

Technical Paper No.9

Ethics in Trilingualism-in-China Research

Anwei Feng & Bob Adamson

April 2013

Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project

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 field work in order to provide rich data that facilitates multilevel analysis of policy-in-context.

Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project Technical Papers Series Editors: Anwei Feng (University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China) and Bob Adamson (The Education University of Hong Kong)

This series of Technical Papers presents information about the research instruments used in this project.

Ethics in Trilingualism-in-China Research

Introduction

One of the key research questions driving the project is how the policy goals of trilingualism is being interpreted and realised in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The project distinguished four distinct policy models of trilingual education (Adamson and Feng, 2013). The first model focuses strongly on the ethnic minority language. Typically, the nine years of compulsory education from Grade 1 in primary schools to Grade 3 in junior secondary schools is provided through the medium of the minority language. Chinese and English are taught as subjects in the curriculum. Chinese could be used as the medium of instruction for certain school subjects in late primary and secondary years. The second model is a balance between Chinese and the minority language. The balance is evident in terms not only of the medium of instruction but also of the ethnicity of the teachers and students. The third model often exists in two different forms. The first form is the reverse of the first model, i.e., Chinese is used as the primary medium instruction and the major ethnic minority language is taught as a subject to all students in the school, irrespective of their own ethnicity or mother tongue. The second form is found in many remote village schools in which one minority group dominates. In these schools, the minority language is used as the medium of instruction for the first two to three years with Chinese taught as a major school subject. Starting from Year 3 or Year 4, all school subjects are taught in Chinese. In both cases, English is taught as a school subject, with Chinese being used when necessary in those lessons. A fourth model is represented by schools that proclaim to be an ethnic minority language school but, in reality, do not use the minority language as the medium of instruction nor even teach it as school subject. Such schools also claimed to be bilingual, in the sense that Chinese and English are studied as languages in the curriculum and Chinese serves as the medium of instruction.

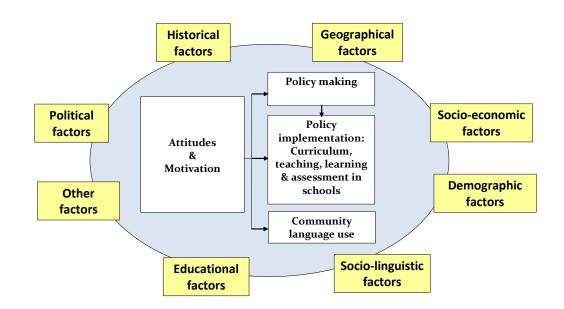## Factors Shaping the Trilingual Education Models

What factors shape and sustain the various models of trilingual education? This question denotes a particular view of education policy—that it emerges from, and forms part of broader contexts.

At the outset of the project, it was possible (on the basis of relevant literature) to identify key contextual factors that would likely play a role in shaping trilingual education policy. For instance, Fägerlind and Saha (1989) propose a triadic framework that positions education policy under the influence of socio-economic, socio-political and educational priorities.

A key concept for the study is ethnolinguistic vitality, the strength of life force of a language within a community. Ethnolinguistic vitality is influenced by geographical, historical, demographic and socio-linguistic factors, in addition to socio-economic and socio-political factors (Landweer, 2000). Other factors, such as religion, are emerging from the first phase of the project.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the study of models of trilingual education in the PRC.

Figure 1—Conceptual framework

To conduct the research into the factors that shape and sustain the various models of trilingual education, a range of methodological tools were adopted.

A suite of research tools as shown in Table 1 were designed. A typical study of each single school would include:
- focus group interviews with 3-6 community leaders
- 2-3 interviews with regional and local education officials
- 1-3 interviews with school principal, deputy and other school leaders
- focus group interviews with 5-10 teachers
- focus group interviews with approximately 10 students
- 3-5 interviews with former students
- focus group interviews with approximately 10 parents
- documentary analysis of policy papers, syllabuses, timetables, learning resources and curriculum materials
- 5-10 lesson observations
- questionnaire surveys focusing on language attitudes and views of trilingual education among 60-100 students, 20-30 teachers including headteachers and deputies.
- field notes (e.g. observations of the school buildings and wall decorations, of languages used in the school outside of the classroom and of language use in the community.

These tools are described in detail in other Technical Papers in this series.

Table 1 – Methods to study factors that shape and sustain the models of trilingual education

Paradigm	Instrument	Focus
Qualitative	Semi-structured interview with head-teachers and teachers (focus groups or individuals)	Perceptions of and attitudes to trilingualism and each language, and their experiences implementing trilingual education models
	Semi-structured interview with policy makers (for individuals)	Perceptions of & attitudes to trilingualism and each language, and their experiences in policy making and implementation of trilingual education policy
	Semi-structured interview with parents (focus group or individuals)	Attitudes to different languages, their knowledge of what is going on in schools and their experiences of their children's trilingual education
	Semi-structured interview with pupils (focus group or individuals)	Attitudes and experiences in using and learning languages in a trilingual education context
	School observation	Language environment: notice boards, signs, pictures, etc.; languages used by staff, pupils, etc.; the role and distribution of languages, as shown in curriculum documents
	Classroom observation	languages used by teacher and pupils, for classroom instruction and activities
	Ethnographic study	To study the language environment in a minority community
Quantitative	Teacher Questionnaire	Teacher's perceptions of current practice, views of language use and views concerning language education
	Parent Questionnaire	Parents' knowledge of current practice and views of language use and language education
	Student Questionnaire	Students' attitude to current practice and views of language use and language education
	Subjective vitality survey	Ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language
Other (Archival)	Objective vitality study	Ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language by collecting data through archives, mass media, official documents, etc.

Ethics is an important consideration in our project.

Ethics
Recent publications on ethics published in China seem to focus heavily on academic integrity or honesty by denouncing plagiarism, creating or stealing data, submitting papers to multiple journals, and other dishonest behaviours. In Western countries, these are also emphasised but primary consideration is given to research ethics: that is, care for the individuals participating in the research and their well being, dignity, rights and safety.

The following section shows the typical procedure for seeking ethics approval before, during and after the research in a UK university.

Basic Principles

Ethical approval is required for all research which involves interaction with people. It is not required if the research is entirely desk based. Research on minors and, on occasions, vulnerable adults (e.g. those involved in counselling) and such research should be undertaken with particular care.

Efforts should be made to:

☐ Minimise the number of human participants used based on statistical good practice

☐ Minimise all the potential risks to the well-being of the research participants

☐ Maximise the quality and impact of the research and the relevance of the research.

Consent Forms

Valid and informed consent is required from all participants in research with the exception of research involving deception. Research participants should be aware of the potential risks and benefits, if any, associated with their involvement. They must also understand that their involvement is entirely voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time.

Other Points

➢ Commencement

The research should normally commence within 12 months of the approval. If not, a written explanation is needed. The approval is suspended if it does not commence in 24 months.

➢ During research

The lead researcher(s) should submit progress reports. The approval expires when the proposed duration ends.

➢ After research

The lead researcher(s) produces a final report within 12 months after the completion of the project.

Most Importantly

The researcher(s) must consider the following questions:

- o Does my or our project entail any potential risks to the well-being of the research participants during or after the project?

- o Have I/we taken into account any issues that may affect the academic integrity as well as the validity and reliability of the research?

Further Reading

Hostetler, K. (2005). What Is "Good" Education Research? *Educational Researcher*. Vol. 34, No. 6, 16-21.

Lagemann, E. C. (2000). *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Macrina, F. (2011). *Scientific Integrity (3rd Edition)* (科研诚信, 第 3 版). 北京：高等教育出版社.

Procedures for Seeking Approval by Ethics Task Group. By the Ethics Task Group, College of Education and Lifelong Learning, Bangor University.

Sikes, P., J. Nixon & W. Carr (Eds.). *The Moral Foundations of Educational Research*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.