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Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project

Briefing Paper No.13

**Developing and Promoting Strong Models
of Trilingual Education: What? Why? How?**

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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 field work 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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Developing and Promoting Strong Models of Trilingual Education: What? Why? How?

Parallel Forms of Trilingual Education

To conceptualise different forms of trilingual education, we can make use of Zhou's (2001) typology of minority communities according to ethnolinguistic vitality:

- Type 1: Uyghur, Kazak, Mongolian, Tibetan, Korean
- Type 2: Dai, Jingpo, Lisu, Lahu, Miao, Naxi, Va, and Yi
- Type 3: the rest

What Are Strong Models?

Major models found and defined according to their aims (in Types 1 & 2 communities):

- Accretive model
 - Aiming to foster additive trilingualism
 - Aiming to maintain first language (L1) and ethnic identity

- Balanced model
 - Aiming to develop both L1 and second language (L2)
 - Aiming to maintain L1, ethnic identity and harmony

- Transitional model
 - Aiming shift to L2 as Medium of Instruction (MoI)
 - Aiming for (linguistic) assimilation
- Subtractive model
 - Aiming covertly for monolingualism
 - Aiming for both linguistic and cultural assimilation

Accretive Model

Features

- Area with strong ethnolinguistic vitality
- Using L1 as MoI as minority pupils dominate
- Strong presence of L1 culture in school environment
- Given favourable conditions, L2 and L3 are promoted robustly as school subjects

Outcomes

- strong performance in all school subjects
- additive trilingualism

Where to find it: Yanbian; some places elsewhere where Koreans and Russians live; some other places?

Note: Where there are no favourable conditions it is difficult for pupils to develop competence in L2 and L3.

Balanced Model

Features

- Areas with mixed Han and minority groups with strong ethnolinguistic vitality
- Using both L1 and L2 as MoI (ratio: somewhat balanced)
- Strong presence of L1 and L2 cultures in school environment
- L3 introduced according to state policies

Outcomes

- Strong competence in L1 and L2
- Strong performance in school subjects
- Likely to foster additive trilingualism

Where to find it: In some areas in Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, Guizhou and Yunnan where bi- and/or trilingualism are genuinely promoted.

Transitional Model

Features

- May be mixed Han and minority groups or a single minority group where ethno-linguistic vitality is weak
- Pupils' L1 is only deemed useful as a stepping stone in the first few years, or in primary schooling, etc.
- (eventually) L2 used as MoI in classrooms

Outcomes

- Acquiring competence in L2 at the expense of L1 (leading to subtractive bi- or trilingualism)
- Unlikely to foster trilingual competence

Where to find it: In many areas in Yunnan, Inner Mongolia and Guizhou where bilingualism and/or trilingualism is said to be promoted, but not genuinely.

Depreciative Model

Features

- Claiming to be minority school with mixed minority groups or a single minority group of pupils
- L2 is the only MoI and L1 is ignored

Outcomes

- Acquiring competence in L2 at the expense of L1 (leading to subtractive bi- or trilingualism)
- Little chance to develop trilingual competence

Where to find it: In many areas in Guangxi, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Gansu and Guizhou where monolingual or laissez faire attitude is adopted.

Other Models

Examples:

- *Min Han Hexiao* – *Minority and Han* merged schools in Xinjiang
- *Neidiban* – Inland classes (for Uyghur and Tibetan students)
- *Minzuyu Tuji Kaoshi Ban* – Short courses for taking exams in minority languages

There can be many other forms of bi- or trilingual education into which we can research, but most may fall into the four categories or somewhere in between.

Type 3 Communities:

- Revitalisation Model
- Concealed or overt assimilation model
- Ignorance model

Strong and Weak Models

To put it in simple terms, if a model aims and promotes additive trilingualism, it is a strong model.

- Accretive model
- Balanced model

If it aims for limited bi-, trilingualism or monolingualism, it is weak.

- Transitional model
- Depreciative model

Why?

Economic reasons

- Cross-border trade (e.g., Koreans, Russian, etc.)
- Tourism (Naxi in Lijiang, Dai in Xishuangbanna, etc.)

However, the economic reason is often weak and there is also a danger of over-emphasis on this logic. Many minority languages are endangered owing to this logic, including some with a long history and strong ethnolinguistic vitality.

For stakeholders in minority education, it is more important to be aware of:

- Cognitive reasons: Research in psychology, education and linguistics has categorically shown the importance of L1 for children's cognitive development
- Affective reasons: Language is an important boundary marker and thus essential part of one's identity, self-esteem and human dignity
- Socio-political reasons: Genuine harmony and stability depend on mutual respect, mutual understanding and empathy in a culturally and linguistically diverse society.

How to Develop and Promote Strong Models?

First questions to address:

1. Clear linguistic, cultural and socio-political aims.
 - Additive trilingualism?
 - Encouragement of minority identity
 - Empowerment of the minority group?
2. Targeted educational outcomes
 - Strong L1 and competent in L2
 - Peer appropriate competence in L3
 - Good overall performance

Favourable Environment

Macro-level:

- National policy on minority groups, political agenda, etc.

Meso-level

- Perceptions and attitudes of policy makers in Region or prefecture
- Ethnolinguistic vitality (objective and subjective)
 - Historical, political, cultural, geographical and demographic factors, mass media, resources, etc.
- Socio-economic situation

Micro-level

- Perceptions and attitudes of teachers, parents, pupils, etc.
- Environment created in school for trilingualism
- Teacher training (in-service), creativity, ...

All these are important and could and should be researched.

Thorny Issues

- Language allocation
- Separation of languages or translanguaging
- Assessment
- Continuity

Language Allocation

Some places in Europe with a strong tradition:

1. Basque Country (Cenoz, 2009): In many primary schools,
 - 4 hours L1 Basque
 - 3 hours L2 Spanish

- 4 hours L3 English
- 17 hours of other school subjects through L1

In some other primary schools (Valero & Villamor, 1997), traditionally,

- 30% Basque language, science, handicraft
- 40% Spanish, maths, religion
- 30% English, music/motor skills, PE

Basque education has proved successful for their school leavers' results in maths, science and literacy in PISA assessment are significantly better than their peers in Spain (ISEI-IVEI, 2008).

2. Friesland, in the Netherland (Remoanere, 2012) Model: Frisian, Dutch and English as subject & medium of instruction
Grades 1-6: 50 % Frisian, 50 % Dutch (+ some taster English lessons)
Grades 7-8: 40 % Frisian, 40 % Dutch, 20% English

There is no fixed model for all to follow. The right 'formula' for a specific school is found through research.

Separation or Translanguaging

There has been a long tradition to separate languages strictly for teaching and in different settings and assess them separately. This view is increasingly challenged. Shohamy (2006) argues for multilingual approach and multimodality; Garcia (2009) develops the notion of translanguaging, the multiple discursive practices. Code-switching, co-languaging, etc. are increasingly researched.

Trilingual Assessment

Is it fair to assess bi-trilinguals using the same criteria as for monolinguals?

This is the same question as 'will a triathlete have a chance to win if you put him in separate events in long distance swimming, long-distance running, and Tour de France?' (Feng, 2010).

Should we adopt holistic view to assess them (Baker, 2011; Grosjean, 2008) or the multi-competence perspective (Cook, 1995)? Is this a theoretical or political question?

Continuity

Specifically for China:

- ✓ Now, there is platform to conduct trilingual education in primary schools in most places.
- ✓ How about secondary schools where you see more mixed groups studying and living together? What model should we use?
- ✓ How about tertiary education?

Contact details

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