Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project

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Ethnic Multilingual Education in China: A Critical Observation

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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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Context

- Top-down policies of multilingual education are guaranteed by various laws and regulations are formulated by the central and local governments and legislation.

- The ideal goal: a mastery of three languages (Sanyu Jiantong 三语兼通)

- Dilemma for EMLs whether to embrace the curriculum set by the dominant Han or maintain their linguistic and cultural diversity.


Gaps between policy and practice

- Perception of and attitude towards bilingual education

- Textbook issues

- Teacher shortage and teacher quality

- Curriculum deficiencies

- Serious social, pedagogical and logistical issues


General attitude towards multilingual education

- Chinese is a pathway to social mobility and personal development, and English a passport to the globalized world.

Analytic framework for multilingual education in China

- Hypothesis of biliteracy continua (Hornberger, 2003)

- “Two types of power relationship” (Cummins, 1976, 2000)

- Ethnographic LPP study (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007)
Theoretical framework

Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester point out that “inclusion of learners’ voice and agency is the only ethically acceptable solution when it comes to educating a linguistically and culturally diverse learner population” (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2003, p. 63).

Cummins (2009) distinguishes two types of power in education system: the coercive power and collaborative power. Cummins and other scholars argue that, when power “enables and empowers” individuals, it works positively; When power “constrains or weakens the capacity to act, it works negatively. As a consequence of the latter case, the issues of “resistance” may arise (Canagarajah, 1999).

“Developing policies informed by ethnography can counteract the unilateral hold of dominant paradigms and ideologies in LPP” (Hornberger 2007, p.155).

Traditionally less powerful | Traditionally more powerful
---|---
**Context of biliteracy**
- micro | macro
- oral | literate
- bi(multi)lingual | monolingual

**Development of biliteracy**
- reception | production
- oral | written
- L1 | L2

**Content of biliteracy**
- minority | majority
- vernacular | literary
- contextualized | decontextualized

**Media of biliteracy**
- simultaneous exposure | successive exposure
- dissimilar structures | similar structures
- divergent scripts | convergent scripts
Two language planning approaches (Hornberger 1994)

• Policy planning on form—the matters of society and nation at macroscopic level concerned with standard language

• Cultivation planning on function and 3 types (status, acquisition and corpus planning at the microscopic level concerned with literary language

Three bases for language planning policy

• Language is problem-oriented. Local languages are problems leading to poverty, handicap, low education attainment and little or no social mobility.

• Language is right-oriented. Local languages are basic civil or human rights. This concept may bring about confrontation a state nation.

• Language is resource-oriented. Local languages are seen as resources not only for the speakers but also for society as a whole.

Multilingual education policies in China
Regional policies concerning ME

In minority areas where Chinese is not understood, instruction in the local language will be vigorously promoted.

In primary schools in minority areas where Chinese is not understood and there is a writing system for the local language, textual materials in the local language should be used for the early grades while, at the same time, **Chinese should be progressively introduced. (Note: Transitional bilingual education. Chinese is the end goal.)**

For the upper grades, textual materials should be in Chinese, with the local language playing a support role in instruction. In primary schools where Chinese is not understood and there is no writing system for the local language, the local language should be used to explain the texts and play a supporting role in instruction. For middle and primary schools serving ethnic groups that understand Chinese, instruction can generally be carried out in Chinese.

In areas where Chinese is understood and there is a writing system for the local language, the wishes of the local people will be respected regarding whether to create local language teaching materials. (State Education Commission 1995, cited in Ma, 2007, p.15)

Within the autonomous prefecture, the ethnic primary schools which mainly enrol ethnic students should adopt *Shuangyuwen* (bilingual or bilingual and bi-literacy) education. At the same time, the common language—Putonghua shall be used in schools. The native language courses should be offered for ethnic minority classes in the general secondary schools or technical schools.

Within the whole prefecture, the native language shall be tested and the score shall be documented in the final scores in the unified examinations (Dehong People’s Congress, 2005).

Promotion Regulation on Ethnic Minority Education in Yunnan Province
*(Yunnan People's Congress, 2013)*

**Clause 15**

各级人民政府应当建立双语教师的培养、培训制度；在民族高等学校和民族地区师范院校建立双语教师培养、培训基地，根据民族地区的需要，举办定向双语师资班，学生毕业后择优录用、聘用到当地小学或者幼儿园工作。（System of Bilingual Teacher Development）

鼓励在民族地区工作的教师学习使用当地通用的少数民族语言。对熟练掌握使用少数民族语言文字教学并有效提高教学质量的教师予以表彰奖励；在同等条件下评优评先、
职称评定、岗位聘任及骨干教师、学科带头人认定时，优先推荐。(Preferential policies for bilingual candidates in academic promotion)

Clause 17
民族地区的国家机关、事业单位、人民团体、国有企业等在招考、招聘人员时，可以采取定向、定岗的方式录用、聘用本地区兼通双语的大中专毕业生。

前款规定外的地区在招考、招聘人员时，在同等条件下应当优先录用、聘用本地区少数民族大中专毕业生。(Preferential Policies for bilingual candidates in recruitment)

Clause 21
开展双语教学的小学国家课程和地方课程教科书经费，应当全部纳入义务教育经费保障范围。

Language Situation in China 2016

《中国语言生活状况报告(2016)》

少数民族语言文字工作深入贯彻落实“科学保护各民族语言文字”的工作要求，切实加强民族语言文字规范化标准化信息化建设，全面推进双语教育，努力传承民族语言文化，服务于“多元一体、民族和谐”的民族工作大局。(Protect ethnic minority scripts scientifically)

中国语言资源保护工程全面启动，按计划完成了81个少数民族语言调查点、53个汉语方言调查点和32个语言文化调查点的工作任务，基本建成中国语言资源采录展示平台，进一步完善相关技术规范和管理制度。(Survey of 81 ethnic minority languages)

Inspirations

To have an understanding of LPP of ethnic multilingual learners in China, more ethnographic language planning policy research should be carried as Hornberger and Johnson (2007) argued:

Ethnographic language policy research offers a means for exploring how varying local interpretations, implementations, negotiations, and perhaps resistance can pry open implementational and ideological spaces for multilingual language education.
Conclusion

In reality, Sanyu Jiantong (trilingual proficiency) is very hard to achieve. However, the joint efforts from the stakeholders and educational experts are promising and appreciated. The inadequate bilingual education in China may not help, but even hinder, multilingual acquisition if ethnic multilingual learners’ L1 and L2 literacy are not adequately developed.

The gap between the top-down policies and the reality of their implementation also brings multilingual learners in China other challenges such as culture discontinuity (e.g., Ogbu & Simmons, 1998; Zhang, 2008; Xiang, 2009), identity conflict (Hu, 2007; Huang & Yu, 2009), and psychological problems.

The newly issued regulations on ME in Yunnan and top-down LPP may ease the tension of mastering national language and maintain the mother tongue to some extent but it is by no means a perfect solution.

References


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