Study on China's Languages' Status Planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative": Proposing the Ecology-of-language Paradigm[*]

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Abstract—**Focusing on China's languages' status planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative", this paper constructs a framework for China's languages' status planning goals and studies its application of Chinese and minority languages in the social context of "The Belt and Road Initiative" raised by China in 2013. The paper points out the focuses of Chinese and minority languages' status planning in the form of both status policy planning and status cultivation planning and makes a detailed analysis from the ecology of languages paradigm. It is concluded that China's languages' status planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative" should focus on the international language spread of Chinese as second language, the inheritance of Chinese as heritage language, and language maintenance and language revival of the minorities, by providing different platforms for the languages to function complementarily at different levels. The paper also looks forward the application of ecology-of-language paradigm in China's language planning would trend a sustainable road for language ecological crisis and human sustainable development in the construction of the Belt and Road for building a community with a shared future for mankind.**

Index Terms—**language status planning, "The Belt and Road Initiative", status policy planning, status cultivation planning, "coexistence of variety, harmony in diversity"**

I. INTRODUCTION

With the coming of a new era marked by the theme of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, in 2013 China raised an initiative of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (hereinafter as the Belt and Road), which is to promote the economic prosperity of the countries along the Belt and Road and regional economic cooperation, strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations, and promote world peace and development. According to the incomplete statistics, there are altogether about 50 official or national common languages and more than 150 regional, minority and tribal languages involved among the 65 countries alongside. As cultural, social and economic resources, languages are characterized by variety, abundance, value potential and exploitability, which has been recognized globally. So, language planning is usually taken as one significant part in a country's resources development and planning worldwide. For China, the construction of the Belt and Road need no doubt the support of various languages for cross-national and cross-ethnic understanding. Therefore, studies on China's languages' status planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative" which focus on the social status and function of diversified languages and their relationships have become one of the principal issues and assignments closely connected with cultural heritage, economic progress, political stability and safe maintenance of China. In the world today, with the deepening and acceleration of economic globalization and world integration, English has been undoubtedly the world language, language diversity has been threatened and language ecological crisis has been triggered, in which that of China is no exception.

In the face of the new language situation at home and abroad, how to develop China's language resources so that Chinese and minority languages could serve the country better? By analyzing the language motives and language ideology from the perspective of language ecology, the paper states the new characteristics of China's language situation, points out the focuses of its languages' status planning in the form of both status policy planning and status cultivation planning, and advocates the corelated inner relationships between status planning, corpus planning, language-in-education planning, and prestige planning. The paper aims to provide a reference for the notion and practice of different languages' status planning in the new social context of "The Belt and Road Initiative".

II. RELATED THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE RESEARCH

A. Language Ecology

Language ecology, now also called ecology-of-language paradigm originated from American linguist Einar Haugen's "ecology of language" in the form of a metaphor. In the 1970s, Haugen published an article entitled *The Ecology of*

Language in which he pointed out the flaws of earlier linguistic science of historical comparative linguistics, structuralism, and generative grammar which are conducted mainly in the descriptive fields as being phonology, grammar, lexicon, etc. By defining language ecology as "the study of interactions between languages and their environment" (Haugen, 1972, p. 325), Haugen called for special attention on the social status and function of the language rather than the history of language, number and location of its speakers. Furthermore, he defines that the ecology of a language is psychological in that it interacts with other languages in speakers' mind, as well as sociological with the society in which it functions. In other words, language ecology is the combination of language ideology and relations between languages and their social context.

However, the notion of language ecology has been neglected for quite a few years and afterwards revisited in Mühlhäusler's works until in 1990s, which agree with Haugen's metaphorically grounded theory and propose that the key property of a language ecology is structured diversity. Just as what Mühlhäusler (1996) has put it, "The ecological metaphor…is action oriented. It shifts the attention from linguists being players of academic language games to becoming shop stewards for linguistic diversity, and to addressing moral economic and other 'non-linguistic' issues" (p. 2).

With the deepening of the language inequality on the minorities, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson's (2008) interpretation of language ecology has largely widened its scope mainly from the perspective of linguistic human rights, advocating maximal support for linguistic diversity and additive multilingualism especially foreign languages teaching and learning.

All in all, language ecology is a theory integrating the cognitive view of ecology into linguistics and exploring more about the non-linguistic elements such as ecological crisis and human sustainable development which are closely related with language in a broad social context. A new paradigm has emerged, suggests Ricento (2000), based on a "synthesis of elements of critical theory with an ecology of languages approach" (p. 20).

In short, as one of the guiding ideologies and the means of formulation of language policy and planning, ecology-of-language paradigm focuses on the following aspects related with language status planning: the maintenance of the functions and status of different languages in the language order; the advocacy of multilingualism, bilingualism and foreign language teaching; the safeguarding of the rights of the mother tongue, especially the rights of the minorities; the calling for minority language maintenance and cultivation; and the emphasis on the cultural attributes and identity of languages.

B. A Framework for Language Status Planning from the Perspective of Language Ecology

Facing to the hegemony of English and ecological crisis of minority languages, from the 1990s, scholars worldwide are increasingly turning to the metaphor of ecology to think and talk about language planning in a multilingual environment. For example, drawing on the ideas of the former researchers on models-constituting (e.g., Ferguson 1968, Neustupny 1974, Fishman 1972, Haugen 1983, Haarmann 1990) and goals-concentrating (e.g., Annamalai & Rubin 1980; Nahir 1984, Bentahila & Davies 1983). Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) illustrates a mode an ecological model for language planning in which national language (including its variety), minority languages and endangered languages, together with the various forces at work make up a linguistic ecosystem (See Figure 1).
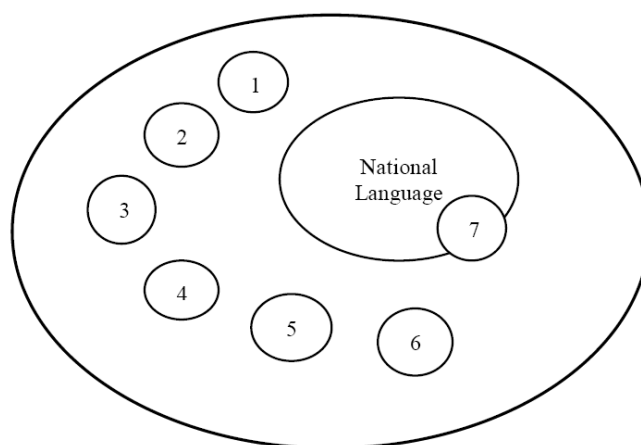

Figure 1   A linguistic eco-system[1] in the language planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 311)

Mühlhäusler (2000) even defines language planning from the ecological view that it "should address the problem of maintaining linguistic diversity and concentrate on the ecological factors that sustain diversity" (p. 358). Hornberger (2002) suggests ethnic and linguistic pluralism as resources for nation-building and argues that multilingual language policies are opening up "ideological and implementational space in the environment for as many languages as possible,

[1]Smaller circles numbered 1 to 5 represent minority languages in the community; smaller circle numbered 6 represents a language that is likely to die in the near future; smaller circle numbered 7 represents a nonstandard variety of the official language (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 311).

particularly endangered languages, to evolve and flourish rather than dwindle and disappear" (p. 8) by turning to the metaphor of ecology. In 2003, Kaplan and Baldauf (2003) provides an expanded framework for language planning goals on the basis of Hornberger (1994), in which the framework for language status planning goals goes in Table 1.

TABLE 1
A FRAMEWORK FOR LANGUAGE STATUS PLANNING GOALS (KAPLAN & BALDAUF, 2003, P. 202)

Approaches
 	
Types (overt - covert)
	1. Policy Planning
	   (on form)
	Goals
		2. Cultivation Planning
		   (on function)
		Goals

1. Status Planning
   (about society)
	Status Standardisation
	• Officialisation
	• Nationalisation
	• Proscription
		Revival
		• Restoration
		• Revitalisation
		• Reversal
		Maintenance
		Interlingual
		   Communication
		• International
		• Intra-national
		Spread

According to Kaplan and Baldauf's framework, status policy planning refers to standardisation, that is, defining the particular status language(s) hold in a society. It may be done either overtly through legislation or constitutions or occur implicitly. Overt status standardisation may take the form of officialization and nationalization of a language and/or proscription of the language rights. The primary status planning includes jobs on language revival, language maintenance, inter-lingual communication and language spread. Status cultivation planning examines how these particular status goals for languages may be met.

The paper then constructs a framework for China's language status planning, shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
A FRAMEWORK FOR CHINA'S LANGUAGE STATUS PLANNING

Status Planning (overt→covert)	Policy Planning	Cultivation Planning
	♦ Status Standardisation • language officialisation • language nationalisation • human linguistic rights	♦ Language Revival ♦ Language Maintenance ♦ Interlingual Communication ♦ Language Spread

With the guidance of the ecology-of-language paradigm and this newly-built framework, the paper would firstly explore China's language situation nowadays, and then analyze the focuses of status cultivation planning in the new language context characterized with "The Belt and Road Initiative", since it is the cultivation planning that normally support the policy planning goals.

III. CHINA'S LANGUAGES' STATUS PLANNING FOR "THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE": FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE ECOLOGY

A. Language Spread in Status Cultivation Planning: International Localization of Chinese

History shows that the strength of the language is closely linked to the rise and fall of the country. A strong language, in turn, will promote the country's strength. According to the framework constructed for China's language planning, language spread is one of the important goals of status cultivation planning, as well as its parts. Therefore, the international spread of Chinese could be taken as an important means for the development of China's soft power. In the languages' status planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative", the international promotion and dissemination of Chinese is undoubtedly one of its major contents. Some scholars have proposed that a new era of globalization featuring the inclusive nature of "The Belt and Road Initiative" is coming (Wang, 2016). In order to help achieve true "inclusive globalization" and allow globalization to become a balanced and benefit-sharing one through inclusiveness, Chinese should take the road of "international localization". In the context of the new era of globalization, the "international localization" of Chinese status planning can be implemented from the following two dimensions: one is the international spread of Chinese as second language and the other, the inheritance of Chinese as a heritage language.

1. International spread of Chinese as second language

"The Belt and Road Initiative" upholds the concept of win-win cooperation through common ground while shelving differences, inclusiveness, peaceful coexistence and symbiotic development. Then what is the concept and connotation of international spread of Chinese for "The Belt and Road Initiative"? The spread of language needs the opportunities from the times. The proposal of China's "The Belt and Road Initiative" and the improvement of its economic strength and international status have greatly stimulated the urgent needs of Chinese in the world and created a rare historical opportunity for the development of international Chinese.

From the perspective of language ecology, the international spread of Chinese as second language is the external communication of Chinese culture, but it is not exclusive. The process of Chinese realizing "international localization"

step by step includes localization of Chinese teaching as second language, local cultivation of Chinese teachers, the integration of Chinese and Chinese culture with the languages and cultures of the target country, etc. Furthermore, the development of international Chinese will enhance the ecological niche of Chinese in the world's linguistic ecosystem and be conducive to the construction and improvement of the world's linguistic ecological environment. Tsuda (1994) receive Phillipson's (1992) linguistic imperialism and proposes the ecology-of-language paradigm as counterstrategy of the hegemony of English and cultural homogeneity in the world so that linguistic and cultural pluralism will be secured worldwide. According to language ecology, the spread of Chinese as second language abroad is one kind of effort to balance the linguistic ecosystem worldwide.

However, according to Crystal (2003) the economic factors would work in the population of languages and the size of its domain of use, hereafter the international spread of the language. Therefore, if we combine the international development goals of Chinese with those of the target countries, especially their economic interests, Chinese could probably enjoy the high status of international Chinese and become one of the preferred foreign languages between the countries along the Belt and Road for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

2. Inheritance of Chinese as heritage language

The paper would also extend its vision to the inheritance of Chinese/Mandarin as heritage language, which is always an indispensable but easily overlooked area of international promotion and dissemination in the Chinese status planning. Chinese (also called Mandarin abroad) is the heritage language of all the Chinese people all over the world. However, at present, the education of overseas Chinese as heritage language is faced with the unfavorable situation of unbalanced education level, limited depth and width, shortage of staff, etc. Relevant research shows that the language shift in Chinese of Chinese-Americans is basically completed within three generations, that is, the third-generation of the Chinese immigrants in the United States have largely lost their ability to speak and use Chinese.

But from the perspective of the language ecology, it is also overseas Chinese immigrants' human linguistic rights to learn their heritage language. Moreover, the inheritance of Chinese as heritage language is not only to maintain Chinese language in the Chinese ethnic groups from generation to generation, but more importantly to inherit the national characters and cultural identity bearing behind the language. The inheritance of Chinese could be taken as the key to helping overseas Chinese immigrants and their descendants to solve the confusion between language identity, ethnic identity and even national identity.

The notion of ecology in language planning suggests both that there are a number of other languages with different functions from that of the national language and, more importantly, that there are structured relationships between all these languages. The promotion of the exchanging of other languages and cultures in the world with the Chinese through the inheritance of Chinese is a contribution made by China to the maintenance of the language and culture diversity of the target countries and to the harmony of world linguistic ecology. As the minority languages of other countries, Chinese occupies the status of second or foreign language, which is one of the important resources to be cultivated and should be taken into consideration seriously in the language planning.

In the meanwhile, the economic development of a country creates opportunities for the spread of language. Therefore, in the construction of the Belt and Road, the international depth and width of the promotion and dissemination of Chinese language and its sustainable development in the future will ultimately depend on the growth of Chinese language's economic value and the enhancement of China's economic strength. By adhering to the purpose of safeguarding the diversity of the world's languages and cultures based on the global ecology and national economy, we could possibly make Chinese an international language.

B. Language Maintenance in Status Cultivation Planning: Utilization of Cross-border Languages

1. Minority languages and cross-border languages

Under the background of "The Belt and Road Initiative", the planning of China's language resources should also focus on the minority languages, the valuable language resources which should be maintained and cultivated in China. It is noteworthy that there are some countries adjacent to the border with China along the Belt and Road, whose official or national languages are the cross-border minorities' languages (hereinafter as cross-border languages) in China. Cross-border languages could be taken as a special linguistic landscape in China's minority languages. Because of their distinctive advantages in cross-border ethnic identification and mutual communication for the adjacent countries along the Belt and Road, the cross-border languages would play a complementary and even irreplaceable role in the promotion of the five major goals (policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds) of "The Belt and Road Initiative" besides Chinese and other international languages, e.g. English. In the framework for China's language status planning, status standardisation is the goal of status policy planning, and language maintenance is one of the important goals of status cultivation planning, as well as its part. However, it is a pity that many China's cross-border languages which are confronted with language vitality crisis are just treated as general minority languages, without explicit language status in China's historical language planning, not to mention their clear positioning in the national interests.

2. Language economy development plan of cross-border languages

Economic globalization has accelerated the language shift of minority languages to national and international languages around the world. The minority's language ecology in China is also not optimistic. Due to the increasing number of minority languages retreating to the second languages of the minority groups, the loss of mother tongues of

the minority language users is serious. The number of minority communities, together with the number and vitality of their languages are declining. The northeastern and southwestern areas where the China's cross-border languages are relatively concentrated are bordered by many countries along the Belt and Road, but they are the areas where the most endangered languages in China are distributed. Baker (2001) holds that "in the language of ecology, the strongest ecosystems are those that are the most diverse. Diversity is directly related to stability; variety is important for long-term survival" (p. 281). According to language ecology, the existence of declining and endangered languages makes the linguistic balance of a country's language ecosystem under destruction and the multicultural inheritance is a concern. Therefore, the survival and development of cross-border languages are closely related with the language ecological balance and sustainable development of multi-cultures in China. How to maintain and develop the cross-border languages so that they could better serve the country in the context of the Belt and Road is an important goal for China's minority languages' status cultivation planning?

Ecological thinking on language planning has some distinguishing characteristics, and one of them is the consideration not just of language factors but wider environmental ones, in which economy is a vital one. As one of the focuses of linguistic economics, the study of the relationship between language and economy under the theory of human capital shows that language is a kind of social resource and natural resource with value, utility, cost and benefit, paying emphasis on the function and position of the language. This paper thus argues that the enhancement of language economic value, utility and benefit in the minorities' language situations could be practical and effective in cross-border languages' status cultivation planning in China.

When the cross-border languages have been taken as the public products with value, utility and benefit, the language employment brought by language consumption can really promote the maintenance of cross-border languages. At the same time, since the beginning of the 21st century, the language industry is booming. And the language economy has been in an ascendant as a new source of economic growth and played a more and more remarkable role in building a harmonious language situation. According to the new language situations worldwide, the development of the language industry is an important embodiment of language economy in the minority languages' status cultivation planning for "The Belt and Road Initiative". Therefore, by proposing the language economy development plan of cross-border languages, developing a cross-border language economy model oriented to language industries including language service, language translation, language publication, etc. is practical and conducive to the economic benefits for the cross-border languages users. Finally, the goal of language maintenance would be achieved by improving the language vitality in the language economy.

Although the maintenance of the minority languages and cultures in the world conflicts with the deepening of economic globalization, combining cross-border languages with the language economy to create a rigid market for needs and to transform the national cultural values of languages into economic values could be taken as one of the effective ways to protect cross-border languages and most minority languages. The country should create favorable conditions for the conversion of language economic values, formulate relevant language policies and make investments in language costs.

IV. CONCLUSION

"The Belt and Road Initiative" has opened a new era of globalization for all things connected. Therefore, from the perspective of language ecology, the paper tries to propose an ecological language planning for the Chinese and cross-border languages in China for the construction of the Belt and Road. Cai (2012) has ever commented, as a new paradigm of linguistics, language ecology "provides theoretical support for studying the impact of globalization on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world as well as on the government's response to linguistic problems such as language policy and planning" (p. 212), and "The new paradigm is closely related to the macro-relationship of sustainable development of human civilization" (Cai, 2012, p. 212).

The paper concludes that ecology-of-language paradigm to different languages' status planning also reflects a Chinese-characteristic inclusive notion of "coexistence of variety, harmony in diversity" and presents a new harmonious view on languages' status planning in the new era of globalization marked by the theme of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit.

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