

The Study of Language Policy in Education in the Context of Belt and Road—The Contrast on Language Education Policy between China and Australia*

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Abstract—The language education policy is closely related to economic development, cultural communication and language strategy. This is a contrast on language policy in education between China and Australia in terms of subjective language, ethnic minority language and foreign language education. Some suggestions on language policy implement including language protection, comprehensive foreign language teaching system and internet advantages are given, in order to be beneficial for future study.

Index Terms—language education policy, language strategy, foreign language education

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the language policy in education has confronted with many challenges and opportunities with the development of *Belt and Road*. Despite of different systems, histories, and cultures, Australia and China have similar language situation. Both of them have their own national language, ethnic languages, and problems like deficiency in foreign language education and protection of language resource. Therefore, the comparison and contrast of two countries' language policies in education will contribute to the formulation and perfection of China's language policy in education.

II. THE COMPARISON ON DRIVING MECHANISM BETWEEN CHINA AND AUSTRALIA

A. Economic Development

Although Australia has abundant natural resources, its tourism and other traditional industries and newborn technological industry have developed rapidly after the implement of *National Policy on Language*. Since Australia, more often than not, conducts trade with non-English-speaking countries, language becomes a useful tool in negotiation and the ways of marketing. In the process of economic globalization, language plays more and more important role in international business and trade. It is one of the most important indexes for economic development, in terms of foreign business, financial industry, as well as modern science and technology. As a result, service industry gradually becomes the prime industry in Australia's national economy, and the structure of national industries has been transformed.

In current China, the language educational policy has been promoted and developed. On one hand, the Promotion of Mandarin decreases the communication barriers, and helps more low-incomers acquire more information and chances to get money. Thus, the great campaign called "Targeted Poverty Alleviation Campaign through the Promotion of Mandarin" is proceeding smoothly. On the other hand, the *Belt and Road* provides plenty of opportunities for China's economy. In order to establish and strengthen partnerships connectivity, foreign languages in education and talents cultivation projects are taken into account in language education policy. As language policy and economy are closely related, language communication owns great practical significance for the development of living standard, global

* Funding projects:

1. The Comparison on Ethnic Language Policy between Australia and China (17YY19), a Social Science Research Project of Jiangxi Province in 13th Five-year Plan;

2. The Comparison on Language Policy in Education between Australia and China (YY18217), a University Humanities and Social Science Research Project of Jiangxi Province in 2018;

3. The Study on Promotion Strategy of ESP Faculty's Competence in New Era (JXJG-19-6-28), a Transformation of College Education Project in Jiangxi.

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economic and international trade. Therefore, the implement of national language and the improvement of foreign language education are key points in language -in-education policy.

B. Culture Exchange

Language is a carrier of cultural exchange. In order to help more people to understand and study different cultures, Australian Federal government promulgated *National Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Strategy* in 1994. As the symbol of Australian traditional culture, Aboriginal languages are valued for the purpose of cultural diversity and resources protection. In *National Policy on Language*, Aboriginal languages are stated in legitimate forms of communication. Meanwhile, language revival and language maintenance of status cultivation plan are declared in the document. Actually, one of the fundamental objectives of *National Policy on Language* is to make sure that Australia gets the maximum profit from rich language resources.

In China, language and culture resources are abundant because of the long history. The president Xi Jinping remarks, "It depends on language expression and transmission to improve cultural glamour and national cohesion." As a matter of fact, language policy is endowed with more social responsibilities to inherit and develop culture. Thanks to the initiatives, both the Promotion of Mandarin and foreign language education, as the priority of language education policy, have been boosted. Language owns great practical significance for the development of minority culture or the improvement of communication. Hence, cultural exchange is another motivation to constitute language education policy.

C. Language Strategy

To strengthen national unity and get more voters from minorities, Australian government acknowledges the status of Australian English, Aboriginal languages and community languages. For instance, the Commonwealth Education Portfolia carried out a three-year National Aboriginal Languages Project to provide funding for initiatives in Aboriginal language education. In 1990s, a strategy called *the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools* was implemented to help Australian people learn knowledge of Asia and its languages. Henderson (2003) pointed out that "Although Australia's national language, English, was growing as an international language, it was not adequate to meet the needs of learners in a multi-lingual world and the Asian region in particular". Since the globalization speeds up, with more language contact and conflict, the language's function as strategy is prominent.

China, a typical multiethnic country, has a complicated language structure. On the one hand, language, as the carrier of mind, has a great strategic significance. Protecting minority language must be harmonious with Promoting Mandarin, which is the key and difficult point in current language work. On the other hand, it is necessary to promote the development of prioritized foreign languages. *Belt and Road* requires language to be a communication bridge. The nuclear of closer people-to-people ties lies in language indeed (Shen Qi, 2015). To meet the needs of politics and economy development in China, the government has strengthened its relationship with western countries and association of south-east Asian nations and Africa. The types of foreign language nationwide and the types in the regions are in urgent need. Thus, language strategy becomes the third motivation to constitute language education policy.

III. THE COMPARISON ON IMPLEMENT OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN EDUCATION BETWEEN CHINA AND AUSTRALIA

A. The Official Language Policy in Education

Although Australian English is the major language in Australian communication, it was not declared as the official language until the appearance of *National Policy on language*. In this document, the policy asserts that Australian English should be used with confidence at home and abroad. As for the nationalization of Australian English, there are ten projects described in this document to support Australian English learning. From then on, Australian English has become the first language for English-speaking Australians, and the second language for other Australians, as well as the required language for overseas students. Existing with ethnic languages, Australian English has established the foundation of national unity and cultural transmission. It inherits Australian culture and values, records Australian colonial history, and declares the independence of Australia.

Since 1949, China has experienced Reform of Writing System, Promotion of Mandarin, and long-term development of language policy. In 2000, the *National Common Language Rules* was enacted, which marks China as a language legislation country. Meanwhile, the regulative principles, such as *Subjectivity and Diversification*, and *Hard Stems and Soft Terms*, make mandarin and dialects, modern Chinese and traditional Chinese coexist and be harmonious. By 21st century, the goal of Chinese language plan has become specific. The government organizes the biggest language program called *Promoting the Poverty Alleviation by Popularization* to carry out the idea of *poverty alleviation being after wisdom improvement, which is after language skill improvement*. To be concrete, the activity forms, working media, and implement manners in project are innovative in order that the low-income people could alleviate poverty by acquiring external knowledge and skills.

B. Ethnic Language Policies in Education

From 1970s, with the wide spread of human rights in the world, the right to learn language was treated as a kind of human right. Minority ethnic groups have established many organizations to advocate their language and tradition. They began to struggle for their language rights and status. Many organizations like Migrant Education Action takes account of issues of education and language and argue that minority groups have the right to maintain and develop their language and culture. The thought leads to the recognition and protection of Aboriginal languages in language policy. Except for the impact of human right campaign, the thought treating language as resource is another factor. The competence of bilingual plays a key role in international communication and national security. Since language is a kind of resource, minority language is also a kind of resource which needs to be valued. In *National Policy on Language*, it is clearly expressed that languages are valuable national resources which enrich culture and life, and promote the national development.

Chinese language policy insists on *Subjectivity and Diversification*. In the Constitution, it is explicitly stipulated that Mandarin should be promoted while every ethnic group has right to use their own language. Before 1980s, the ethnic minority languages took priority in ethnic areas and the common language was ranked in the second place. Since 1980s, Chinese government has begun to formulate and implement a series of policies, such as the *Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy of People's Republic China* and *Education Law of People's Republic of China*. Ethnic schools are expected to focus on ethnic language education and Chinese education. For instance, bilingual education experiments involving teaching contents, methods and systems have been conducted, and ethnic minority classes are established to help students become competent in both Chinese and their own languages. In 2011, the theme of *vigorously promote and use standard Chinese, and protect ethnic minority language in scientific ways* was stated in the Six Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The protection of ethnic minority languages is brought forth in language policy. At present, China begins the greatest language project called Language Resources Protection Program to protect ethnic minority languages, especially endangered language and dialects. Both minority languages and dialects are currently better protected and developed.

C. Foreign Language Policy in Education

Since 1980s, the authorities in Australia have stipulated a couple of high-priority foreign languages successively. Students are asked to learn at least one community language or one language which has territory or economic advantage. Considering some factors, such as national economy, social needs and individual development, the government chose more than one languages as target languages. Students were encouraged to learn one foreign language which was beneficial to Australian economic development. Entering the 1990s, the federal government has got a great progress in the construction of multilingual and multicultural country. The non-English foreign language teaching has been gradually supported. The schools received federal government's financial support based on the number of students learning languages. Foreign language policy in education became an important and indispensable part in language policy. Thanks to the frequent trade between Australia and China, Japan and Southeast Asia, the Australian government increased federal funding for Asian languages teaching, and 60% students in 10-grade were asked to choose one of four Asian languages to study. Besides, non-English magazines, TV programs, book stores, as well as libraries served for target languages. It is the positive and efficient language policy in education. Such a favorable study environment provides immigrants convenience and lays foundation for social stability and development.

In recent 40 years, Chinese foreign language education has developed rapidly with the deepening of reform and opening-up policy. As everyone has to take English as a compulsory course no matter how good one's performance was on the English exam when they enter a college, the English level of Chinese people has been improved in general. As for college English education, besides of practical course, other content based courses, such as literature nation's background, economy and trade, were drawn more attention to cultivate students' language competence in English. Through two decades' development of foreign language education, the number of undergraduate students who study foreign languages amounts from 3,300 to 1million. Foreign language majors and the orientation of cultivation changes from single one to compound structure, and the range of cultivation goals is extended gradually from linguistic and literature to foreign business, banking field, and mass media. By 2018, more than 1,300 universities opened English undergraduate major while 506 universities opened Japanese major. More than 200 universities opened Russia and German undergraduate majors. In the new century, China has established translation major, business English major to cultivate "researching professionals, practical and interdisciplinary talents". Foreign language education develops with the change of time and social progress, which bring up a good quantity of talents for economic construction and culture exchange.

IV. ENLIGHTENMENT ON CURRENT LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY

A. Language Resource Protection

China is a country with multiethnic groups and different ethnic minority languages. The inheritance and transmission of Chinese culture is closely related to these minority languages and dialects. Some issues, however, need be taken into attention. The current Chinese program called "Language acquisition promoting poverty alleviation" puts emphasis on the promotion of mandarin and lacks of exploration and utilization on ethnic language resources. Furthermore, a deep adjustment for ethnic language status planning in China is very necessary. Especially, the awareness for the identity of

national language, protection for dialects and minority languages need to be valued for the purpose of maintaining language diversity. Therefore, ethnic minority languages are supposed to be studied in academic circles.

First of all, language resources belong to intangible cultural heritage. Chinese minority language resources differ in ecological environment, language styles, and existing situation. As a matter of fact, laws and regulation are enacted according to local conditions. In this way, the protection of language and culture heritage has laws to abide by. The ethnic minority language policy not only guarantees the right of choice among ethnic people, but also decreases conflicts between mandarin and ethnic minority languages. Secondly, Language inherit require more people to say and write, as well as deep communication through languages. In other words, to explore and transmit ethnic culture in language is the goal of language inheritance. From this point, to increase fund for introducing ethnic minority talents can guarantee the number of qualified teachers working in ethnic minority areas. Only the quality of ethnic minority education is improved, minority culture can be protected and researching fruits can be produced to a large extent. When economic develops, culture and language will develop in a coordinated way and the functions of culture inherit will appear. Furthermore, try to record language and words, and maintain active state of language to improve language ecology and strengthen language vitality. At last, by establishing digital language file and language database, the original language ecology is going to be kept from phonologic, linguistic and other perspectives. Hence, some endangered languages can be kept. Even if some voices disappear, the later generations will feel and touch it and the value of language resource will be cherished.

B. Foreign Language Teaching Mode

After the Reform and Opening-up, Chinese economy develops rapidly, the demand of foreign language talents is pressed in talents markets. Experiencing three steps (recovery, steady development and repeated revolution), the framework on foreign language education is accomplished and the approaches on foreign language research are verified. A great quantity of foreign language talents have contributed to economic, social and diplomatic development. However, 21st century has witnessed a great progress in every aspect in China, and new conflicts and new issues are arising.

It is stated in *Program Planning for National Long-term Education Revolution*, “The aim of language education is to cultivate a quantity of talents who master international rules and has the ability to deal with international affairs and join competitions.” The current nuclear idea of China’s language education is to cultivate “What kind of talents”, and “What will they do”. He Lianzhen (2019), director of college foreign language education committee, said “The cultivation of talents who are the expert in one thing and good at many things or talents who are good at one thing and have ability in managing other things will be the orientation of college foreign language revolution”. Current foreign language courses in China mainly focus on common languages such as English, Japanese, Russian and French, which are far from meeting the needs of the *Belt and Road Initiative*. It is unsuitable for cultivating interdisciplinary language talents. By contrast to the quantity of foreign language in Australia, the number of foreign languages offered in Chinese education is small. Due to the long-term influence of English’s dominance in foreign language education, there are few researches on the setting non-English foreign language courses. Meanwhile, the rational allocation of different languages should be carried out according to diplomacy and requirement of economy and trade. At present, schools offering *Belt and Road* language courses are distributed in foreign – language institutions and some specific regions, especially in the southwest China. Apparently, the language plan is not very scientific and the major distribution needs to be optimized. Furthermore, the high-quality language teaching system and cultivation system need to be improved. The high quality language education system, as well as the continuous language learning both in elementary and college educations is supposed to provide multi-lingual learning chances. At last, deepening the cooperation between college and research organization, college and enterprises will contribute to the building of a higher class education cooperation community. Apart from the combination with the academic discipline, colleges are in need of class time on Language for special purpose and inter-cultural communication in order to strengthen national language capability and improve students’ professional competency.

C. The Advantage of Internet Plus

With the development of science, technology, and industry revolution, AI has been constructing a better world. Thanks to powerful linguistic corpus and terminology bank, the machine translation works well in daily communication and acts as assistance for excellent translator. Under such a background, foreign language education needs to keep up with era development. Researchers and teachers should be encouraged to be bold in innovation. For example, for the aid of technologies, such as, AI, flipped classroom, VR, students have access to the experience of the target nation’s life, thought and culture. In this way, the teaching methods will be diverse and students’ humanistic quality will be improved. Taking the advantage of *Belt and Road*, foreign language teaching mode will be changed with the assistance of data. In the construction of the *Belt and Road*, Chinese education will contribute more to a larger, deeper and more sophisticated cooperation. Besides, the fund of intelligent class and digital campus should be increased and the collaboration of AI and teachers will create a new biological circle. Teachers’ role will be changed and they can have ability to solve individual problems for the assistance of MOOC resource, biometric identification technology, man-machine interaction, and data analysis. Only combing in and out of class, online and offline teaching, teaching environment can be changed and the pluralistic education can be boosted to go forth into intelligence.

V. CONCLUSION

At present, China is in a vital and fast developing period. Although language policy in education gets a great achievement, there is a great space for perfection. The ways to establish and use of Internet plus, the language propagation mode, the cultivation of creative and compound talents are waiting for joint efforts from more scientists, educational experts and frontline educators.

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