

ทางเลือกใหม่ในการส่งเสริมการศึกษาตลอดชีวิต เพื่อคงไว้ของภาษาชนกลุ่มน้อย

THE ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO PROMOTE LIFE-LONG EDUCATION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MINORITY LANGUAGES

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาทางเลือกใหม่ในการส่งเสริมการศึกษาตลอดชีวิตเพื่ออนุรักษ์ภาษาของชนกลุ่มน้อย พื้นที่ศึกษาคือชุมชนที่ยังคงใช้ภาษาอาหมในชีวิตประจำวัน เป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ โดยใช้วิธีการวิจัยด้านมานุษยวิทยาภาษาสังคมศาสตร์ และการวิจัยเชิงเอกสาร เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลปฐมภูมิด้วยการสัมภาษณ์ การสนทนากลุ่ม และการจัดสัมมนา เครื่องมือที่ใช้คือแบบสัมภาษณ์อย่างมีโครงสร้าง

ผลการศึกษา พบว่า ภาษาอาหม ยังคงมีความสำคัญต่อสมาชิกของหมู่บ้านใหม่ซง เพราะยังคงมีการใช้ภาษาอาหมในชีวิตประจำวันกันอยู่ แต่แนวโน้มที่พบแสดงให้เห็นถึงการใช้ภาษาอาหมที่จำนวนผู้ใช้ค่อยๆ ลดลงตามลำดับ จนอาจทำให้ไม่มีผู้ใช้ภาษาอาหมอีกต่อไปในอนาคตอันใกล้ เนื่องจากมีปัจจัยสำคัญที่ส่งผลกระทบต่อการใช้ภาษาอาหมในหมู่บ้านใหม่ซงคือภาษาที่ใช้ในการจัดการศึกษา ที่นำเอาภาษาจีนกลางมาใช้เป็นภาษาสำหรับการจัดการเรียนการสอนอย่างเต็มรูปแบบ และยกเลิกการใช้ภาษาอาหมในการเรียนการสอนอย่างสิ้นเชิง

ผลการศึกษานี้มีข้อเสนอแนะสำหรับผู้กำหนดนโยบายด้านการศึกษาด้านภาษา ดังนี้

1. รัฐบาลกลางควรกำหนดนโยบายที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการศึกษาที่สามารถดำเนินการได้ เช่น นโยบายการศึกษาตลอดชีวิตที่ทำให้สภาพแวดล้อมของชนกลุ่มน้อยยังคงมีการใช้ภาษาของตนและรักษาภาษาของตนให้คงอยู่
2. รัฐบาลกลางควรมีการสำรวจภาษาพูดและภาษาเขียนของชนกลุ่มน้อยด้วยการจัดตั้งหน่วยงานเฉพาะกิจในการทำงานประสานกับผู้ที่ยังคง พูดและเขียนภาษาของชนกลุ่มน้อยได้ รวมทั้งจัดตั้งสถาบันเพื่อการวิจัยด้านภาษา มีการฝึกอบรมผู้เชี่ยวชาญในด้านภาษาของชนกลุ่มน้อย และให้ความช่วยเหลือในการประดิษฐ์ ปรับปรุงหรือปฏิรูปภาษาเขียนของชนกลุ่มน้อย รวมทั้งส่งเสริมการใช้ภาษาพูดและภาษาเขียนของชนกลุ่มน้อยในทุก ๆ ด้าน
3. รัฐบาลท้องถิ่นควรจัดให้มีการรณรงค์ด้านการสร้างสภาพแวดล้อมที่เอื้ออำนวยต่อการที่ทำให้ภาษาของชนกลุ่มน้อย

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to explore the alternative approach to promote life-long education for minority language conservation. And the researcher took a Hani language speaking community as example.

Through using ethnographical sociolinguistic methods and documentary study in this study, the preliminary data were collected through interview, group discussion, and seminar. Two major data collection instruments were utilized: interview and questionnaire.

The result of the study indicates that language condition in Meichong Village is that the language still has strong vitality, but it also tends to gradually decline to some degree, and is likely to be endangered in the near future. There are many factors affecting it. However, the factor that affects the language condition was caused by language education that standard Mandarin education was fully implemented while Hani language education was not maintained.

The results from this study yielded significant implication for the language education policy makers are as follows:

1. The central government should prescribe a series of related education policy, such as life-long education policy, and implement it in reality. Meanwhile, the lively linguistic community for minority language would be guaranteed and maintained.
2. The central government should make investigation of the spoken and written languages of ethnic minorities, and establish special organizations involved in work connected with the spoken and written languages of ethnic minorities to conduct research, train specialists in these languages, help minority people create, improve or reform their written languages, and promote the use of spoken and written languages of ethnic minorities in every field.
3. The local government should create the favorable environment for survival and development of minority languages.

Rationale and Significance of the Problem

Under the background of globalization, the exchange of cultures and languages among different countries and nationalities is proliferated. For achieving political unity of any country, the common language is promoted. However, while the common language is widely promoted, the government neglects maintenance of subordinate languages, which causes a situation where the dominant language becomes much more popular, while

subordinate languages are neglected, or some have been pushed to the margin of endangerment. However, the subordinate languages still play an importance role in the society and even have impact upon the individual citizen. Thus, various efficient approaches are explored in many countries. However, the situation of subordinate languages is not optimistic around the world, China is not excluded.

Then, what is the real situation of minority languages in China, and how to conserve them? Therefore, this study aims to

evaluate whether the Chinese central government's policies or strategies on minority language could help conserve minority languages in the effective way, and then propose new alternative approaches of teaching and learning in reference to successful maintenance of minority languages.

Research Questions of the Study

1. What are previous and current situations of minority language teaching and learning in schools?
2. How effective is the policy concerning teaching and learning of minority languages in schools using bilingual approaches?
3. What is the current situation of minority language used in the community and families?
4. What are the factors affecting declined uses of minority languages?
5. What is the alternative approach to promote life-long education for the minority language conservation?

Objective of the Study

On account of this issue, this study is to accomplish the following goals:

1. To investigate the history and current situations of minority language teaching and learning in schools.
2. To appraise the policy concerning teaching and learning of minority languages in schools using bilingual approaches.
3. To investigate the current situation of minority language used in the community and families.
4. To investigate factors affecting declined uses of minority languages.

5. To propose the alternative approach to promote lifelong education for the minority language conservation.

Research Methodology

To achieve the 5 objectives, the methodology applied for the study is quantitative and qualitative approaches. Ethnographical sociolinguistic methods and documentary study were applied to collect data. Data were gathered through interview, group discussion, and seminar. Two major data collection instruments were utilized: interview and questionnaire.

Research Result

The result of research is that Hani language still holds strong vitality in its speech community in the short term, while its linguistic ecology has been gradually eroded with the wide spreading of Putonghua as the official common language used nationwide. Thus, Hani is likely to decline and is on the margin of endangerment. Likewise, many factors are found to be indicator to Hani endangerment, the major factors are as follows: (1) The central government does not fully carry out the minority language policy. Because of this, it fails to promote minority language teaching and learning at school and spread it in the community and families. (2) The full implementation of Putonghua only policy at current school education system, government official department, other public places and mass media is a vital factor. (3) Language education in Hani by the old generation to the young generation is not thoroughly maintained in the community and families.

All these elements lead to the unstable situation of Hani's dominant status in the community and families. Meanwhile, some minor factors affect declined use and endangerment of language as well.

Discussion

On the whole, to discuss the research result, language condition in Meichong Village is that the language still has strong vitality, but it also tends to gradually decline to some degree, and is likely to be endangered in the near future. However, the factor affecting language condition was caused by language education that standard Mandarin education was fully implemented and language education in Hani is not maintained. On this point, it corresponds with what was proved by Malcolm (1994: 54). According to Malcolm (1994: 54), bilingual education programs were recommended for the maintenance of aboriginal languages, and language shift may be accelerated by education. Likewise, in the current study, children learn the dominant language at school, where they seldom use their native languages. Over the long-time immersion at school, they may be accustomed to using the dominant language with their peers and teachers. Therefore, in the research result, the researcher emphasized discussing impact of the government language education policy on language learning and use of minority languages in the community.

From the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, according to Zhou (2003: 23-31), China's language policy can be essentially broken down into three stages: (1) the first pluralistic stage (1949-1957),

characterized by accommodation and official promotion of linguistic pluralism; (2) the Chinese monopolistic stage (1958-1977), generally dominated by assimilationist practices and promotion of Chinese; and (3) the second pluralistic stage (1978-present), distinguished by a promotion of both Chinese and minority languages. In the three stages, there were two major language policies prescribed and successively implemented—namely, on one hand, “promotion of Putonghua” for the purpose of ruling and managing the whole country, on the other hand, “application of bilingual education” for the purpose of maintaining minority languages.

Through making a comprehensive survey of the history and current situations of language education in Meichong Village, it is found that Putonghua is drastically promoted, which results in the situation that Hani children only learn and speak Mandarin at school. What's worse, Mandarin is also taught by parents at home. Thus, the community is the only linguistic environment where children can learn their mother language through spontaneous acquisition. In addition, it is found that bilingual education applied in the village school is transitional bilingual education. It gradually transfers students to get used to learning in Mandarin only. On the contrary, maintenance bilingual education which is to conserve minority languages is not encouraged and applied. Therefore, bilingual education in Meichong Village does not eventually help maintain the minority language. Instead, the transitional bilingual education accelerates endangerment of minority language.

In effect, a country's language policy is prescribed according to the actual condition of that country. There is no doubt that the Chinese central government is always inclined to maintain and develop minority languages. Until now, there are three national laws concerning minority language maintenance and development: the Constitution Law, the Law on Regional National Autonomy and the Law of the Peoples Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language.

"The three laws vary greatly in emphasizing on certain dimensions" said Huangxing, vice president of Ethnology and Anthropology Research Center of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences when interviewed by reporter Cheng Liping from the state-run Legal Daily. It is clearly prescribed in the Constitution Law that "The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages". The *Law on Regional National Autonomy* states "the organs of self government of national autonomous areas shall guarantee the freedom of the nationalities in these areas to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and their freedom to preserve or reform their own customs". Otherwise, A Law of the standard spoken and written Chinese language discusses almost exclusively about the use and spread of Putonghua 'common speech' nationwide and simplified Chinese characters.

"Generally speaking, the establishment of laws and policies on national language and written system are simply aimed to integrate national language policy and language planning and ensure the minority people's rights to use

and develop their mother language in form of law. While the establishment of laws and policies aimed to project and maintain minority languages have not been proposed yet" said Huangxing.

According to Huangxing, in terms of improving the legal system of minority language protection and maintenance, only a few languages are concerned in the currently prescribed law on national language and written system", such as Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur, Kazakh, Korean, Yi, Dai, and Zhuang and so forth. Nevertheless, the majority of minority languages are not protected in the form of law. He further stated that the issue was mainly caused by imbalanced learning and use of minority languages. In China, the majority of minority groups don't formulate their own literacy and written system, and there is huge difference among subdialects inside a language. Thus, objectively, these subdialects are impossible to be popularized in the government department, education field, mass media, modern technology, and various social language activities and simply constrained in a narrow scope. Therefore, the contemporary existing laws only guarantee the right of the few advantaged minority languages, while the vast majority of other minority languages are not taken into account.

Because of this, the local government applied bilingual education policy made by the central government. Namely, bilingual education is implemented in the economically and educationally advantaged minority regions. Thus, Meichong Village, as an economically and educationally disadvantaged village, could not guarantee the implementation of bilingual

education policy. Meanwhile, the local government does not create favorable condition to ensure maintenance of language through bilingual education. Thereby, bilingual education in Meichong has lost balance, which directly leads to the imbalance of Hani linguistic ecology system. The situation that Hani language still has strong vitality while it tends to face danger is definitely inevitable.

To discuss in the perspective of linguistics view, balance of language ecology can sustain under the condition that the language learner learns and uses the language in the whole life. In lifelong education theory, as the British educator Basil Yeaxlee (1929: 4) along with Eduard Lindeman (1926: 7) provided an intellectual basis for a comprehensive understanding of education as a continuing aspect of everyday life rather than a partial issue or a transitional stage of a person's life. In this part, a view of permanent education in various continental traditions is vital in a person's whole life learning. Moreover, as Dave (1976: 124) states: Lifelong education is a process of accomplishing the personal, social and professional development of both individuals and groups. It is a comprehensive and unifying idea, which includes formal, non-formal and informal learning for acquiring and enhancing enlightenment so as to attain the fullest possible development in different stages and domains of life. It is connected with both individual growth and social progress. Thus, to discuss lifelong education correlated to the current study, education contains school education, family education, and social education. Besides, lifelong education is an integrative education system, aiming to achieve

improvement in quality of life from the pre-school years to post-retirement, and in a wide range of education——family education, school education and social education.

If the two language policies were not fully implemented because of weakness of the national power in the past, well then, it should be right time to adjust and improve language education policy in the new stage. One reason is that the background of language use in the contemporary China is far different from the early stage of foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Besides, with fast developing of economy in the ethnic minority concentrated regions, the modernization of economy also causes wide spread of Putonghua in these areas. Therefore, more and more minority people are inclined to master Mandarin as the national common language except to learn their own native language. This is to fit into the social interaction through learning the common language and to acquire the latest science and technology. Thus, the best pattern of language life is that various minority ethnic groups not only maintain their native languages, but also skillfully use the common language or the dominant language.

Recommendation for Application

The researcher mainly made recommendations in two dimensions: the aspect of policy making and the aspect of future study.

Recommendation for Policy Making

1. The central government should prescribe and put in place a series of related education policy, such as lifelong education policy, to ensure that the living environment of minority language would be maintained.

2. The central government should make investigation of the spoken and written languages of ethnic minorities, and established special organizations involved in work connected with the spoken and written languages of ethnic minorities as well as institutions to do research and train specialists in these languages, help minority people create, improve or reform their written languages, and promote the use of spoken and written languages of ethnic minorities in every field.

3. The local government should create the favorable environment for survival and development of minority languages. The details are as follows: (1) Conduct research on language condition of ethnic groups to appraise degree of vitality of various languages, and estimate it based on the appraisal according to a widely accepted international assessment standards. Upon that, the corresponding measures should be taken to bring definitely endangered languages or near endangered languages into education program. (2) Record and preserve endangered languages materials in large quantity. In particular, applying modern scientific technological means to conserve endangered languages in terms of phonetics recording, vocabulary collection, grammar organizing, long story making, textbook compiling, dictionary publishing, oral literature recording, and audio file recording and so forth.

(3) Create spelling and written system for endangered languages with orthography unavailable, and strengthen the mother language education to maintain endangered languages. Meanwhile, appropriate financial support should be put into the project of minority language conservation through budgetary allocations. Besides, broadcasting, publication, and literature and art creation in endangered languages should be carried out. Particularly, some efficient measures should be taken to wake up the mother language speakers and offer them relevant support to prevent their mother language from dying out. (4) Establish special agency and devote more manpower, material and financial resources to carry out the task of protecting the endangered language.

Recommendation for Future Study

The current study focuses on universal study of minority language declination and endangerment and the alternative approach to maintain it, while the study of particularity is simply explored in width. Therefore, future study should focus on exploration and study of particularity of minority language declination and endangerment in depth.

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