URBANIZATION, DEVELOPMENT & BILINGUAL LANGUAGE SITUATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF BILINGUAL LANGUAGE IN MINZU UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

China is a unitary, multi-national, socialist country. There are 56 ethnic groups in China, among which 55 are considered national minorities. The reason why these 55 ethnic groups are habitually referred to as "national minorities" is that their population is smaller than that of the Han people. China is a country comprised of diverse ethnic groups with various spoken and written languages. Among the 55 ethnic groups in China, 53 have their own spoken or written language: the Hui and Manchu ethnic groups use the Han language as their common language. Beijing is the capital city of China and we can find all 55 minority groups living there. Among these ethnic groups, minority intellectuals constitute the largest proportions. This paper examines language usage among professors and scholars from the Faculty of Language and Literature of Chinese Ethnic Minorities, at Minzu University of China (MUC). This case study explores the impact of urbanization and development on minority intellectuals' bilingual situations and associated language changes. We argue that, despite urbanization and development, different family types have different language usage characteristics, but all retain that of the generation gap. The major feature is the declining usage and ultimate disappearance of native languages, and the accelerated and improved usage of Han and other foreign languages.

提要

中国是统一的多民族社会主义国家。有56个民族，其中55个是少数民族。因为这55个少数民族人口相对汉族来说较少，故习惯性地称之为"少数民族"。在55个少数民族中，除回族和满族两个民族通用汉语外，其他53个少数民族都有自己的语言。北京是中国的首都，也是全国民族成分最多的城市，这里生活的少数民族知识分子占有很大比例。本文以中央民族大学少数民族语言学院从事民族语文工作的少数民族教师为例，通过个案分析在城市化过程中城市少数民族知识分子双语的状况和变化，以及他们子女的语言使用情况。目的是从中了解少数民族知识分子在于城市化进程中语言使用的规律及其发展趋势。作者指出由于城市化的进程，不同类型家庭的语言使用具有不同的特点，都存在着代沟现象，总的变化特点是母语能力减弱甚至不会母语，汉语和外语水平不断提高。

I. INTRODUCTION

China is a unitary, multi-national, socialist country. There are 56 ethnic groups in China, among which 55 are national minorities. The reason why these 55 ethnic groups are habitually referred to as "national minorities" is that their population is smaller than that of the Han people. China is

a country comprised of diverse ethnic groups with various spoken and written languages. Among the 55 ethnic groups in China, 53 have their own spoken or written language: the Hui and Manchu ethnic groups use the Han language as their common language. Beijing is the capital city of China and there are 55 minorities living there. Among these ethnic groups, minority intellectuals constitute the largest proportions. This paper examines language usage among professors and scholars from the Faculty of Language and Literature of Chinese Ethnic Minorities, MUC.

1. MINZU UNIVERSITY OF CHINA (CENTRAL UNIVERSITY FOR NATIONALITIES)

Founded in October 1941 as the Yan'an Institute of Nationalities, the Central Institute of Nationalities was officially established in Beijing in June 1951. In November 1993, the Institute adopted a new name: the Central University for Nationalities (CUN). In 2009, the Central University for Nationalities changed its English name to Minzu University of China (MUC). MUC is the top institution of higher education for Chinese ethnic minorities. As a key prestigious university of the "211 Project" and the "985 Program," it is reputed to be "the cradle of high-level talents of Chinese ethnic minorities".

2. THE FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE OF CHINESE ETHNIC MINORITIES

The academic discipline of Language and Literature of Chinese Ethnic Minorities was established in the early 1950s and ratified as the National Key Academic Discipline in 2002. The faculty's academic research encompasses the literature and documents of 56 ethnic minorities, 80 languages and 30 writing systems in five language families, namely the Sino-Tibetan, Altaic, Malay/Polynesian, South-Asian, and the Indo-European families. Since the ratification, the faculty has focused on the construction of academic disciplines and faculty teams, the cultivation of students and scientific research in various academic fields. The faculty has 62 professional teachers for undergraduate education, among which are 24 professors, 16 associate professors, and 19 instructors.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

1. LANGUAGE USAGE

Minzu University is a multi-national family. Most faculty and staff at MUC are minorities. For example, 90% of the faculty and staff at the Faculty of Language and Literature of Chinese Ethnic Minorities belong to as many as 24 different ethnic minorities, including: Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak, Korean, Yi, etc. The professors are all proficient in their mother tongue. At the same time, they master Chinese and foreign languages at varying levels. The faculty is the bilingual language centre of MUC. I interviewed 29 faculty professors belonging to 17 different ethnic minority groups, including Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak, Korean, Yi, Miao, and Dai. Investigation shows that 100% of minority professors can teach courses in their native languages, accustomed as they are to their native way of thinking. Simultaneously, however, more than 90% of the minority professors master Chinese. The longer they live in Beijing, the better their Chinese-language skills become. For ethnic minorities with a written language, such as Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak, Korean, or Yi, their native languages are much better preserved than those of certain minorities from Southern China or other small ethnic groups.

A narrow range of native language is a common characteristic of all minority languages. Today, ethnic groups in Beijing live in concentrated communities scattered all over the city. Han (Chinese) is the official language of China, and its dominance limits the realistic usage and scope of minority languages. The Han (Chinese) language must therefore become the default second language of all minority professors.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF BILINGUAL LANGUAGE TYPES

Type A: Minority language - Han Language (Chinese)

55% of minority professors belong to Type A. They rely mainly on their minority language, while Han language (Chinese) skills make external assistance subsidiary. Ethnic groups include Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak, Korean and Yi .

Type B: Han Language (Chinese) - Minority language

30% of minority professors belong to Type B and include ethnic minority groups from Southern China who live in scattered or mixed communities.

Type C: Minority language - Han Language (Chinese) - Minority language

Eg. Uygur Professors master Kazak; Kazak Professors master Uygur.

15% of minority professors belong to Type C and these minority professors are masters of both their native language and the Han (Chinese) language. At same time, all of them have at least a good command of a foreign language.

In all, twenty professors have mastered English, Japanese, Russian, Turkish, Bulgarian, Kyrgyz and Vietnamese; Five professors have mastered more than two foreign languages; And one professor each has mastered Mongolian, Chinese, English, Japanese, Russian; Tibetan, Chinese, English; Korean, Chinese, Japanese; and finally, one has mastered Uygur, Chinese, Russian, and Turkish.

3. BILINGUAL VARIATIONS AS A FUNCTION OF AGE AND ETHNIC GROUPS

Among the interviewees, the eldest is 78 and came to Beijing in 1952, while the youngest is 39. In terms of native language skills, the older interviewees are, generally speaking, better linguistically equipped than the younger ones. The ethnic groups who live in concentrated communities in northern China retain their native languages much better than minority ethnic groups from southern China who live in scattered or mixed communities. Bilingual language utilization is in inversely correlated to the individual's age. Young and middle-aged professors employ their bilingualism more frequently and have higher levels of Chinese and English proficiency than the older ones.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY SITUATION AND CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE USAGE

1. LANGUAGE SITUATION OF SINGLE-NATIONALITY FAMILIES

At the Faculty of Language and Literature of Chinese Ethnic Minorities, 75% of professors' families are of a single nationality and 25% are the product of intermarried families. I investigated 21 single-nationality families and 8 intermarriage families. Research finds that in Beijing, native languages decline very quickly in the generational transition between single-nationality family and intermarriage family. Mongolian, Uygur, Kazak, Kyrghyz, and Korean are almost all single-minority families. I studied the families of four Mongolian, three Uygur, one Kazak, one Daur, three Tibetan, four Korean, two Yi, one Dai, one Miao and one Jingpo professors. In these families, 17 professors' spouses possessed a good command of their native languages while 3 spouses possessed only a basic level of linguistic knowledge. Thirty-one percent of the professors' children mastered their mother tongue; 15.8% had a basic understanding of their native language; 21% could understand but not speak, and 31.7% of the children knew nothing of their mother tongue.

2. STATISTICAL CHART OF LANGUAGE USAGE AMONG SINGLE-NATIONALITY FAMILIES: (SEE TABLE ON NEXT PAGE)

3. LANGUAGE CHARACTERISTICS OF SINGLE-NATIONALITY MINORITY FAMILIES

1) Children's capacity for their native language has universally declined.
2) Large minority populations retain their native languages much better than small minority populations.
3) Children from families which communicate in their native language develop strong native language skills.
4) Children born in minority areas have a better grasp of their native language than those born in Beijing.
5) When the children communicate in their native language, they usually speak half in their mother tongue and half in Chinese.

4. REASONS FOR NATIVE LANGUAGE DECLINE IN SINGLE-NATIONALITY MINORITY FAMILIES

1) There are no minority language primary schools or middle schools in Beijing.
2) Minority children speak Chinese and receive Chinese cultural education. Chinese has thus become their first language.
3) They are accustomed to Chinese ways, and their minority identity has faded from their memory.
4) Although their parents are the first generation in Beijing, the influence of their native language is confined to family life. The native language influence is becoming weaker and weaker.
5) The native language of second-generation single-nationality minority families is obviously declining. The third generation may lose their native language gradually.

5. LANGUAGE SITUATION OF INTERMARRIAGE MINORITY FAMILIES

Intermarriage minority families make up 25% of the faculty. Among this group, I investigated 8 families:

The Miao- Han family. The husband is 58-years old and teaches the Miao language. His wife and child don't know the Miao language. Their family language is Han (Chinese).

The Tibetan-Han family. The husband is 49-years old and teaches the Tibetan language. His wife and child don't know Tibetan language. Their family language is Han (Chinese).

The Li-Han family. The husband is 65-years-old and teaches the Li language. His wife and child don't know the Li language. Their family language is Han (Chinese).

The Gaoshan-Hui, Lisu-Han, Yugu-Han, Hani-Han and Yi-Han families form the intermarriage families. These minority teachers only use their native language when they meet their fellow countrymen. Since their spouses don't understand the minority language, the language used at home is Chinese and so has become the common language.

Nowadays, there are more and more intermarried minority families at Minzu University and intermarriage is becoming a common phenomenon. This is an inevitable trend in minority urban development, as is the mixing of multiple nationalities. With Chinese as the common language spoken by mothers and fathers in the home, minority children lack the environment in which to learn their native language.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper examines language usage among professors and scholars from the Faculty of Language and Literature of

Statistical chart of language usage among single-nationality families

NATIONALITY	AGE	SPOUSE			CHILD				FAMILY LANGUAGE	CHILD'S PLACE OF MOTHER-TONGUE EDUCATION
		OCCUPATION	MOTHER TONGUE PROFICIENCY	CHINESE PROFICIENCY	BIRTH PLACE	AGE	MOTHER TONGUE PROFICIENCY	CHINESE EDUCATION LEVEL	FAMILY LANGUAGE	
MONGOLIAN	67	Staff	Excellent	Basic	Beijing	31	Understands basic language	University	Bilingual, Mongol/ Chinese	Home
MONGOLIAN	55	Teacher	Excellent	Good	Beijing	30	Master	University	Bilingual, Mongolian	Home
MONGOLIAN	53	Teacher	Excellent	Very good	Beijing	14	Can understand but not speak	Secondary school	Bilingual	Home
MONGOLIAN	51	Cadre	Excellent	Excellent	Beijing	21	None	University	Bilingual, Chinese	Home
KOREAN	64	Staff	Excellent	Good	Jilin	28	Master	University	Korean	Home & school
KOREAN	61	Doctor	Basic	Excellent	Beijing	29	No	University	Bilingual, Chinese	Home
KOREAN	58	Teacher	Excellent	Excellent	Beijing	30	Master	University	Bilingual, Chinese	South Korea
KOREAN	41	Cadre	Excellent	Excellent	Beijing	10	No	Primary school	Bilingual	Home
UYGUR	61	Cadre	Excellent	Good	Beijing	29	Master	University	Uygue	Home
UYGUR	49	Cadre	Excellent	Good	Beijing	21	Can understand/ speak but cannot read/ write	University	Uygue	Home
UYGUR	39	Cadre	Good	Excellent	Beijing	11	Can understand/ speak	Primary school	Uygue	Home
TIBETAN	76	Teacher	Excellent	Excellent	Sichuan	45	Master	University	Tibetan	Home & school
TIBETAN	50	Cadre	Excellent	Excellent	Qinghai	19	Basic	University	Bilingual	Home & school
TIBETAN	42	Cadre	Very good	Excellent	Beijing	9	None	Primary school	Bilingual, Chinese	Home
KAZAKH	52	Teacher	Excellent	Excellent	Beijing	25	Can understand	University	Bilingual, Kazakh	Home
DAI	78	Cadre	Excellent	Good	Yunnan	37	Basic	University	Bilingual, Dai	Home
YI	52	Cadre	Basic	Excellent	Beijing	25	Can understand	University	Chinese	Home
YI	38	Teacher	Good	Excellent	Beijing	8	None	Primary school	Chinese	
MIAO	76	Teacher	Excellent	Excellent	Hubei	40	None	University	Chinese	Home
DAUR	52	Cadre	Basic	Excellent	Beijing	23	None	University	Chinese	Home
JINGPO	45	Cadre	Good	Good	Beijing	17	Can understand	Secondary school	Bilingual, Chinese	Home

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006

Chinese Ethnic Minorities, MUC. The data gathered helps analyzes urban development and minority intellectuals' professional and family bilingual situations and consequent language changes. One conclusion is that due to urbanization and development, different family types have different language usage characteristics, but all retain that of the generation gap. Based on this, it can be argued that the declining usage, and ultimate disappearance of native languages is a very real possibility, given the accelerated and improved usage of Han and other foreign languages.

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