Ethnic Minority Bilingual Education and Language Variation

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Keywords: Ethnic Minority, Bilingual Education, Language Variation.

Abstract. Ethnic minority bilingual education and language variation are both hot issues in ethnic minority language research and social linguistics, which seem no connection in separate field, this paper collects the main skeleton of both research and try to detect the potential connection between ethnic minority bilingual education and language variation.

Introduction

Ethnic minority bilingual education has been a hot issue since the appearance of bilingual phenomenon in ethnic minority group. Bilingual education brought in Chinese Mandarin to the life of common minorities, those who only used minority mother language began to use both Chinese Mandarin and minority language. The transformation from monolingual to bilingual made the occurrence of language contract, in which the ethnic minority individuals made a lot of language varieties in the process of using Chinese Mandarin due to the differences of age, gender, identity and environment. The occurrence of language varieties made the research towards language variation become another hot issue in the ethnic minority field.

Research of Bilingual Education

Field research in some ethnic minority concentrated region began to focalize the application of bilingual from late 80th 20 century. Stepping into 90th, the high frequency rate of bilingual education as a keyword showed that the main content of ethnic bilingual research was bilingual education. The research in this period mainly in the form of subject theory, dividing types of bilingual education from many different angles, and evaluated distinctive features of bilingual teaching and bilingual education from aspects of teaching object, method and content. Bilingual education became an individual subject gradually, and with features of interdisciplinary subject of education, linguistics and ethnology. The most important content for bilingual education is teaching of Chinese mandarin. Thus mandarin teaching becomes the hot issue of bilingual education research.

As second language teaching, teaching method and theory of Chinese mandarin will influence the effect of the teaching activity directly. The theory of second language acquisition abroad has been applied widely in Chinese mandarin teaching. Especially in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, in the research of Chinese mandarin teaching towards the Uygur ethnic minority scholars applied negative transfer of mother tongue, inter-language and error analysis theories in second language acquisition theory.

In addition, various teaching methods in second language acquisition theory also applied widely in Chinese mandarin teaching, the method of comparing Chinese mandarin and ethnic minority language to highlight the characteristic of Chinese mandarin is applied in every section of Chinese mandarin. Papers like The function of comparative method in Chinese mandarin teaching of Mongolian school [1], the confliction of different cultures and its inspiration towards Chinese teaching [2] and so on reveal that the comparison of Chinese mandarin and ethnic minority languages including pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

With depth of bilingual teaching and bilingual education in vast minority concentrated region, some bilingual teachers create some specialized teaching methods towards different minorities based
on the features and minority language and culture psychology, such as modeling method of Bai nationality, five lessons style of Chaoxian nationality, and unite-separate-unite style of Dai nationality.

With the raising of Chinese mandarin test in the field of teaching Chinese to foreigners, the research of language test which aims to serve to bilingual teaching appeared, but the Chinese mandarin test towards ethnic minority has not formed targeted system. Thus in the early age, the Chinese mandarin level test HSK designed for oversea students was also used in ethnic minority directly. Some minority concentrated region even proposed that the Chinese mandarin teaching style and lessons in ethnic minority concentrated region should be set the same way as teaching Chinese to foreigners. And the research towards teaching materials formed gradually in this period.

In this certain period, the research from the initial location of bilingual phenomenon to make sure teaching Chinese as the main content of bilingual education, to apply abroad second language acquisition theory and teaching method to promote Chinese mandarin teaching in ethnic minority comprehensively and research towards Chinese mandarin test and bilingual teaching materials, which shows that bilingual teaching research has permeated to the whole ethnic minority language research. From the angle of classification of ethnic minority, the bilingual education of ethnic minority has deepen into the vast area in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region, the number of research towards Uygur is biggest, thus the keywords of Uygur stays highest.

Research of Language Variation

Language variation is one of the main contents in social linguistics; it studies how the outer factors influence a certain language community to make the language change macroscopically; it studies the users of the same language show difference in the process of using language due to the difference of individual factors such as age, gender, nationality, career, language style, outer environment, psychology state and so on microscopically, the difference is called language variation [3]. After variation, each different user is using language variety. The variation of language is always created by language contact, two or more kinds of language are used by the same user in the same time, the languages will influence each other and make comparison which will make one language or two languages create certain varieties.

With the vigorous development of ethnic bilingual teaching in the ethnic minority concentrated region, Chinese mandarin and ethnic minority languages in the ethnic minority concentrated region contact frequently and the language contact make a large number of language variation.

Research on language variation mainly focuses on the social and cultural psychology, analyzing the cultural psychology in the process of studying Chinese mandarin of ethnic minorities. The reveal of cultural psychology activity can reflect language attitude hold by the ethnic minority toward Chinese mandarin adequately. The language varieties created in the ethnic minority concentrated region are mostly from young people. Some young people have sense of superiority after learning Chinese mandarin, when they use mother language they mix Chinese mandarin vocabulary into ethnic minority language, even modeling the tones of Chinese mandarin to change the tones and language orders of ethnic minority language. Language variation centered ethnic social linguistics research also includes the research on language relationship: language influence, language shift, bilingualism and so on. Some ethnic minority languages are influenced by Chinese mandarin and created language variation, and other ethnic minority languages are influenced not only by Chinese mandarin but also by other ethnic minority languages and abroad across broader languages. Bilingualism shows the appearance of bilingual usage. Social linguistics research the bilingualism with emphasis on the reason of bilingualism. In a multinational country, the bilingualism is always coursed by actual demand of culture communication; the ethnic minorities with small population use the languages of those with big population. And long time positive bilingualism always creates language shift [4].

Language variation in ethnic minority language are sourced in language varieties produced in vigorous bilingual teaching, bilingual teaching is one of the sources of language variation, and social
linguistics such as language variation and language relationships supplies theory basement for bilingual phenomenon and bilingual teaching, it analyzes the social and cultural psychology and judges the attitude towards Chinese mandarin by the result of language shift and bilingualism.

Summary

Ethnic minority bilingual education research is one typical hot issue across the whole research history of ethnic minority language research. Language variation is a new hot issue in the field of social linguistics. Early research on bilingual education and social linguistics are carried out separately without combination. But after analyzing the sequences of ethnic minority bilingual education and the cause of ethnic minority social linguistic, especially language variation in ethnic minority concentrate region, it is obvious to see the connection between them. The main content and task of ethnic bilingual education is to teach Chinese mandarin to ethnic minority, after years of education, Chinese mandarin becomes a part of ethnic minority life and communication, Chinese mandarin is not something new anymore. With the popularity of Chinese mandarin in ethnic minority concentrated region, language contact becomes more and more frequent, with large number of language varieties emerging as a direct result. Thus the research on language variation should connect the research on bilingual education, they should not be considered as two separate and individual fields, they are source and result which should be considered as a unite section. With a connecting view towards the research on ethnic minority bilingual education and language variation to analyze the problems raised in the two fields will be a wise and effective choice in future.

Acknowledgement

This research was financially supported by 2016 Social Science Planning Fund in Liaoning Province the Construction of Field Knowledge Graph in Chinese Ethnic Minority Language (grant No. L16CYZ004). Research Fund for Doctoral Program in Bohai University Field Knowledge Graph Construction and Language Research Frontier Problem.

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