An Investigation on the Trilingual Education in Garze Prefecture of Sichuan Province

Xin HUANG

School of Foreign Languages Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu Sichuan, China
huangxin2009@foxmail.com

Keywords: trilingual education, Garze Prefecture, status quo, countermeasure.

Abstract. The purpose of this investigation is to present the status quo of trilingual education in Garze Prefecture of Sichuan province of the PRC, the three development stages of trilingual education, main patterns and the “bottleneck”-problems in particular. In view of the status quos, this paper also puts forward some effective countermeasures, including reconstructing the system of language education, redefining the trilingual competence, and strengthening the trilingual teacher team, etc. The specific investigation and analyses will promote the trilingual education in minority areas in China.

Introduction

Garze Prefecture, an abbreviation for Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, is founded on November 24, 1950, and is the first ethnic autonomous prefecture since the founding of the PRC. It is situated in the west of Sichuan Province and the southeast of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, and covers an area of 153,000 square kilometers and the average altitude is above 3,500 meters. Now Garze Prefecture dominates 18 counties with a population of 1.09 million, and 25 minorities, of whom, the Tibetans are almost 78.29 percent, Hans about 18.24 percent [1]. In the past six decades, the Chinese government has committed to developing “bilingual” education (Tibetan and Han language) in this prefecture, and “trilingual” education (Tibetan, Han and English language), and has achieved good results.

The Status Quo of Trilingual Education in Garze prefecture

The Three Development Stages of Trilingual Education

The Initial Phase from 1950s to 1970s

Since the founding of the Prefecture in 1950, some experts with a good command of Tibetan language are employed by the government to build the primary Tibetan schools as the special institution using bilingual education with Tibetan as the principle language. Simultaneously, the experts begin to compile some textbooks. In 1952, the compilation committee of textbooks is founded by the government of Xikang Tibetan Autonomous Region (the original name of Garze prefecture from 1950 to 1955). Then the bilingual teaching base—Garze Teacher Training School is built successfully in 1956, and another bilingual teaching base named Kangding Teacher Training School in 1958, too. But unfortunately, both the bilingual education and researches on languages have been suspended during the so-called “cultural revolution” (1966-1976), with a result that these two schools have to carry out the monolingual teaching (Han language).

The Recovery Phase from 1970s to 1990s

After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1978, the China’s ethnic policy has been thoroughly carried out in Garze Prefecture. Thus, the Tibetan language education has been picked up again; the bilingual education also has got a rebirth and development, and so many middle
schools such as Batang Teacher Training School built up in 1974 have introduced English as the third language. In 1979, Garze Prefecture adopts bilingual education with the principle of regional planning and classified guidance, i.e., the teaching plan should be in line with the local geographical conditions and the sincerely hopes for study from the students. In addition, bilingual education in Tibetan and Chinese has been popularized throughout the whole prefecture.

At the same time, both the Opinions on Work on the Education among the Ethnic Minorities issued by the Ministry Education of the PRC in 1980 and the Decision on Further Strengthening the Work on the Education among the Ethnic Minorities issued by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission have pointed out that the education among the ethnic minorities must be in accordance with the minority ethnic characteristics, which includes the education system, teaching content, teaching methods and so on. The most important is that the language teaching should adopt the ethnic language if the minority ethnic group has its own native language. Importance should be given to both the Tibetan and Han Chinese languages, with priority given to the Tibetan language. With the full implementation of these policies, the bilingual education in Garze Prefecture has changed a lot, which includes:

Firstly, the construction of training institutions in Garze Prefecture has been strengthened. For example, Sichuan Tibetan School and Kangding Nationality Teachers College are found in 1981 and 1985 respectively. And more importance has been given to the training on bilingual teachers, so there appear hundreds of bilingual teachers, who become the influential members of the bilingual education in Garze Prefecture in that period, and later, whose teaching methods are developed into the model for the bilingual education.

Secondly, the bilingual education is proceeding well. According to the local geographical conditions and the hopes from the students, the bilingual education has been divided into three types by the Culture and Education Bureau of Garze Prefecture in 1984. In 1986, textbooks for bilingual education from Qinghai or other part of Tibetan areas are widely adopted in Garze Prefecture, too. The fist forum on bilingual education of Garze Prefecture is held in 1989; the types of bilingual education, teaching patterns and methods are discussed, and formed. In 1995, the Culture and Education Bureau of Garze Prefecture has enacted the Bilingual Education Plan of Garze Prefecture, and begins to popularize the three-type bilingual education, which will be explained in detail later.

The Flourishing Phase since the 21st Century

At the beginning of the 21st century the Ten-year Action Plan for Minority Ethnic Education of Sichuan Province and the Plan to Make Nine-year Compulsory Education Universal and to Eliminate Illiteracy among the Young and Middle-aged in the Western Region have been successively implemented all over the province, the local government of Garze Prefecture has seized the opportunity, and given more importance to developing the bilingual education, which enters into a flourishing stage naturally.

Furthermore, according to the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy of the People's Republic of China, the Regulations of Regional Ethnic Autonomy of the Garze Prefecture and the history and the prevailing conditions there, the local government formulates the Decisions of Use and Development of the Tibetan Language in the Garze Prefecture. These laws and regulations put the work related to the bilingual education on a legal track. According to the statistics in 2006, the total number of the teachers of all kinds and at all levels is almost eight thousand, and students 0.12 million or so, among whom, there are 0.1 million minority ethnic students. And more than 57 thousand students accept the bilingual education while they enjoy free food, clothing and accommodation in 437 boarding schools. Up to 2009, the Garze Prefecture has 722 primary schools with 0.11 million pupils, 49 middle schools with 49 thousand students, 3 secondary vocational schools with 3391 students, and 1 college with more than 7300 students. Thus, the three-type bilingual or trilingual education is proceeding well in these schools or college.

In addition, the bilingual textbooks are compiled and used by some schools from the beginning of the 21st century. The data by Garze Prefecture Bureau of Statistics in 2012 show that there are 533 bilingual primary and secondary schools, making up 84.1 percent; in which, there are 92 thousand
students, making up 58.6 percent, accept the bilingual education, even the trilingual education in cities and towns.

**The Patterns of Language Teaching**

It should be pointed out that in the last six decades the trilingual education in this prefecture has experienced three teaching patterns--the monolingualism, bilingualism and trilingualism. In the monolingualism pattern, only Tibetan or Han Chinese language is involved; both Tibetan and Han language, or Han and Tibetan language are involved in the bilingualism pattern; while in the trilingualism pattern, Tibetan, Han and English language are all involved.

In fact, over the last sixty years, the teachers in bilingual education in Garze Prefecture mainly adopt two intermediate languages, i.e., Tibetan or Han Chinese language; even in trilingual education in some pastoral areas of the prefecture, they use Tibetan or Han as the main intermediate language. In the late of 20th century, English as the third language is only taught in the secondary schools. Compared to the requirements by the Ministry of Education that from 2001 the primary schools should have English course since their third school year, the real trilingual education in Garze Prefecture begins in 2005.

Up to the date, there have existed three patterns of trilingual education in Garze Prefecture. The three-type trilingual education can be explained like the following:

Type I means all the subjects are lectured in Tibetan language, and Chinese (Han) as an additional subject is lectured in Han language in order to meet the needs of Tibetan students from the pastoral areas with Tibetan as the mainstream language. Type II means all the subjects are lectured in Chinese language and Tibetan as an additional subject is lectured in Tibetan language in order to meet the needs of Tibetan students from the agricultural areas, cities and towns with Chinese as the mainstream language [2]. Type III means all the subjects are lectured in Chinese language in order to meet the needs of the Tibetans, Hans and other minority students from the agricultural areas, cities or towns, in which Chinese is spoken as the mainstream language and the schools are much good in available education conditions.

The pattern of trilingual education in Garze Prefecture is also called a “Flexible Way”, namely, “2+1” or “1+1+1”. The common view in the academia is that the trilingual education does not equal the simple combination of “1+1+1” or “Tibetan + Han + English language”. [2] Thus, the so called “Flexible Way” is doomed to bring out the result--high input but low output in Garze Prefecture.

**The Bottleneck-problems in Trilingual Education**

**Imbalance in Teaching Language**

Originally, to cultivate the talents “having a good command of Tibetan, Han and English languages and cultures” is one of the main purposes of trilingual education; however, because the local government and scholars in Garze Prefecture have much great differences in the language concept including the definition, value and significance of trilingualism, many schools even local governments at county level carry out this program in their own way. The pattern of trilingual education and the proportion of teaching language are frequently employed with blindness and randomness, too [3]. By the way, the dissimilarities in management system such as the span of English curriculum, teaching contents, evaluation system and selection mechanism, etc., also lead to the imbalance in teaching language.

But the preferential policy formulated by the Chinese government is that in the national college entrance exams, it is permissible to answer questions using Tibetan script, and the pass marks for admission are appropriately lowered and students are chosen on the basis of their test results. Viewed from these policies, many students, those from the pastoral areas in particular, are willing to accept the trilingual education with Type I. Thus, Tibetan, as an intermediate language or a teaching language is employed, too.
Generally speaking, the trilingual education in cities and towns is carried out better than that in agricultural areas, which is better than in pastoral areas, and the number of students taught in Type I is smaller than that of students in Type II, and the latter is smaller than Type III. Especially, the trilingual education in secondary and senior schools is far behind from the higher education. Furthermore, with the social and economic development of Garze Prefecture, more and more families pay more attention to their children’s the language performance both in Chinese and English, which will help them have a good score in the national college entrance exams, and have more majors or colleges (universities) to choose. Besides, the students proficient in Chinese and Chinese culture seem to have more opportunities to get a good job in the future. In order to meet the needs of the social trend, most of trilingual education is fulfilled in a “2+1” flexible way—Han or English as the mainstream language.

All these just like the bottlenecks have made the trilingual education in Garze Prefecture imbalanced in teaching language and made it lack of system and scale.

**Shortage of Trilingual Educational Resources**

The shortage of trilingual educational resources mainly shows in trilingual teaching materials and trilingual teachers.

As we all know that the teaching materials for trilingual education refer to those textbooks compiled in Tibetan, Chinese and English languages, all kinds of reference books, learning materials and the like designed by the teachers themselves for trilingual education. And the teaching materials for trilingual education should be featured by reality, adaptability, and diversity, as well abundance in traditional cultures [4]. But due to the special conditions of Garze Prefecture, the trilingual education materials at present are featured by shortage both in number and characteristics. Now the state-compiled textbooks or unified teaching materials adopted by the trilingual schools thoroughly ignore the thinking modes as well as the cognitive levels of the Tibetan students, or lack of the comparison between the three cultures.

Although the insufficiency of trilingual teachers has become a common problem, the shortage of trilingual education in Garze Prefecture is more serious. Up to now, the trilingual teachers proficient with three cultures are very few. It is just for this reason that most of schools in this prefecture are doing the program in monolingualism or bilingualism, even the “Flexible Way” mention above. The student-teacher ratio in these schools is badly low. The statistics from the Education Bureau of Garze Prefecture reflect that in 2013 the student-teacher ratio in Kangding (the capital of Garze Prefecture) arrive to 1:17.25; in the schools in the west of Zheduo Mountains of Kangding, the teachers in total are 225, students 4621, but the teachers with a good command of the three languages or cultures are still zero. Besides, the teacher structure is unreasonable, which is reflected in the numbers of Tibetan, Chinese and English teachers, academic degrees, age and professional titles, etc., all these are different much.

**Insufficiency of Trilingual Education-study**

Compared to the studies on trilingual education in other parts of China since the end of 20th century, the researches on this topic in Garze Prefecture is more late and backward because of its unique geographical and educational conditions. Thus the research achievements are doomed to be insufficient, too. Only 50 or so are found if we make a title-retrieval by “Tibetan, Han and English Trilingual education” in the CNKI (National Knowledge Infrastructure of China), and only 2 is hit in target if we do a theme-retrieval by “Garze Trilingual education” and the like. Moreover, most articles from the CNKI are of little innovative, systematical and pertinent features, and even some of them are short of practicality [2][4].

Besides, the projects on trilingual education in Garze Prefecture at provincial and ministerial levels are still zero. According to the investigation, in the past sixty years there are no research teams or special research institutes engaging in this topic in the schools of all kinds and at various level. From the discussion above, we can get the conclusion—insufficiency of trilingual education-study.
Of course, the bottleneck-problems also include the incomplete education system in this prefecture, insufficient educational expenditure invested in this program, and backwardness in teaching approaches and methods.

**The Countermeasures to the Trilingual Education in Garze Prefecture**

*Reconstructing the System of Language Education*

In modern society, to master a second or third language is a way which can not only meet the needs of language communication between different nationalities, but also spread the culture of a certain nationality. Therefore, it is be of much necessary to improve the efficiency of trilingual education in Garze Prefecture through constructing the system of language education. The main principle is to strengthen the trilingual education based on the bilingual education for the purpose to protect the Tibetan language and guarantee the educational fairness. Since lacking of (bilingual) system of language education for a long time, the awareness of trilingual education is much weak in Garze Prefecture, for instance, English or Tibetan may not be required when the students register for some colleges or universities or attend the civil service examination. Therefore, the local governments should enact and implement multiple policies and regulations on trilingual education in light of the actual conditions in Garze Prefecture, and balance the three types of trilingual education; the schools and teachers at all kinds should enlighten the students and the families to give more importance to trilingual education in order to enhance their awareness of language education. In recent years, running Tibetan classes in inland China adopted in other minority ethnic areas is a good example to reconstruct the system of language education.

*Redefining the Trilingual Competence*

In line with the policy of the central government and the reality in Garze Prefecture, the local government should formulate a more scientific orientation of trilingual education and accurate teaching objective on the basis of clear understanding to the trilingual competence, namely, cross cultural awareness, trans-cultural communication and cultural tolerance [5]. Bearing the mission to cultivate or “tri-culture talents”—having a good command of ethnic culture, Han’s culture and English culture, the trilingual teachers in Garze Prefecture should give more information on relevant cultural background knowledge in their trilingual teaching. In addition, all kinds of teaching materials should be compiled bilingually or trilingually in the light of the syllabus and the trilingual competence explained above. Simultaneously, more and more scholars and teachers should be advocated to do some researches on trilingual education, the methods how to cultivate trilingual competence in particular.

*Strengthening the Trilingual Teacher Team*

In Garze Prefecture the shortage of trilingual teachers is a serious bottleneck problem, which has badly impeded the development of trilingual education. Actually, many tri-culture ethnic students are willing to work in or around their hometown because of the different customs in inland cities of China. Hence, the relevant departments in Garze Prefecture should endeavor to attract more trilingual talents to carry out the trilingual education because annually there are more than 20 thousands ethnic graduates from 100 colleges or universities [6]. Moreover, through on-job training, off-job training or joint training, etc., the governments and schools should enact more preferential policies to encourage the existing trilingual teachers to improve their teaching competence including the changes in teaching methods, teaching concepts, even the language concepts. When the teachers are enough strong to fulfill the program, both the government and schools will regulate that all the trilingual teachers should employ the multi-teaching-modes based on society demand, and change the teaching manners, contents adapted to the ethnic students’ aptitude.
Summary

The ethnic education is an important part in the whole education of China, the trilingual education in Garze Prefecture plays an irreplaceable role in the ethnic education. From its three development phases of trilingual education, we can conclude that there still exist many bottleneck problems such as imbalance in teaching language, shortage of trilingual educational resources, and insufficiency of trilingual education-study, etc. Therefore, the system of language education, the trilingual competence, and the trilingual teacher team should be given priority to by the local government, schools, teachers and even the families. Of course, the research team also hope more and more scholars pay attention to the trilingual education in those minority areas.

Acknowledgment

This research was financially supported by the project from Chinese Ministry of Education (Project No. 12YJC740037) and by the project from National Office for Education Sciences Planning (Project No. GPA115077).

References


