



Cross-border Language Education: A Perspective from the Belt and Road Initiative

Yazhao Dong

School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan Business University, Wuhan, China

E-mail: 546837423@qq.com

Abstract. In 2013 China proposed the “Belt and Road” initiative which now has become the most inclusive international cooperation platform, the “Belt and Road” involves a large number of countries and these countries own many languages, including a considerable number of cross-border languages which carry diverse cultures and possess unique national resources, more importantly they play a crucial role in promoting international communication, keeping national identity, maintaining cross-border security and stability, etc. The paper makes a brief overview of the basics of the concept of cross-border language, including its definition, formation and different types of cross-border languages, this paper also makes an overview of the current education and teaching situation of cross-border languages in China. This paper discusses the existing problems and puts forwards suggestions and proposals in terms of cross-border education and teaching system with the hope of exploring new models of cross-border language education and teaching and enhance the linguistic vitality of cross-border languages, so as to cultivate qualified cross-border language talents needed against the background of the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Keywords: cross-border language, the Belt and Road initiative, trilingual, teaching model

1 Introduction

In China cross-border languages have dual status of minority languages and foreign languages when considering their social functions. Affected by political, economic, cultural and other influencing factors, China's cross-border languages generally only play their role as regional minority languages. As ethnic minority languages, cross-border languages have played a significant role in preserving and developing regional minority groups' culture identity, and communication, at the same time they have greatly promoted bilingual education (Chinese language, regional minority language) in the vast ethnic minority areas. While as foreign languages, cross-border languages are generally offered in colleges and universities as foreign language majors with the purpose of cultivating or training special talents.

The "Belt and Road" covers many countries and ethnic regions, and the racial and ethnic distribution of these regions is relatively complex, and their social and economic

development is unbalanced as a result there are a lot of religious and cultural differences among many areas and regions, therefore the effective implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative is inseparable from the cultivation of talents in different fields and languages [1]. However, due to limitation of China's current foreign language talent training model, and the fact that China's language education, especially foreign language education has not been upgraded to the national level, and language education model is relatively single at present coupled with limited types of foreign languages, thus the quality of foreign language talents is unsatisfactory, and the national language capability is relatively weak. While the construction of the "Belt and Road" offers a good opportunity to improve the country's foreign language capability to meet the social needs of different languages in China and other member countries along the Belt and Road areas. On the other hand, in the context of bilingual education for ethnic minorities in China, it is of great significance to carry out the cultivation of multilingual talents with the help of the cross-border languages for the development of human resources [2].

2 Cross-border Language

2.1 Concept of Cross-border Language

Cross-border language, which is generally known as trans-border language, language of the cross-border ethnic groups or transnational language, is referred to as a linguistic variant of the same ethnic language distributed in different countries, one cross-border language may cross two or more borders. Generally speaking, the greater the number that a cross-border language crosses, the wider scope of its use and the greater its influence [3]. According to previous researches cross-border language could be understood from its narrow sense and its broad sense. In a narrow sense cross-border language is a language distribution of two cross-border ethnic groups that are bordered by each other. Broadly speaking, cross-border language is a language that crosses two regions including bordering regions and non-bordering regions. At present, English is the world's largest cross-border language, and Chinese is the world's strongest cross-border language.

2.2 Formation of Cross-border Language

Originally, a cross-border language is exactly the same language but later due to the fact that being used by two or more countries or ethnic groups, as different countries or different ethnic groups may have political, social, historical, cultural, geographical, institutional, linguistic differences and other influencing factors, there have been many linguistic variations in their respective countries or groups coming from one same language, thus the different variants emerge in the process of variation, and thus the variant of that language becomes a cross-border language[4]. In general, there are many complex reasons for the formation of cross-border languages, and there many arguments about the relation between language and border on the term of cross-border language, but the arguments can be summarized into the following two categories.

The first category takes the view that (cross-border) languages exist before borders. Because some (cross-border) languages exist much earlier than national borders (geographic borders), and once national borders (geographic borders) are established the languages become cross-border languages. Traditionally, most cross-border languages have been formed in this pattern, and they are basically cross-border languages in the narrow sense. The second category views that borders exist before (cross-border) languages. Such cross-border languages were formed as a result of migration, natural migration, war, etc., cross-border languages formed in this pattern are not necessarily border languages, as some of them belong to cross-border language in the narrow sense while some in the broad sense [5].

3 Current Situation of Cross-Border Language Education in China

With the proposal of the "Belt and Road" initiative, China has begun to transform from a local country to an international country, which means that China's foreign language education will usher in new opportunities. Since China's current foreign language education policy directly affects the level of foreign language education in China, it is time to take this opportunity to reconsider and formulate scientific and effective language teaching models and systems. In the course of language teaching and language education in the last a couple of decades, actually China's foreign language education policy has undergone great changes. For example, from the 50s of the 20th centuries to the reform and opening up period, China's foreign language education has changed from policy-oriented to economy-oriented. Since the reform and opening up, in order to learn advanced science and technology and management experience from developed countries, China's language education has emphasized the demand for foreign languages, for example the English language talents with strong comprehensive and compound strengths become the outcome of foreign language education.

Against the background of "Belt and Road" initiative, making full use of the bilingual advantages in bilingual or even multilingual ethnic minority areas, carrying out bilingual education in ethnic minority areas, and cultivating bilingual talents shall be the new orientation of China's foreign language education. In this way, it can not only meet the demand for language talents in the "Belt and Road Initiative", but also facilitate the rational use and protection of language resources. However, problems of un-systematic and lack of top-level design in China's foreign language education system have greatly restricted the development and utilization of foreign language resources in China, so one of the key issues that need to be solved urgently is the adjustment of foreign language education model and system in cultivating new foreign language talents in the context of the "Belt and Road" initiative especially in the core areas of the cross-bordering ethnic minority areas [6].

4 Cross-Border Language Teaching System Construction

4.1 Curriculum System Construction

Like other subjects cross-border language curriculum system includes teaching targets, teaching curriculum and teaching methods, which consist of the major elements in teaching and learning. Seeing from actual language education and teaching the cultivating cycle of language talents is long and resource consuming, so it is necessary to conform to the principles of language education, and take key cross-border languages that serve the national strategy as school curriculum into cross-border language education curriculum system of primary schools, middle schools and universities in cross-border areas.

On the one hand, key cross-border language courses at the primary and secondary school levels shall be offered mainly to achieve the greatest connection with the current bilingual education practice, so as to cultivate students' basic language communication skills, language and culture literacy. Therefore, cross-border language education at the primary and secondary school level should not only reflect the instrumental value of cross-border languages for one's personal development, but also emphasize the transforming of language learning process into the pursuit of humanistic values for the all-round development of individuals for example linguistic cognition, emotional expression, cultural and behavioral choices. In order to achieve those values school-based cross-border language curriculum shall include culture and history courses related to key cross-border languages on the basis of the national curriculum and local curriculum to improve the ethnic and cultural literacy of ethnic minority students or bilingual learners [7].

On the other hand, key cross-border language courses at the university level shall mainly adopt the talent cultivating model of combing subject specialty(majors) and cross-border language and the combining of existing language majors and cross-border languages, with the purpose of cultivating multilingual talents with comprehensive capacity of national languages (ethnic minority languages), national lingua franca and foreign languages. It is undeniable that mastering multiple languages can enhance one's personal development and promote a country's influence in international community. Yet due to the principle of language acquisition, the learning efficiency of foreign language generally decreases with the increasing of learners' age, thus in China the cultivation of multilingual talents has always been a shortcoming [8]. However, at present it is more important to reflect and reconsider the unreasonable language education system and unsatisfactory evaluation system. Actually, the co-study of various ethnic minorities is an important feature of the educational ecology in China's cross-border areas, if this compound language talents cultivation model and practice can be promoted to national level the country's language capacity will be basically guaranteed, and it will also help build the general multilingual capacity of the border areas.

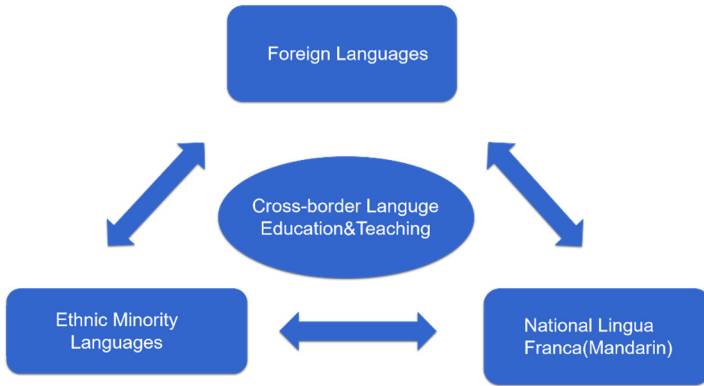


Fig. 1. Trilingual teaching model

In trilingual education (trilingual teaching & learning), trilingual refers to a learning who has already mastered a second language and is currently learning another language in addition to his or her native language, as shown in Figure 1. As far as China's ethnic minority groups are concerned, the term "trilingual" typically includes their native language, Mandarin, and another foreign language, for example English. Most ethnic minority groups in China have experience in learning Mandarin and English (their minority languages). Due to the fact learners are from different cultural backgrounds and are at different language proficiency levels in the process of learning (teaching) any one of the three languages the other two may be used as lingua franca to facilitate teaching or learning a language. In ethnic minority areas of China, trilingual education (consisting of the mother tongue, Mandarin, and a foreign language) has emerged as a new teaching method with unique regional characteristics and has become a crucial development feature in ethnic minority education. What's more trilingual education contributes significantly to the stability, security, ethnic cohesion, and economic growth of local communities [9].

4.2 Faculty System Construction

Faculty system construction is another indispensable part of cross-border languages education and teaching as teachers are one of the leading factors for the smooth progress of school education, and they are also the main body of teaching activities. Which means that teachers' teaching skills, experience, literacy in bilingual education and teaching play an important role in guaranteeing the quality of bilingual language teaching and cross-border language education [10]. Among them, the construction of cross-border language faculty at the primary and secondary school level is particularly important because what they teach and how they teach will lay a foundation for bilingual learners.

Generally speaking, teachers in a bilingual education system need not only to have the knowledge and skills to teach professional language knowledge, but also to have a high level of proficiency in the language they are teaching and to be able to communicate in another language by which the other language is taught. At the same time,

maintaining a high level of proficiency in the native language is an indispensable aspect of the development and training of bilingual teachers. In this regard, the cultivation of the language ability and cultural quality of the younger generation of ethnic minorities is also an important reserve force for future bilingual teachers. From the perspective of the state, relevant authorities at both local levels and national levels should issue incentive measures and allocate supportive resources including financial, material and human resources in training the faculty of bilingual or multilingual teachers and maintaining those teachers. Only in this way can the reserve of language talents with special needs for national interests be ensured in an effective and sustainable way.

4.3 Assessment System Construction

Once cross-border languages have entered the schooling system in a formal capacity, there is a need to establish appropriate language proficiency assessment criteria for their learners as the evaluation system and criteria are directly related to the success or failure of language education and teaching. Therefore, the establishment of appropriate evaluation system and criteria is a necessary part in designing cross-border language education curriculum [11]. In a sense, the evaluation criteria and system are closely related to the reflection and adjustment of teaching methods and teaching contents of cross-border language education and teaching for the long run.

At present, there is a lack of corresponding evaluation indicators for native ethnic language ability in some ethnic minority groups and cross-border areas. In addition to the foreign language and Chinese proficiency tests for second language evaluation the current standardized language proficiency test in China also covers some minority languages. For example, standardized tests, certification, and examination programs for the speakers of ethnic languages have been designed and are being gradually promoted nationwide. For instance, the Zhuang Language Proficiency Test (VSSG) introduced by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Minority Language Working Committee, and the Mother Tongue Proficiency Test for the Seven Minority Ethnic Languages in the North (including Daur, Sibe, Salar, Baoan, Evenki, Oroqen, and Russian) [9]. However, the design of evaluation system needs to be refined and the language coverage of cross-border languages needs to be expanded. In order to evaluate the quality of cross-border language teaching more objectively and more effectively, it is necessary to set different goals, for example language skill goals, cognitive goals, linguistic and cultural goals, for students at different learning stages and for students with different learning purposes. These goals can be broken down into specific, actionable hierarchical indicators which in turn can support the establishment of cross-border language education and teaching assessment system.

5 Conclusion

China is a pluralistic and multi-ethnic country with rich linguistic and cultural resources, cross-border languages along the "Belt and Road" route not only embody cross-border ethnic groups but also carry diverse cultures, and is a unique national

resource which has played a crucial role in regional communication, national identity, economic development, and border security [12]. Greater attention shall be paid to the cultivation of cross-border language talents as there is a huge demand of them in the light of success of "Belt and Road" initiative. The cultivation of language talents is a slow process, which needs scientific and reasonable design in language education and language evaluation system, especially the teaching methods and teaching model of cross-border languages needs to be further explored and studied to formulate an effective system to better cultivate language talents. As far as cross-border language education and teaching are concerned bilingual education and the two-way bilingual education model in ethnic minority areas shall be promoted. In the context of the "Belt and Road" Initiative full use should be made of the leading role effect and the guaranteeing mechanism of China's cross-border languages to explore new models of cross-border language teaching, so as to cultivate qualified cross-border language talents needed against the back ground of the construction of the "Belt and Road".

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