

A Questionnaire-based Survey on the Multilingual Use of College Students in Minority Areas

Yujie Shi
(Yanbian University)

Shi, Yujie. (2020). A questionnaire-based survey on the multilingual use of college students in minority areas. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 28(2), 57–68. Language is one of the essential means of communication that makes multilingualism has been closely related with sociolinguistics. The research of language use can provide information to teachers about learners' needs and behaviors to the learning and teaching process and to give some support for the use of different languages. From the perspective of language life, this study investigates the multilingual use of 645 college students of foreign language college in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture through the method of literature review, questionnaire and statistical analysis to understand the linguistic situation and find out the reasons behind this situation. The study shows that students have the highest score on language use of Chinese language and language usage is affected by grade, major, ethnicity and educational background of parents. This study may contribute to enriching the relevant theories about multilingual use in minority areas abroad, providing practical experience for multilingual use in minority areas and the construction of multilingual, multicultural and harmonious language living environment.

Key Words: multilingual use, college students, minority areas

1. Introduction

Language use has become an important part of our language life which may not only provide reference for scholars, but also give language learners and educators more information about language ideas, reactions and behaviors from the learning and teaching process. We could put forward effective solutions to the current situations by understanding the whole situation of the learners' language use and the different backgrounds of learners. Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture has its own language advantage (bilingual or multilingual). Local college offers foreign language courses, such as Korean language, English language, Japanese language, Russian language according to its unique geographical environment and historical background which provides college students in minority areas with the opportunity to learn different languages. College students already have a certain learning ability of foreign language, high level of cognition and accurate judgement which also make us think about the students' situation of multilingual use in the area. This study investigates the language use of college students in minority areas, so as to sum up the characteristics of language use, predict the trend of language use, make appropriate measures of multilingual education, and improve the learning and teaching environment of language.

The Ministry of Education has decided to strengthen the education of foreign languages in minority areas since 2001, so as to take English as an important part of the curriculum reform in the early 21st century. "15th Planning Project Guide" held by the National Education Science formally listed the experimental research topics of three-language education in September 2001. In 2002, minority schools in China began to offer English lessons from the first grade. The basic education of ethnicities in China has been further developed from the bilingual education system of mother tongue and Chinese language to the trilingual system of mother tongue, Chinese language and English language. In the history of the Korean-Chinese ethnicity in China, language education has experienced a tortuous stage of development. Korean-Chinese students have had two or more kinds of language education in

different periods, but has always insisted on teaching by the use of mother tongue. Understanding the language use of the multilingual contact environment in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is not only helpful to sort out the development of language ecology, but also has certain reference value and significance for formulating and planning language policy in minority areas. China is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is the largest settlement of Korean-Chinese which is located at the border between China, North Korea and Russia, surrounded by the sea of Japan. With the popularizaion of Chinese and foreign language education, the multilingual learning space of Korean-Chinese has been expanded and other students living in this area have also been affected in language contact and use. This study analyzes the situation of multilingual use by combining the relevant literature with the unique language living environment in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, so as to make college students in minority areas to use Chinese, mother tongue and other foreign languages appropriately and effectively, and creat harmonious multilingual learning and teaching environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Basic Concepts

Language use (behavior) was originally proposed by Spolsky (2004) 's book "Language Policy", which is explained in three ways. Spolsky (2004) said that language policy could refer to all language practices, beliefs, and management decisions of a community or polity. Language practice refers to the habitual choice pattern of language variants which is also called language behavior; Language belief or consciousness refers to the thought of language and language use which is also called the attitude of language. Fielding (2015) listed the key factors on identity, such as gender, age, social class, nationality which were accepted by some scholars. (Deaux, 2000; Fought, 2006; Omoniyi, 2006) It focused on the factors that affected the bilingual identity of young bilingual learners and summarized three elements that constituted the identity by reviewing the theory of bilingual ability and education. It showed the importance of investment, socio-cultural connection and interaction upon bilingual identity negotiation, which is called the "Bilingual Identity Negotiation Framework" (BINF) (Figure 1). Investment includes the students' self-concept and levels of motivation relating to their self-concept impact upon their investment in language learning and developing their bilingual identity; Socio-cultural connection includes the impact of language socialization and exposure to language in the family and community on multilingual development; Interaction refers to the ways and objects of language interaction. From the research of two foreign scholars, language belief and investment can be attributed to language attitude; language practice, socio-cultural connection and interaction can be classified as language use or behavior on any occasion and any object. It could be seen that language use and language attitude were interrelated and influenced each other.

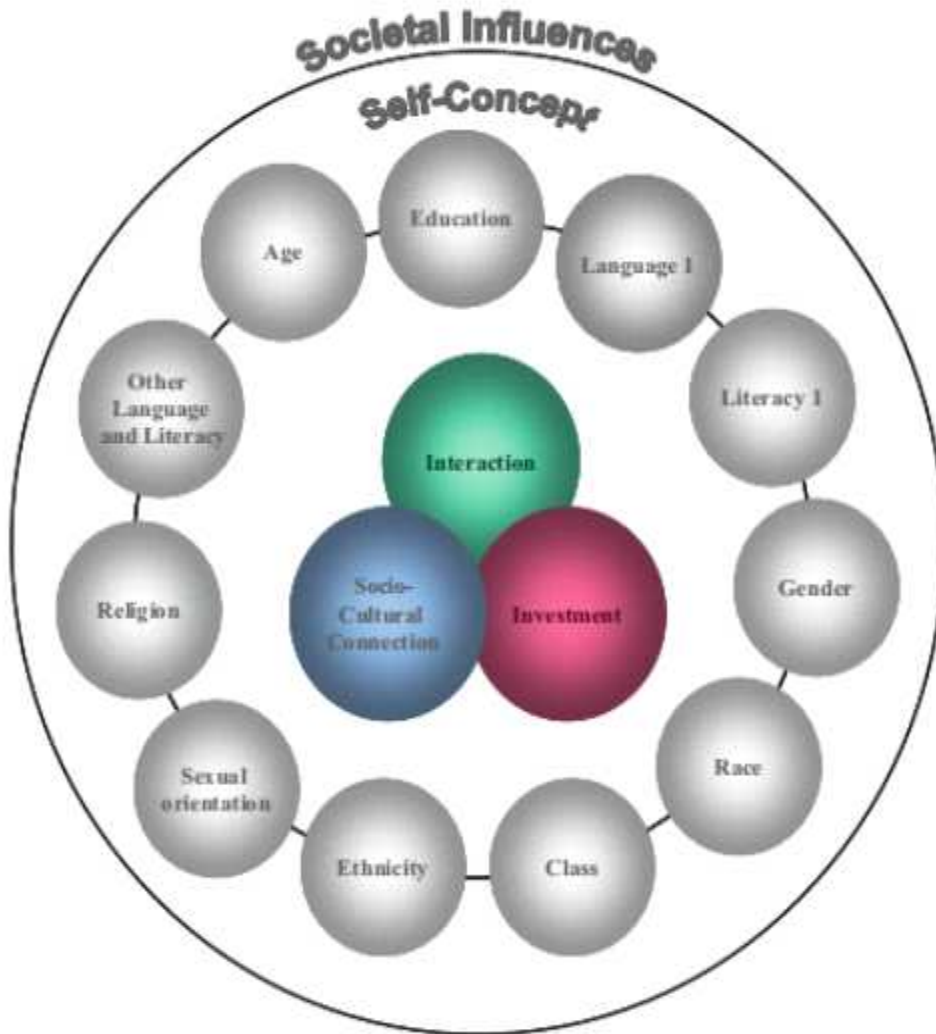


Figure 1. Bilingual identity negotiation framework (Fielding 2013)

Language identity includes both language attitude and behavior (Sun, 2011, pp. 27–28). Identity is the process or result of emotional and psychological convergence between individuals and a certain group, and also refers to the recognition of self identity by individuals and groups. A person’s identity includes individual and group, for example, each person belongs to different social groups according to family relationship, gender, age, occupation, region, social class, educational background, cultural background, etc (Xi, 2017, pp. 77–78).

From this sentence, we can draw various factors on personal identity which can be borrowed from the situation analysis of language use. With regard to language use or behavior, this study discusses the multilingualism of college students in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture based on cognitive theory in social psychology. It is found that scholars examined the internal and external fields of language use by reviewing literature, in which the internal field refers to the family and the external field includes the field of school and public place. Based on the division of scholars, this study divides the use of five languages into the fields of family, school and public place and adds the field of leisure and entertainment according to the actual needs, including listening to music, watching movies, surfing the Internet.

Combine the Spolsky's framework with several domestic scholars’ concepts of language use, the concept of “multilingual use” in this study is defined as the use of two or more languages. Language use is divided into four dimensions: family, public place, school, leisure and entertainment.

2.2 Relevant Research

Domestic research on language use is divided into three main aspects: the empirical study of language use in minority areas; the study of factors on language use; the situation of language use in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Firstly, empirical studies on language use in minority areas include Wang (2008, 2009), Sun (2011), Wu and Chen (2016), Chen (2017), Wang (2017), Sun (2018), and Chen (2018), three of which are aimed at college students. Wang (2017) investigated the language use of Chinese language and mother tongue in Xinjiang and found that the use of the mother tongue presented a distinct intergenerational differences in the internal register and the younger generation showed a high trend of bilingual and multilingual growth. The use of Chinese language mostly appeared in external various communication environments and the attitude of the mother tongue is more positive. Sun (2011) investigated the language identity of residents by means of questionnaire and interview and found that Chinese language was used less in various communication environments and language identity of Chinese language was higher than mother tongue which became the main language for communication. It is concluded that the language identity of mother tongue in this area is lower than that of Chinese language. Chen (2018) investigated the language identity of minority students from six universities in Guangxi and found that the student' mastery of Chinese language and identity were higher than that of mother tongue. Secondly, research on language use in urban and rural areas has been carried out by Yu (2012), Chen and Lin (2013), both of which are aimed at primary and middle school students. Yu (2012) investigated students' situation of language use, language attitude and language ability from primary to high school in Nanjing, and showed that there were significant age changes in the language use of urban teenagers. Chen and Lin (2013) took urban and rural primary and middle school students as the research subjects, analyzed the present situation and existing problems of language use, and explored the reasons why language use was not harmonious. Thirdly, the situation of language use in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Zhang (2015) analyzed the phenomenon of Korean-Chinese ethnicity's language variation in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture from three aspects: grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. It was found that the variation appeared in network, television and communication between China and South Korea. In general, domestic research on language use in minority areas adopts the method of questionnaire to collect a large amount of data for quantitative analysis and draws a conclusion. Sun (2018) examined the language use and identity of Korean-Chinese from young to old levels in Dandong and found that there were obvious intergenerational differences. People showed higher score on the use of Chinese language but a more positive attitude towards mother tongue. Therefore, language use was more inclined to Chinese language with high social status and strong practicability. It can be seen that the protection of Korean-Chinese's mother tongue in Dandong is not enough, resulting in many people not using or even cannot use mother tongue. It is suggested that the language education policy of Korean-Chinese ethnicity should be adjusted appropriately and practically, and the harmonious development of Chinese language and mother tongue should be promoted effectively.

Domestic studies mainly show a comparison between the use of Chinese language and mother tongue, but there is no study on the five languages. "Age" is the main factor on the language use and the conclusions are similar above all studies. In addition, the studies of language use in Yanbian limited participants to Korean, the language use of students who are not Chinese-Korean but have long been in contact with or living in the environment should be discussed.

As far as the foreign research situation is concerned, the focus of early foreign research is roughly divided into three categories. Firstly, the literature review on language use. Patricia (2015) presented some recurrent themes in the fields of multilingual use, identity and cross-nationalism. Secondly, the current situation research of language use. Svetlana (2015) chose the university students who major in science and technology and analyzed the vocabulary, grammar and syntactic level in the network discourse, and revealed the language identity and the social characteristics of the bilingual college students on the particularity of lexical semantic content. John and Francesco (2019) investigated the situation of language attitude, behaviors and identity in Australia by the quantitative and qualitative methods. Thirdly, the study of the factors on language use. Trang and Hoa (2017) interviewed three

students from international schools and found that socio-cultural connection, interaction and investment would affect students' bilingual identity. Fourthly, the problem of how to construct identity. Enrique (2015) described how different media production teams negotiate the use of mother tongues in practice through interview and classroom observation. The research showed that the groups expressed multi-layered identity and how to maintain the language and culture, simultaneously upholding professionalism and contesting negative stereotypes. Liv (2018) examined the language practices and learning experiences of ten adolescent multilingual immigrant English learners from Congo. The study emphasized a shift away from learning discrete language skills in one language toward a focus on supporting complex language and content learning fluidly across languages and content areas in ways that affirm students' identities and new learning. Ramon and Leah (2017) investigated how kindergarten and primary school students construct multilingual identity through the method of classroom observation and interview. The study showed that interactional mechanisms by which students' identities were variously asserted, contested, and negotiated in everyday classroom talk, and offered implications and raised further questions with respect to the implementation of dual language education for multilingual students. From the above empirical research on language use, the foreign academic articles have been involved in different aspects about language which include the attitude towards language, the social status of language, as well as the speaker's language ability, gender and mother tongue.

Compared with domestic research, foreign research on language use is more diverse in content, object and method. Foreign studies include research on the situation, factors and methodological issues on how to construct. The subjects include primary to high school, universities, urban residents, immigrants. The research use the methods of questionnaire, interview, test and classroom observation.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research questions

This study attempts to solve the following two questions through investigation.

- (1) What the situation of college students' multilingual use in Yanbian Korean Autonomous area?
- (2) Through the above language situation, what advice can be provided for multilingual education in the area?

3.2 Research subjects

In this study, 645 students of foreign language college in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture are selected to carry out a questionnaire survey to investigate the multilingual use of college students. The following is the background information of the participants.

Table 1. Basic information of participants

Dimensions		Number	Percentage
Gender	male	138	21.4%
	female	507	78.6%
Grade	first grade	261	40.47%
	second grade	165	25.58%
	third grade	133	20.62%
	fourth grade	86	13.33%
Major	English	288	44.65%
	Japanese	174	26.98%
	Russian	183	28.37%
Ethnicity	Han Chinese	300	46.51%
	Korean-Chinese	300	46.51%
	Other minorities	45	6.98%
Educational background of father	Middle school or below	447	69.3%
	College or above	184	28.52%
	Post-graduate	14	2.17%
Educational background of mother	Middle school or below	470	72.87%
	College or above	163	25.27%
	Post-graduate	12	1.86%
Total		645	100%

3.3 Methodology

This study uses literature review, questionnaire and statistical analysis to investigate the language use of college students in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. First of all, Understand the multilingual situation of students in other minority areas through the books and articles of the academic websites. Determine the research questions and prepare for the concrete implementation of this study. Secondly, a questionnaire survey is conducted from 645 college students of foreign language college in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture and selected to investigate the language use of college students. Make a suitable questionnaire for this survey and analyze the overall language use of college students according to the survey results by combining the investigation and research of other scholars on language use with the actual situation of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Thirdly, use SPSS software to carry out reliability and validity analysis to form a formal questionnaire, and analyze the data.

Different researchers have different classification on the composition of language use. This paper mainly investigates the use of Chinese, Korean, English, Japanese and Russian by college students from four dimensions. The questionnaire was divided into five levels “never / occasionally / generally / often / always” with 1,2,3,4,5 points respectively according to four situations (family, public, school, leisure and entertainment). The total score for each language is 20.

4. Results and Discussion

There are four situations selected to investigate the language use of college students in minority areas which is including family, public place, school, leisure and entertainment. The questionnaire scale is divided into five levels “never / occasionally / generally / often / always” with 1,2,3,4,5 points respectively.

Table 2. Statistics on language use (M= average, SD= standard deviation)

Language Use	Chinese		Korean		English		Japanese		Russian	
Family	4.47	1.032	2.29	1.619	1.69	.884	1.35	.703	1.19	.586
Public place	4.78	.631	2.09	1.445	2.03	.970	1.36	.706	1.22	.594
School	4.80	.583	2.18	1.458	2.93	1.280	2.15	1.327	1.74	1.326
Leisure & Entertainment	4.67	.733	2.68	1.584	3.21	1.296	2.36	1.342	1.53	.997
Total	M=18.72		M=9.24		M=9.86		M=7.22		M=5.68	

Table 2 shows that the average usage of the five languages is Chinese (M=18.72) > English (M=9.86) > Korean (M=9.24) > Japanese (M=7.22) and Russian (M=5.68), which indicates that the most commonly used language for college students in minority areas is Chinese language, followed by English language, and the least commonly used is Russian language.

Chinese language as a official language is undoubtedly the most frequently used in China. It accounts for the highest scores in four fields among which the highest score is at school (M=4.80). The result is obviously similar to Wang (2017) 's research finding, which shows that students use Chinese more frequently than mother tongue and the usage is prominent in the external field. The usage of English language (M=9.86) is similar to the Korean language (M=9.24), indicating that the high frequency usage of these two foreign languages. Students use Korean language more frequency in the leisure and entertainment field (M=2.68) than the other three, and have the lowest score in the public field (M=2.09) among the four language situations. English as a global common language which is required to master, but the score is only high in the leisure and entertainment field not in other fields. It can be seen that although students learn English longer than other foreign languages, the actual use of it is not optimistic. The use of Japanese language and Russian language in each field is similar, especially in the field of family and public place, with Japanese language (M=1.35, 1.36) and Russian language (M=1.19, 1.22) respectively.

The situation of language usage would be analyzed based on the different backgrounds of students, including gender, grade, major, ethnicity and educational background of parents. There is no significant difference in the use of five languages between male and female in terms of gender.

According to previous studies, age is the most common factor on language usage which is founded that young people use foreign languages more frequently than old people and use mother tongue less.

Table 3. Comparison of grades on language use

	First grade (n=261)		Second grade (n=165)		Third grade (n=133)		Fourth grade (n=86)		F (3,641)	Post Hoc (Turkey)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Chinese	18.94	2.042	18.47	3.115	18.75	2.210	18.37	3.002	1.749	
Korean	8.64	5.366	8.78	5.425	10.10	5.822	10.63	6.090	4.225*	Fourth grade > First grade Fourth grade > Second grade
English	10.10	3.538	10.13	3.498	9.23	3.128	9.50	3.032	2.625	
Japanese	7.52	3.110	7.02	3.284	6.61	2.915	7.67	3.589	3.233*	Fourth grade > Third grade
Russian	5.70	3.090	5.53	2.889	5.76	2.711	5.77	3.150	.195	

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between Chinese, English and Russian language from first grade to fourth grade, all of which maintain a more balanced score. The score of usage on Korean language and Russian language is significantly varied by the grades ($F(3,641)=4.225, 3.233, p<0.05$). Turkey's post hoc procedure indicates that students of fourth grade use foreign languages more frequently than first grade.

Individual major can also be one of the factors on language usage. Whether students with three different majors can use and like to speak after learning their own language major or still have a fear of speaking foreign languages.

Table 4. Comparison of majors on language use

	Major in English (n=288)		Major in Japanese (n=174)		Major in Russian (n=183)		<i>F</i> (2,642)	Post Hoc (Turkey)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Chinese	18.62	2.546	18.49	2.642	19.04	2.369	2.412	
Korean	9.24	5.475	9.87	5.832	8.63	5.601	2.159	
English	10.73	3.142	8.48	3.213	9.76	3.519	25.875*	Major in English > Japanese, Russian
Japanese	6.94	2.699	9.62	3.273	5.39	2.367	105.747*	Major in Japanese > English, Russian
Russian	4.20	.837	4.22	1.317	9.38	3.025	519.221*	Major in Russian > English, Japanese

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference on the usage of Chinese and Korean languages between different majors. It is concluded that the senior students use Korean and Japanese more frequently than the junior students. The score of usage on English, Japanese and Russian language is significantly varied by the majors ($F(2,642)=25.875, 105.875, 519.221$ $p<0.05$). Turkey's post hoc procedure indicates that students have the highest use of their own language major among the three language majors.

The study of the usage on Chinese, mother tongue and other foreign languages between different ethnicities is also a topic. Only when a ethnicity treats its own language and other languages correctly, can it protect its own language, culture and improve its self language ability.

Table 5. Comparison of ethnicities on language use

	Han Chinese (n=300)		Korean-Chinese (n=300)		Other minorities (n=45)		<i>F</i> (2,642)	Post Hoc (Turkey)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Chinese	19.70	1.367	17.61	2.957	19.38	2.480	62.891*	Han Chinese > Korean-Chinese,
Korean	5.32	2.347	13.77	4.819	5.13	2.170	420.779*	Korean-Chinese > Han Chinese
English	10.81	3.559	8.92	2.966	9.67	3.268	25.046*	Han Chinese > Korean-Chinese
Japanese	6.99	3.215	7.57	3.144	6.51	3.293	3.701*	Korean > Other minorities
Russian	6.16	3.315	5.13	2.284	6.11	3.863	9.872*	Han Chinese > Korean-Chinese

* $p < 0.05$

Table 5 shows that the usage of five languages among three different ethnicities is all significantly different. The mother tongue usage of Han Chinese and Korean-Chinese is the highest with 19.70 points and 13.77 points respectively. In terms of foreign languages, Han Chinese use English and Russian language more frequently than Korean-Chinese, while Korean-Chinese use Japanese more frequently.

It could be said that to some extent, educational background could measure a person's level of knowledge and high education, which would stimulate to use more kinds of language than others. Children who grow up in this family setting unconsciously or consciously come into contact with more languages than others, and naturally use them.

Table 6. Comparison of educational background of mother on language use

	Middle school or below (n=300)		College or above (n=300)		Post-graduate (n=45)		<i>F</i> (2,642)	Post Hoc (Turkey)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Chinese	18.68	2.425	18.87	2.594	17.67	4.793	1.394	
Korean	9.27	5.548	9.02	5.706	11.08	7.242	.770	
English	9.78	3.387	9.89	3.343	12.00	4.023	2.532*	Post-graduate > Middle school or below
Japanese	7.28	3.111	6.92	3.236	9.25	5.207	3.234*	Post-graduate > Middle school or below
Russian	5.44	2.750	6.18	3.172	8.25	5.610	8.522*	Post-graduate > Middle school or below

* $p < 0.05$

Table 6 shows that there is no significant difference between English, Japanese and Russian language among three educational background of mother, all of which maintain a balanced score. The score of usage on English, Japanese and Russian language is significantly varied by the educational background ($F(2,642)=2.532, 3.234, 8.522, p<0.05$). Turkey's post hoc procedure indicates that mothers of higher educational background use foreign languages more frequently than other backgrounds. The results also apply to father's educational background through data analysis, which is no longer presented here.

5. Conclusion and Implication

5.1 Major Findings

The following two results are obtained by investigating the multilingual usage of college students in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Students use Chinese language the most frequently, while the scores of Japanese, Russian are low and the language usage is affected by grade, major, ethnicity and educational background of parents. It could be that students do not have enough confidence in their proficiency in English or other foreign languages. Therefore, universities should provide students with multilingual learning space as much as possible, give more opportunities for language learning, and lay the foundation for cultivating multilingual talents in the new era.

5.2 Implication

5.2.1 Foreign language education should be national and open

Students use Chinese language most frequently, because it is essential not only in daily life, but also in social work in China. But with the development of globalization, foreign language learning has become an essential part of education. As is shown in Table 2, the score of English language is only half of the Chinese language although we have learned English from third grade in primary school and have the innate linguistic environmental advantages. Universities should carry on the reasonable scope to when strengthening the Chinese language and other language guidance to the students, not reduce the interest and enthusiasm for language learning. Schools should encourage foreign language teaching especially at the university level, optimize the environment for foreign language learning and provide students with sufficient resources, such as introducing advanced teaching equipment, strengthening teachers and improving the quality of education.

In Sun's (2018) study, we found that the use of Chinese language by Korean-Chinese is higher than mother tongue in Dandong. However, it can be seen that the use of mother tongue by Korean-Chinese in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is obviously higher than Chinese language in the results of this study. Education in the mother tongue (including minority languages) should not be neglected by emphasizing the importance of learning foreign languages. Schools should add mother tongue courses in the lower grades, prevent students from emphasizing foreign language over mother tongue in language selection, improve students' confidence and sense of belonging in mother tongue, guide students to treat mother tongue and foreign language correctly, and form correct judgment of language value.

5.2.2 Setting up a foreign language type that is close to the native language type

According to the result from Table 4, Korean-Chinese use Japanese language more frequently than other minorities students, which is indicated that there is significant difference between Korean-Chinese and other minorities students. Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is located at the junction of China, North Korea and Russia, and is surrounded by the Sea of Japan. It has innate geographical advantages, so as to open foreign language course similar to its mother tongue, which is more conducive to students' understanding and mastery of language. Fouser (1997) analyzed the relationship between Japanese and Korean as L2 and L3 languages by focusing on the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of communicative competence. It was found that Korean can help learners acquire Japanese because the two language types are close to each other. (The Korean language used by the Korean-Chinese people can be divided into Korean from South Korea and North Korea). Genoz (2009) also draw the same conclusion, suggesting that the closer the native language is to the target language in type, the more likely it is to transfer, the easier it is for language learners to acquire the target language, and the more likely it is to improve the learning efficiency as a second (or third language).

It has been concluded that students generally have a positive attitude towards Korean and has a good impression on Korean culture. Therefore, it can make good use of the local language and cultural advantages, open Korean courses for students, so that more students understand and integrate into Korean culture, and then learn Japanese is relatively easy for students which is similar in language type.

In addition, it can be seen that the use of Russian language is the lowest one in the five languages. If it can make effective use of geographical advantages and further study Russian, college students in minority areas are expected to become rare multilingual compound talents.

5.2.3 Efforts to develop multilingual teachers

Ofelia, Angel and Stephen (2017) mentioned many studies showing that bilingual teachers are usually the best way to improve students' bilingual ability, school performance, positive development of identity and self-confidence, and opportunities of future life. Schools should strengthen the bilingual and multilingual teachers in foreign language institute. Korean-Chinese teachers speak a wide range of languages, including Korean, Chinese, professional language (English, Japanese, Russian). Other ethnicities teachers who live in the area for a long time also have knowledge of some daily Korean language. Teachers should combine the complex multilingual situation in minority areas to think about how to use the advantage in classroom teaching. For example, the flexible comparison with other languages in a language course, including semantic, pragmatic and so on, so as to make students easy to understand. Lado (1957) mentioned in his Contrastive Analysis Department hypothesis that it was possible to let learners know the differences of language and promote positive transfer through comparison in the teaching process. Schools should strongly support the cultivation of multilingual teachers to make it more systematic and scientific, and improve the multilingual level of foreign language teachers as the key point to the future multilingual development of universities.

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Yujie Shi

Graduate Student

Department of English Language Education

College of Foreign Languages, Yanbian University

977 # Gongyuan Road, Yanji City, Jilin Province, China

Phone: +86-13278239005

Email: 2514594839@qq.com

Received on April 21, 2020

Revised version received on July 29, 2020

Accepted on July 30, 2020