

THE SPREAD OF MANDARIN CHINESE AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In the past centuries, Latin was the global language. It was promoted by the Catholic Church. In the recent past, French was once a global language. It was promoted by the French government. The British government promoted English in the 19th and 20th centuries. The English language has remained the global language without a serious contender. However, in 21st century, China is seriously promoting the Mandarin Chinese language, and it is now contending with the English language. The Chinese government is using the Confucius Institute as a vehicle in promoting the Mandarin Chinese language around the world. This study argues that although the English language is still the major global language, the Mandarin Chinese language is challenging it and hoping to replace it in the future. The Chinese government is committed to promoting and spreading of the Mandarin Chinese language around the world.

Keywords: Language, English, Chinese, Globalization

INTRODUCTION

The spread of the English language is both a resource for modernization and a source of contention. The Mandarin Chinese, like other languages across the globe, has criticized the global dominance of English for suppressing other languages and monopolizing the world's information. Chinese scholars have expressed consternation that the internet would encourage the global dominance of English and marginalize all other languages. The spread of the English language is caused by many factors, one of them is colonialism. The other factors are trade, missionary, education, technology, etc. the dominance of the English language is caused by the use of the language by millions of speakers in different nations of the world. The dominance of English language has truly suppressed other languages especially minority languages.

In every period of globalization, the principal hegemonic power has promoted its own language as a tool for unity across time and space (Ding and Saunders, 2006). In the past centuries, Latin was the global language. It was promoted by the Catholic Church. In the recent past, French was once a global language. It was promoted by the French government. The British government promoted English in the 19th and 20th centuries. The English language has remained the global language without a serious contender. However, in 21st century, China is seriously promoting Chinese language, and it is now contending with the English language. In support of the above assertion, an American investor Jim Rogers once said that the 19th century may have belonged to England and the 20th century to the United States, but the 21st century belongs to China.

The Chinese government itself has also taken the task to promote Mandarin, taking it as a way to develop soft image abroad and to garner national strength across the board (Ramzy, 2006). As the 21st century is said to belong to China, the Chinese government is not leaving any stone unturned in promoting the Chinese language around the world. Any language that would become a global language would have a large users and speakers. A global language is backed by a strong nation. China is now a strong nation in trade, education, medicine, military, science and technology. The Chinese government is using the Confucius Institute as a vehicle in promoting the Chinese language around the world. This is unlike the method used by the England in promoting the English language. This is called soft power.

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

Language imperialism had aided English as a global language. Linguistic imperialism or language imperialism refers to the transfer of a dominant language to the other people. The transfer is essentially a demonstration of power – traditionally, military power but also, in the modern world, economic power – and aspects of the dominant culture are usually transferred along with the language. The first stage of the global spread of the

English language was the result of the empire building of British, otherwise known as imperialism. The second stage was the result of the cultural, political and economic preeminence of the United States of America, otherwise known as neo-imperialism. The global reach of America's cultural, political and economic influence has contributed significantly to bolstering the dominant position of the English language in the 20th and 21st centuries.

'English has become the second language of everybody', said Mark Warschauer, a professor of education and informatics at the University of California. It's gotten to the point where almost in any part of the world to be educated means to know English. The primary aim of education in the British colonies became the acquisition of the English language, and the future academic and financial success of those living in colonized countries came to depend mainly on their English language ability. After World War II, when the colonized countries started to gain independence, the English language maintained its influence by being selected as an official or national language by leaders who were themselves the products of colonial education. (Phillipson, 1992)

The fact that English now belongs to 'everyone or to no one' (Wardhaugh, 1987) would seem to imply that English will maintain its position as the global dominant language throughout the 21st century and beyond. English dominates the world as no language has ever, and some linguists are now saying it may never be dethroned as the king of languages. Some insist that linguistic evolution will continue to take its course over the centuries and that English could eventually die a common language as Latin did. It is theoretically possible that English itself will, at some future time, be succeeded by another language, promulgated by the economic, political and cultural might of its native speakers (Paul Raine, 2012). The Mandarin Chinese is likely the next language in line to replace the English language in future. Already the Mandarin Chinese language has over a billion speakers around the world. With the recent economic status and political importance of China in the world, the Mandarin Chinese language has the chance of becoming a global language.

LANGUAGE AND GLOBALIZATION

Language is the human ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication, and a language is any specific example of such a system. It is also defined as a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols. A language is a system of words and grammar used by a group of people. When we write or speak, we are using language. Larsen-Freeman and Freeman (2008) say that language is the tool that everyone uses in learning and teaching. And Rubin (1975) says that everyone is born with the ability to learn a language and good language learning is said to depend on at least three variables: aptitude, motivation and opportunity.

Human language is unique in comparison to other forms of communication, such as those used by non-human animals. Communication systems used by other animals such as bees or apes are closed systems that consist of a finite, usually very limited, number of possible ideas that can be expressed (Hockett, 1960). In contrast, human language is open-ended and productive, meaning that it allows human to produce a vast range of utterances from a finite set of elements, and to create new words and sentences. This is possible because human languages is based on a dual code, in which a finite number of elements which are meaningless in themselves (eg. Sounds, letters or gestures) can be combined to form a theoretical infinite number of larger units of meaning (words and sentences) (Trask, 1999: 1-5).

Globalization is not synonymous with what is immediately suggested by the French word *mondialisation* (roughly, “universalization” as covering the whole globe). Globalization cannot be associated with uniformity either, as many of the diffusions associated with globalization acquire local characters and therefore reflect some cultural hybridization (Pieterse 2003, Tomlinson 1999). Globalization is a social process characterized by the existence of global economic, political, cultural, linguistic and environmental interconnections and flows that make the many of the currently existing borders and

boundaries irrelevant (Steger, 2003). Globalization is the process of interdependent connection across societies. As a result of globalization, the prior minimalist-interactionist relationship between cultures and societies has been replaced with increased linkage of societies in economics, technology, politics, culture, and language (Agwuele, 2010).

Globalization has many effects on language, both positive and negative. Globalization creates a sociolinguistic behaviour that favours the expansion and acquisition of mainstream languages at the expense of the less empowered languages that have increasingly become endangered. However, with globalization allowing languages to spread and dominate on a global scale, it also leads to the extinction of other languages. Dor (2004) has this to say:

The process of globalization indisputably has shown far-reaching linguistic consequences for the general social function of language and the relationships among different languages, speakers, various nation-states, and even the global market in the world.

CHINA AND CHINESE LANGUAGE

China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), is a sovereign State located in East Asia. It is the world's most populous country, with a population of over 1.35 billion. China has twenty two provinces, five autonomous regions, four direct-controlled municipalities, and two mostly self-governing special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau). It covers approximately 9.6 million square kilometers, being the world's second-largest country by land area. China's landscape is vast and diverse, ranging from forest steps and the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts in the arid north to subtropical forests in the wetter south.

The history of China goes back to the ancient civilization. In the past, China's political system was based on hereditary monarchies, known as dynasties. China has a long history, dating back to 5,000 year ago. It is recorded that *Yuanmou* man is the oldest hominoid in China. Chinese society has progressed through five major stages: primitive

society, slave society, feudal society, semi-feudal and semi-colonial society, and socialist society. The written history of China can be said to date back to Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BC), over 3,000 years ago. The first dynasty was founded in 21st century B.C., and China was first unified in 221 B.C. The Chinese history can be summarized and divided into two eras: imperial era and modern era. The imperial era started with the first dynasty, Xia dynasty and ended with the last dynasty, Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The revolution of 1911, led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, ended the rule of the Qing dynasty. The modern era began from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Reform and Opening up policies of 1978 to the present economic and technological development.

According to traditionalists, Chinese is one language with different dialects. They believe that all Chinese people read and share the same writing called *Hanzi* (character-based), despite speaking in different ways. But western linguists do not agree with the above beliefs. The western linguists see Chinese as a language family with different languages which are not mutually understandable. There are so many arguments on this issue and we are not going further. In division, Chinese language is perceived by their native speakers as dialects of a single Chinese language, rather than separate languages, although this identification is considered inappropriate by some linguists and sinologists (Mair, 1991).

The Chinese language is a language or language family consisting of varieties which are mutually intelligible to varying degree (Crystal, 1987). Chinese language is distinguished by its high level of internal diversity, although all varieties of Chinese are tonal and analytic. The Chinese language comprises of seven main dialects: Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, Wu, Min, Xiang, and Gan. Han Chinese represents about 92 percent of the total Chinese population. About two-thirds of the Han population speaks a variant of Mandarin as their native tongue. Standard Chinese (*putonghua*) is a standardized form of spoken Chinese based on the Beijing dialect of Mandarin. It is the official language of Singapore. Mandarin is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Mandarin is the language of discussion in this research and is synonymous as Chinese language in this research.

There are many systems of romanization for the Chinese languages due to the lack of a native phonetic transcription until modern times. Romanization is the process of transcribing a language into the Latin script. Chinese is first known to have been written in Latin characters by Western Christian missionaries in the 16th century. Today the most common romanization standard for Mandarin is *Hanyu Pinyin*, often known simply as pinyin, introduced in 1956 by the People's Republic of China, and later adopted by Singapore and Taiwan. It is generally used for teaching Chinese in schools around the world. Chinese parents and teachers also use *Pinyin* to teach their children and pupils respectively the sounds and tones of new words.

Chinese writing system is called Chinese character. Chinese characters are logograms. Chinese character is one of the oldest systems of writing in the world. Chinese characters number in the tens of thousands, though most of these are minor graphic variants only encountered in historical texts. Studies carried out in China have shown that functional literacy requires knowledge of between three to four thousand characters (Norman, 2008). In Chinese orthography, the characters are largely morphosyllabic, each corresponding to a spoken syllable with a distinct meaning. However, the majority of Chinese words today consist of two or more characters.

According to the legend, Chinese characters were invented by *Canjie* (c. 2650 BC), a bureaucrat under the legendary Yellow Emperor. The earliest confirmed evidence of the Chinese script yet discovered is the oracle bone script (*Jiagumen*), literally 'shell-bone script' of the late Shang dynasty. Chinese characters have undergone some changes in history. The simplified Chinese characters in use today are the result of the works moderated by the government of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The simplified Chinese characters are easy to learn and write than the traditional Chinese characters because they have lesser strokes than the latter. Chinese characters are written with very precise rules. The most important rules regard the strokes employed, stroke placement, and stroke order.

PROMOTION AND SPREAD OF CHINESE LANGUAGE

Chinese as a foreign or second language is the study of Chinese language by non-native speakers. Increased interest in China from those outside has led to a corresponding interest in the study of Mandarin (Standard Chinese) as a foreign language, the official language of mainland China and Taiwan. However, the teaching of Chinese both within and outside China is not a recent phenomenon. Westerners started learning different Chinese languages in the 16th century. With China, Mandarin became the official language of China in 1924. Mandarin also became the official language of Taiwan after the *Kuomintang* took over control from Japan after World War II.

In support of the importance and popularity of Chinese language, Jim Rogers said, “If the 19th century belonged to Britain, and the 20th century to the United States, then 21st century will surely belong to China. My advice: make sure your kids learn Chinese”. In today’s increasing close international interaction, language as mankind’s most significant tool for communication plays an irreplaceable important role in international exchange. In the past, people made great effort to learn Latin, French and English according to their time of influence and importance, but now Chinese language (Mandarin) has become a new growing choice for many people around the world. ‘Chinese fever’ is still catching many people around the world judging by the growing number of people learning Chinese. It is estimated that more than 40 million foreigners outside China are learning Chinese language.

In order to project China’s soft power (political influence that is extended by means of diplomacy, international assistance, cultural exchanges, etc; rather than by military intervention or punitive economic measures), the teaching of the Mandarin Chinese language to speakers of other languages has been identified as a major source. The Chinese Ministry of Culture has been treating it as a matter of strategic significance to enhance friendly and mutual understanding between China and other nations, and to elevate China’s influence in the international community. The Chinese dream will not be

actualized without the possibility and ability of non-Chinese people learning and using the Mandarin Chinese language. Also China's soft power is not complete without the promoting and spreading of Chinese language around the globe. The Chinese government is very committed to achieving this purpose. Ding and Saunders (2006) say that the Chinese government has conceptualized many programs and has materialized some of them to popularize the Chinese language around the world in a systematic way and on massive scale. The most institutionalized and strategic form of influence is the establishment of State policies and agencies entrusted with the task of promoting and spreading national language and cultures abroad. In 1987, China established the National Office of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL) with a range of activities including, cultural exchanges and tours, support networks for foreign teachers of Chinese, and a wide array of language teaching support (Bianco, 2007).

Hanban is the colloquial abbreviation for the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL). It is governed by the office of Chinese Language Council International (*Zhongguo Guojia Hanyu Guoji Tuiguang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi*), affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. The Hanban is a non-government and non-profit organization. According to the mission statement, Hanban is committed to developing Chinese language and culture teaching resources and making its services available worldwide, meeting the demands of overseas Chinese learners to the utmost degree, and to contributing to global cultural diversity and harmony. Generally, the Council is charged with cultivating knowledge and interest in the Chinese language and culture in nations around the world that are not native speakers of Chinese. The other functions of the Council include the following: (i) to propose suggestions for the guideline, policies and development plans for China's development in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, (ii) to provide policy guidance for the work of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, (iii) to organize and implement the national development plan for teaching Chinese as a foreign language, (iv) to undertake general management of the work of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, (v) to organize the foreign exchange and cooperation in Chinese language teaching, (vi) to give guidance to the work of the Society for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language and to provide assistance in the

work of the World Chinese Language Teaching Society, and (vii) to manage and use the fund specially subsidized for teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Confucius Institutes have become a symbol as well as a vehicle for promoting of the Mandarin Chinese language. Confucius Institutes promote and teach Mandarin Chinese language and culture around the world. It develops Chinese language courses, train teachers, hold the HSK Examination (Chinese Proficiency test), and provide information about contemporary China. The director of the Confucius Institutes worldwide, Xu Lin, started to cater to the sudden rise in the interest in learning Chinese language around the world. The Confucius Institute program began in 2004 in South Korea . There has been a dramatic increase in the number of these institutes, from 10 in 2005 to 350 in 2011. And, according to Vice-Minister of Education, Hao Ping, the number is expected to reach the 500 mark in 2015. The proliferation of these institutes is a clear testimony both to China's commitment to expound its cultural presence and to the world's desire to learn more about China (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). In Nigeria, there are two Confucius Institutes located at Nnamdi Azikiwe University and University of Lagos. There are thousands of students learning the Mandarin Chinese language in Nigeria. Many Nigerian students also go to China to study Chinese either by scholarship or self sponsorship. Recently, both Nnamdi Azikiwe University and University of Lagos have commenced a degree programme in Chinese studies. The importance of learning the Mandarin Chinese cannot be overemphasized. Many students have gotten scholarship to study any course of their choice in China because of learning the Mandarin Chinese. Many students have equally been employed because of their ability to speak the Mandarin Chinese language. The benefits of learning the Mandarin Chinese language are not limited to the students only. It benefits the business men and women, companies, schools, universities, and the government. China is a world market. Many of the Nigerian business men and women are doing well because of their ability to communicate in Mandarin Chinese language. The China-Nigeria bilateral relationship will improve tremendously if many Nigerians including the government officials could speak the Mandarin Chinese language.

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, China is positioning itself to challenge America for the position of number one economic power in the world, and possibly the linguistic dominance of English language. Although the number of people who are speaking the Mandarin Chinese language as their mother tongue is above 1.3 billion (including overseas Chinese), Chinese speaking population is limited to Chinese and foreign-country-born Chinese. The foreign population using the Mandarin Chinese language as their native language or their second language is much less. In these years, with the developing of China's economy, there has been an increasing enthusiasm for learning the Mandarin Chinese language, but it still cannot be compared with the English language's dominance. The Mandarin Chinese language has not attained the status of a global language like the English language but it is working towards its attainment. The success is largely depended on the Chinese government to promote the Mandarin Chinese language and the willingness of the foreigners to learn the language.

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