



The Comparative Study of Minority Language Teaching in Comprehensive Colleges, Language Colleges and Vocational Colleges in China

Yihan Lu^(✉)

College of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University, Nanjing 210046, China
191108071@smail.nju.edu.cn

Abstract. The implementation of the vision and plan of the Belt and Road Initiative is based on language exchange. On the basis of statistics, more than 1,000 languages are spoken in countries along the Belt and Road Routes, of which about 60 are official languages. According to media reports, many colleges in China have opened new majors following the Belt and Road Initiative and other social hotspots, such as adding minority languages from countries along the routes to the curriculum. The economic and trade cooperation between China and countries along the routes is progressing steadily, and China will build up the alliance with more countries in trade. A large number of professionals are needed to support the cooperation. By reading the essays on minority language teaching in different types of colleges in China, this paper concludes the following three conclusions. The public elective courses of minority languages in comprehensive colleges only require students to master the basic ability to communicate in minority languages, while teaching aimed at students majoring in minority languages lay more emphasis on the cultivation of academic research ability. The teaching objectives of minority language teaching in the School of Foreign Languages is to cultivate professional talents through a specific and detailed division of courses. The training of minority language talents in vocational colleges is employment-oriented, taking enterprises as the second classroom for students.

Keywords: Minority language teaching · Comprehensive college · Language college · Vocational college

1 Introduction

Minority language teaching is a matter of great significance for foreign language teaching in China especially under the Belt and Road Initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative has made language teaching become a new hotspot in more than 60 countries along the routes, increasing the demand for multilingual talents year by year. The lack of talents in minority languages has virtually restricted the participation of some Chinese enterprises in the Belt and Road Initiative.

There are three types of colleges for minority languages in China: comprehensive colleges, language colleges and vocational colleges. A comprehensive college is an

institution of higher learning with complete disciplines, large scale and strong scientific research strength. Language colleges refer to institutions of higher learning with language majors as the main subjects. Vocational colleges are those that train skilled personnel. And the minority language in this paper refers to other languages other than English, such as French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, etc.

After looking up the data, however, there is a lack of systematic review on this topic. Most of the existing literature studies a specific minority language in a specific college type. For example, Sun Ping and Wu Shaohui from Shandong Vocational College of Tourism wrote the paper “Discussion on the Efficient Model of Minority Language Elective Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges”. And most of the paper focuses on the classroom teaching of minority languages in foreign language colleges. So far there is no macroscopic research on the teaching of minority languages in all colleges and universities. The research objective of this paper is to explore the similarities and differences in minority languages teaching in different types of colleges in China from both the perspectives of classroom teaching and practice teaching.

2 Minority Language Teaching in Comprehensive Colleges

2.1 Course Setting

In the teaching of foreign language colleges in comprehensive colleges, specialized courses usually consist of intensive reading, grammar, reading, writing, oral expression and the culture of the other countries. These courses are on the schedule for each class and are divided into beginner, intermediate and advanced courses according to their difficulty. For example, in the curriculum arrangement of the Russian Department of The School of Foreign Languages of Nanjing University, freshmen need to take basic Russian courses, an overview of Russia and oral courses taught by foreign teachers, and sophomores need to add grammar and reading courses, and juniors need to add writing and translation courses.

The public minority language elective course is not as complicated as mentioned above. Each minority language normally set up only one course, and some colleges open minority language advanced courses, such as Fudan University opens Japanese (a) and Japanese (b), and the goal is to make sure students can choose the most suitable course for themselves.

2.2 Classroom Teaching

In Chinese comprehensive colleges, minority language courses are usually public electives, which are open to all students but not mandatory. Students can choose the courses they like based on their interests and needs. Minority language electives help students broaden their horizons and enhance their cultural literacy. Since language is a mirror of culture and a window to different cultures, an increasing number of colleges set up foreign language courses other than English, allowing for diversity in the curriculum to a large extent [1].

Foreign language courses are characterized by “small numbers of students and small class sizes”, whereas, in comprehensive colleges, minority language courses are offered

to the entire, and class sizes are often 50 or more students per class. This makes it impossible for teachers to keep track of each student's mastery, thus dragging down the quality of teaching.

On top of that, public electives are usually arranged in the evenings or even on weekends in order to accommodate most students' class schedules [2]. After a day of study, it is difficult for students to focus on the difficult, zero-based language courses in the evening. This makes it harder to ensure teaching quality. Learning a new language usually starts with the alphabet and phonetics, and then slowly penetrates into grammar, which is a very tedious and difficult process. The teacher cannot take the learning difficulties of each student into account in a large class and cannot practice listening and speaking, which is not conducive to students' motivation to learn a new language [1].

However, unlike minority language courses at foreign language institutions, minority language elective courses in comprehensive colleges put more weight on the study of everyday language rather than emphasizing the teaching of a complex grammar system. This is because with limited class time, the courses have to pursue novelty and interest so that students can acquire more knowledge in a relaxed teaching environment.

2.3 Practice Teaching

It is not a rare matter to have a foreign language club in a comprehensive college, and minority language clubs tend to attract more people because of their fun nature. Minority language teaching clubs are more flexible and consist of two parts: teaching by teachers and independent study by students. Club leaders invite professional teachers to teach their expertise, and students improve their language skills by watching movies, interacting with international students, and having group discussions in their spare time. Some schools have introduced online teaching methods such as MOOCs, which are popular among students and teachers because they can be replayed unlimited times or played at any time.

2.4 Teaching Objectives

In comprehensive colleges, the teaching goal of minority language courses is to cultivate academic research talents, so the training plan will be more theoretical. For instance, the French Department of Beijing University is committed to the comprehensive and systematic training of students' French skills and the teaching of French literature and culture, as well as the humanistic and historical knowledge of French-speaking countries. At present, the main employment directions of bachelor's degree graduates are government organs, scientific research institutions, colleges and universities, and foreign-funded enterprises. Students who wish to continue their studies can choose to pursue master's and doctoral degrees in languages, literature and translation, some of which can be included in the doctoral program of cooperation with foreign universities. Students with outstanding performance in various aspects can be selected by the school and assigned by the Ministry of Education to enjoy the Chinese and French government scholarships for further study in France.

3 Minority Language Teaching in Language Colleges

3.1 Course Setting

For example, the Russian Department of Beijing Foreign Studies University offers practical courses, oral English courses and literature reading courses, so students can choose from a wider range.

The practice class mentioned above requires students to participate in practice in a strong way, that is, to put the language knowledge learned into practice, improve their language application ability, and make comprehensive preparation for future development. In addition, as an established foreign language college, it opened courses in 89 minority languages in 2020. Through the undergraduate training of Beijing Foreign Studies University, students will become multi-lingual talents, experiencing the culture and history of other countries and experiencing the charm of languages.

3.2 Classroom Teaching

Unlike the teaching of minority languages in comprehensive colleges, minority language courses in foreign language colleges are significantly more difficult. The purpose of training in foreign language colleges is to cultivate high-quality, application-oriented and composite talents needed by the market, such as highly skilled translators, excellent foreign language teachers or foreign affairs workers with foreign language skills. Nonetheless, it is obvious that it is not scientific to try to use one discipline to train all three kinds of talents, yet many universities are generally grouping people who study the same language into one department, called "... Language and literature", which leads to the lack of focus in the cultivation of talents, so it is difficult to cultivate professionals in a certain field in four years of foreign language education [3]. For example, after graduation, some students wish to pursue a career as foreign language teachers, but they do not have the basic conditions to become foreign language teachers because they have not systematically studied psychology, pedagogy and other courses during the four-year language training process.

The learning of minority languages is characterized by "many class hours and great difficulty". Especially for zero-based learners, learning minority languages is easy to be affected by negative transfer of language, and students are easy to substitute habitual thinking in their mother tongue or first foreign language, resulting in learning difficulties [4]. Zero-based learners and high-starting learners study in the same class, so it is easy to undermine the learning enthusiasm of zero-based learners. Consequently, teachers cannot well achieve "teaching in accordance with their aptitude".

In domestic foreign language colleges and universities, language teaching tends to be basic rather than applied. The teaching process is often rigid procedural teaching such as dictation of vocabulary and recitation of text. Although multimedia has been gradually introduced into the teaching of minority languages in recent years, it is only an alternative tool to traditional blackboard writing. The lack of an environment for learning minority languages in China limits the development of students' language application ability. The school can hold regular seminars, reports, communication meetings, etc., to provide a good platform for students to use the language they are learning, and at the same time expand their knowledge through communication.

3.3 Practice Teaching

Due to the variety and difficulty of minority languages courses, students who learn minority languages do not have the opportunities of practice as other students do and only become the talents who do exercises rather than the foreign language talents in line with social needs. It is urgent to reform the lagging teaching system of minority languages.

Practical teaching is the shortcoming of talent training in foreign language colleges. Foreign language schools can learn from the practice of foreign universities such as the University of Nottingham in the UK to explore the integration of karmic cultivation into training programs. The university can establish the co-construction and sharing mechanism of practice bases and collaborative education mode between schools, schools and governments, schools and enterprises, schools and scientific research institutes through various professional internship programs, construction of practical education bases inside and outside the school, innovation and entrepreneurship training programs, etc. Each major can try to work with cooperative units to jointly formulate teaching objectives and plans for off-campus practice education, construct teaching contents, and create brand practice projects, so that students can enhance perceptual understanding, consolidate book knowledge, improve practical ability and solve practical problems in practice and social practice activities [5]. The design of the internship program should make full use of the advantages of foreign language resources in foreign language colleges, strengthen the cultivation of students' communicative ability through practical activities, improve students' sensitivity and tolerance to cultural differences in different environments and be flexible response-ability to deal with various emergencies.

3.4 Teaching Objectives

The teaching goal of the School of Foreign Languages is to cultivate professional talents, so the curriculum arrangement is more comprehensive and detailed, and students are striving to become more professional through several years of language learning [6].

According to the 2020 employment report of Shanghai International Studies University, the total employment rate was 96.33 percent, among which 65.26 percent, 4.79 percent and 9 percent of graduates chose contract employment, contract employment and flexible employment, respectively. 11.06 percent of graduates participated in targeted training and 2.15 percent went overseas for further study. Among the graduates of contract employment and contract employment, the proportion of foreign language majors entering Party and government organs, military units, institutions, scientific research institutes and primary, secondary and higher education units is higher than that of compound majors [7].

4 Minority Language Teaching in Vocational Colleges

4.1 Course Setting

Foreign language majors in vocational colleges still face a great many challenges in terms of how to optimize course content, improve educational methods, improve students'

operational ability, and cultivate students' comprehensive vocational ability according to the needs of enterprises and the characteristics of vocational students [8]. Minority language courses set up by vocational colleges tend to be more practical, which started late, developed in a short time, and do not have a complete teaching system. At present, there are no textbooks for minority language courses in vocational colleges on the market. Vocational colleges need to use undergraduate textbooks or self-compiled textbooks [9]. What is more, teachers in vocational colleges have the low educational background and unreasonable structure of teachers. Most of the teachers are young teachers and few professors or associate professors.

4.2 Classroom Teaching

The teaching of minority languages in vocational colleges has the characteristics of vocational colleges. It is employment-oriented, training talents who directly serve the social and economic development and stressing the practicality of talents.

Students in vocational colleges have less learning habits and initiative than undergraduates, so even if many students choose to take courses in minority languages, class attendance is not high. The teaching management of vocational colleges is not standardized, and the assessment system is not perfect. For example, in a vocational college in Jinan in Shandong Province, the final result of the minority language course after investigation accounts for 50% of the attendance rate, 40% of the homework, and only 10% of the exam result. Many students who take this course even think that there is no exam, so vocational schools should increase the pressure on students to study elective courses appropriately [10].

4.3 Practice Teaching

The teaching of minority languages in vocational colleges should rely on the industry and enterprises, follow the development path of production, research and learning, clarify their own positioning, create more internship opportunities for students in enterprises, and strive to improve the employment rate of minority languages.

Classroom teaching is often taught in the classroom on the basis of the content of textbooks, and the content is divorced from the production reality of social enterprises. Teachers pay more attention to the systematization of knowledge. Practical teaching is not aimed at the requirements of students' skills assessment and post-graduation work, but at a theory or an exercise in the textbook, regardless of whether students can learn skills in line with post-graduation work. For foreign language majors, due to the particularity of the major, it is not easy to find suitable enterprises. The practice units are all contacted by teachers themselves, and there is no fixed place. Some schools can only make up for it through simulation training rooms, although there is some effect, there is still a big gap with the real enterprise environment. Therefore, students cannot learn a lot of practical knowledge in class and fail to realize the new requirements of the society for graduates of this major. They are incapable of understanding the problems existing in the school-enterprise cooperation between schools and enterprises. All these are practical problems existing in the teaching of foreign language majors in vocational colleges.

4.4 Teaching Objective

Minority language talents trained by vocational colleges face the job market directly. Hunan Foreign Language Vocational College, as the only independent foreign language vocational college in the Central and southern region in China, always adheres to the path of “marketization, professionalism and internationalization”. The campus has a “scene simulation training room”, and at the same time, each major has established 3–5 enterprise practice teaching bases. Through the school and the enterprise jointly negotiate the training program, jointly form the guidance team, jointly manage the teaching process, give full play to the advantages of the two main bodies of the school and the enterprise joint training, so that the students’ professional skills training are truly solid and in place [4].

5 Comparison

5.1 Course Setting

The curriculum is closely related to the training objectives. Without exception, the learning of minority languages begins with pronunciation, and the introduction of minority languages is a tough and long process. In minority language elective courses in comprehensive colleges, teachers are more attentive to the application of knowledge, that is, the learning of minority languages serves daily expression. Nevertheless, for minority language majors, students need to acquire numerous skills through learning, such as translation, reading, communication and literary studies, so the curriculum will be richer and more diversified. The teaching of minority languages in vocational colleges is relatively less in-depth. After students master the basic knowledge of the language, they will apply the knowledge into practice and combine learning with employment.

5.2 Classroom Teaching

In terms of class size, except for the College of Foreign Languages and the College of Foreign Languages in comprehensive colleges, which usually have small classes, the other classes are all large classes. Large class teaching is not conducive to the development of minority language teaching, because the learning of a minority language is a delicate process, which requires constant practice and correction under the guidance of the teacher.

For students majoring in non-minority languages, the courses they take in minority languages do not need to be particularly deepgoing, so teachers often adopt multimedia teaching for students to understand the taught content more intuitively and quickly, and to excite students’ interest of the class.

The courses of minority language majors are more academic, which is mainly reflected in the intensive indoctrination of knowledge by teachers and intensive practice by students. The classes they take require more time and effort. Furthermore, the curriculum of the minority languages has a single structure: the lower grades learn the basics of vocabulary, phonetics, grammar, etc., while the upper grades study foreign original works and analyze their ideas and styles. The traditional teaching model of

minority languages has become obsolete, and the speed of teaching is not in line with the development of society. This is not conducive to the development of student's creative thinking and limits the improvement of students' creativity.

Limited by students' learning ability and teachers' teaching level, minority language courses in vocational colleges are neither diverse nor complete.

5.3 Practice Teaching

Since it is not appropriate to take up too much time for students who choose elective courses of minority languages in comprehensive colleges, the opportunity to practice is very little, and students need to take the initiative to practice. For example, students can get improved by participating in foreign language clubs or associations. Students majoring in minority languages have more opportunities to practice, such as the practical courses in Beijing Foreign Studies University, but students don't have enough opportunities to practice, because they spend most of their time in class. There will be much more practical activities in vocational colleges, usually in the form of enterprises.

5.4 Teaching Objective

The teaching in the comprehensive colleges tends to be comprehensive, unlike the more academic teaching in the language colleges. The teaching in vocational colleges is employment-oriented, and is connected with companies and enterprises.

6 Conclusion

This paper makes a comparative study of minority language teaching in comprehensive colleges, foreign language colleges and vocational colleges from the perspectives of curriculum setting, classroom teaching, practical teaching and teaching objectives, and finds that there are similarities and differences. Due to the diverse teaching objectives of various types of colleges, there are discrepancies in their curriculum and teaching arrangement. Comprehensive colleges, foreign language colleges and vocational colleges are oriented to academic research, practical training and employment training respectively, so their curriculum and teaching arrangement have obviously diverse focus.

Therefore, in order for each type of college to maximize its ability to train outstanding talents for the country, each college needs to learn from each other, that is, recognize its own shortcomings in teaching and strive to make its students outstanding in all aspects. Of course, the pursuit of perfection is desirable but unrealistic, and every type of colleges needs to make some trade-offs.

This research is of profound significance for the improvement of the framework of foreign language teaching in China, especially for the implementation and development of the national Belt and Road policy.

This study, however, is only the integration and induction of the existing statistics, without investigation and research. Additionally, all contents remain theoretical and cannot be put into practice. In the future, the research in related fields can be supplemented by questionnaires and field visits. The author is looking forward to seeing more research results on minority language teaching.

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