

An ecological perspective on trilingual education for children in the west ethnic regions of China:

Current situations and the strategy

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Abstract

Trilingual education is an important component of basic education in the west ethnic regions of China. For years, studies at home and abroad mainly focused on language planning and the acquisition of English as a third language in colleges, ignoring children's learning of English in the ethnic regions. However, starting from regional social and economic development, it's essential to stress more on the relations among the society, schools and families comprehensively within an ecological strategy of the country, and build a positive ecological environment to foster children's trilingual abilities, consequently, setting the foundation of fairness of education and its sustainable development of the ethnic regions.

Keywords: trilingual education of children, the west ethnic regions of China, ecological perspective, current situations, ecological strategy

1. Introduction

Trilingual education has been a hot topic of linguistic research in language planning in many countries in recent years. For example, English is the most common foreign language in Continental Europe, and in the case of regions with ethnic languages it is not the second but the third or fourth language. Therefore, schools in these regions have the need to go beyond bilingualism and to promote trilingualism and multilingualism as one of the most important aims in education. (Cenoz, J. & Gorter, D., 2005) ^[1]. In China, trilingual education mainly covers the teaching of the ethnic language, Mandarin and a foreign language (mainly English) for ethnic students which is developed based on the "bilingualism". (Gai, et. al, 2003) ^[2]. In recent years, following the development of national economy and the society, the study of trilingualism in China has achieved a lot in many aspects; nevertheless, it is a pity that so far the researches in China were mainly restricted in trilingual acquisition or teaching of college students in a micro way or the policies of language planning in a macro way, seldom did researchers feel the importance of children's trilingual ability development and hence the findings in this area are not rich. (Wei & Peng, 2015; Wurina, 2015) ^[3, 4]. However, studies at home and abroad have demonstrated that the period of child language acquisition is crucial for children because it has great influence on children's future language learning and ability development. Whether children can acquire three languages, therefore, in this period affects not only the implementation of educational planning of the ethnic regions, but also the strategy of how these areas integrate in the economic and social development of the whole country. The related research in China is quite rare. Therefore, this paper attempts to probe into the ecological strategy of trilingual education of ethnic children and the construction of the ecological environment of children's trilingual education in the west ethnic regions of China, with the hope to throw some light on trilingual education and multilingualism in China as well as Asia.

2. Children's trilingual education from an ecological perspective

The research of trilingual education from an ecological perspective originated from the cross-disciplinary study of ecolinguistics. Early in the 1960s, the Norwegian linguist Einar Haugen proposed the idea of study language from the ecological perspective. According to Haugen (1972) ^[5], ecolinguistics emphasizes the characteristics of variety, development and balance of language. Most ecolinguists believe that language and its environment form a flexible and dynamic ecological system and that researchers therefore should pay attention to the rules of how the environment affects language change, language acquisition and language use. This idea, as a matter of fact, exerts great influence on language acquisition and teaching compared with the traditional ideas of second language acquisition (SLA) and second/foreign language teaching (SLT/FLT). Wendel (2005) ^[6], further analyzed the nature of linguistic ecology and regarded that the aim of eco-linguistics is to discover and research the complex relationships among language, environment and human beings with the methodology of ecology. In his monograph *Language Ecology*, Palmer (1974) ^[7], pointed out that "linguistic ecology concerns a series of ecological factors like politics, society, culture and psychology." In reality, from the idea of ecolinguistics, linguistic ecology is the manifestation of the integration between language and society, concerning the common language of the country, languages of different nations in the country, language policies and the developing characteristics such as variety, changes and societal attitudes toward a certain language and so forth. In China, trilingual education is implemented in certain areas within the general framework of the national language planning. From an ecological point of view, trilingual education must consider a number of factors, including the variety of languages in the country, national unity, national development as well as the sociocultural environment of trilingual education. These

ecological factors together form the complex interrelated relationships among each other and exert influences on the quality of trilingual education.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, there are three dimensions in children's trilingual education, namely, spatial, age and linguistic dimensions. First of all, spatial features of the region indicate the special characteristics of the ethnic region which has already been clarified in national and regional language planning and policy. For example, the language policy in Xinjiang autonomous region is that the ethnic language like Hasake, the Xibo language and Mogolian are maintained as the first language (L1) for the very nation; then Mandarin is regarded as the second language (L2) and English the third Language (L3). Second, the age of "children" sets another special requirement for trilingual education, that is, trilingual teaching must be in line with the law of children's cognition, psychology and language acquisition and be implemented specifically with specialized language planning. Trilingualism in the ethnic regions is a type of addition of language from L1 to L2 and then to L3. Its aim is to protect the variety and development of languages in the ethnic areas in order that the ethnic region will have equal power to access information linguistically. Third, learning English as L3 is different from learning English in other areas because English for ethnic students is L3 and is affected by both L1 and L2. There could be a very complex process of transfer from L1 and L2. Besides, there is also the problem of notice distribution because ethnic children have to spend more efforts on learning languages other than their first language. As a result, children's trilingual ability is influenced by many ecological factors, like national language planning, children's cognitive characteristics, the school where they are taught, the society and the relationship among L1, L2 and L3 as well. Therefore, it's essential to mediate all these ecological factors effectively to construct a well-fabricated ecological environment so as to promote children's trilingual development which consist of one part of the whole development strategy of the ethnic regions.

3. The status quo of the ecological environment of trilingual education for Children

Currently, trilingual education in the west ethnic regions of China is characterized by a number of features ecologically. For instance, the distribution of population, formal schooling and social situations all have their roles in children's trilingual education, forming a complex map of teaching, learning and applying the three languages.

3.1 Population distribution influencing the current condition of trilingual education

Seeing from the distribution of the population of the west ethnic regions, in the geographical structure, ethnic people distribute in a gathering and dispersing way as agreed by many anthropological researchers in China, which influences how the formal multilingual language teaching can be carried out in the school directly. In some certain places, the ethnic nations such as Zang, Yi or Uygurs dominate the area. For instance, in the whole region of Xinjiang autonomous area, there are 47 nations; Uigurs mainly live in the southern part, such as Kashi, Hetian, Akesu and the eastern part of Tulufan, taking almost 83% of all the Uigurs of the whole autonomous region. (Ma, 2000) ^[10]. In Sichuan province, Yi people mainly live in Liangshan state and some areas in Leshan like Mabian and

Erbian. In some schools in the above-mentioned agglomerations of Yi people, the proportion of Yi children takes over 80%. In some areas such as in the regions like Hami and Urumuqi of Xinjiang, Dali and Honghe of Yunnan province, the distribution of ethnic people is balanced and fair. In those areas, there would be a heavy burden of learning Mandarin as L2 which consequently affects the carrying out of learning English as L3. However, in other areas like Changji, Karamay and Shihezi of Xinjiang and Lhasa, Changdu of Tibet, there is higher proportion of Han people and Mandarin has a strong ecological niche consequently which ensures the advantages of carrying out trilingual education in these areas. The aforementioned situations of population in the west ethnic areas form the ecological base of trilingual education. Because of such a layout of population and the related language education policy, the proficiency of children's L1 (ethnic language), L2 (Mandarin) will be verified which, in turn, influences the placement of students in different classes in the school, the objectives of formal trilingual teaching in the school, as well as the teaching model, the choice of teaching language. All these factors exert significant influences on the specific implementation of trilingual education in the west ethnic regions of China from various aspects.

3.2 Bilingual education forming the base of L3 teaching in the west ethnic regions

At present, there are around 60 million ethnic peoples in China using their L1 in the daily communication, taking about 60% of the whole population of the ethnic peoples; and also, there are about 30 million using the written forms of their L1 in the daily life. Besides, there are 154 broad casting systems and TV stations using ethnic languages in the autonomous regions, and the broad casting systems of the local government and the central government make their programs using 21 ethnic languages.(Information Office of the State Council, 2009) Thanks to the persistence of the local and central governments in bilingual policy and bilingual education, great achievements have been made in the bilingual education system, the construction of teaching materials and teaching staffs. For example, there were more than 1.82 million ethnic children in Xinjiang received bilingual education of the ethnic language and Mandarin in primary and middle schools which take the proportion of 70.93% of all the ethnic students in 2013.(The Educational Department of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, 2014) Therefore, it can be asserted that an ecological environment including the language maintenance, language variety and multilingualism has gradually been built in the west ethnic regions of China which provides the ecological base of children's trilingual education. However, there are also regional variations because there isn't unified requirement of trilingual teaching for different ethnic regions. Following the advancement of trilingual education of China so far, children's trilingual ability has developed to a certain degree in some areas. For example, primary school students of Tibetan nationality in Gannan Tibetan State of Gansu province can communicate fluently in Mandarin and even be able to engage in basic daily communication in English. Compared with children's language ability a decade before, this would be a great development with efforts of all parties.

3.3 Social environment influencing children's trilingual education

With regard to the national language policy, the Ethnic language (L1), Mandarin (L2) and English (L3) are all covered in the language education programs by the government at all levels. For example, Teaching of Mandarin and English has been carried out in Tibet, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and other ethnic areas positively, cultivating many bilingual and trilingual talents for the society. (Huang & Zhang, 2013)^[12]. Nevertheless, due to the different social functions and status of the three languages in the ecology of society, the three languages, Ethnic language, Mandarin and foreign language (mainly English) for different individuals and families are different in terms of its social value, influencing children's attitude, interest and affection toward foreign language learning. For the historical and geographical reasons, ethnic regions lag behind in the economic development and keep conservative in the socio-cultural and the economic development process. Especially in the rural areas, the whole education is lag behind other parts of China. As to trilingual teaching, due to the lack of the language environment of using English economically and culturally, English teaching in the rural areas of the ethnic region was not cared by the mass and the family. The long existing closed and self-sufficient tradition and the lower income condition in these areas make the families unwilling to spend on English learning, which, in turn, affects children's learning of L3 negatively. A survey made in 2013 indicated that over 75% families in the countryside of Liangshan autonomous state of Sichuan province would not or could not provide electronic facilities for their children to learn English. As a result, the attitude and cognition of English have all become a worrying problem in the linguistic ecology in those areas currently.

4. The strategy of children's trilingual education in ethnic regions

Ecologically, children's trilingual education exists in a macro environment, concerning the country, the ethnic regions and is under the influence of the trend of multi-value and globalization of the time. Considering the maintenance of social justice, unity among nations and the stable development of western regions of China, the rules of bilingual and trilingual education at the initial stage, Children's trilingual education in the ethnic region must take a strategic perspective at the very beginning in order to promote children's trilingual education walk out of the traditional way effectively.

4.1 Understand the nature of children's trilingual education as an ecological system

As have been discussed, children's trilingual education forms a unique ecological system in the society. In the first place, there must be an ecological and developmental balance among the three languages since each has its own function and ecological niche. In this framework, ecological balance is meant to maintain the variety of languages in the ethnic regions, keeping the ethnic language and Mandarin in their own natural niche. Being developmental is referred to the whole process of language development from being bilingual to being trilingual. In other words, there must be appropriate arrangement of teaching Mandarin and English (L3) in the schooling to make sure children develop from bilingual to trilingual step by step. This makes clear the stance of bilingualism and trilingualism in

the ethnic regions. That is, the learning of ethnic language (L1) as the base of self-identity and affection, the learning of Mandarin (L2) as the requirement of the economy, politics and development and the learning of English (L3) as the need for internationalization and exchange of information. At different stages, there should be different emphasis of learning the three languages. Therefore, strategically, the departments of the local government that regulate the use of language must function as the axis to integrate schools, teachers and the society as a unity so as to make a top-level design and the policies of trilingual education that follow the rules of children's cognition and the acquisition of the three languages.

4.2 Promote formal teaching of English as an L3 on the basis of bilingualism

For a strategic consideration, there must be significant advancement of trilingual teaching which is future-oriented on the basis bilingualism in the ethnic regions. The third language per se is a foreign language, and schools must be aware of the potentiality of children language development and the differences among learning L1, L2 and L3. Officially, there should be overall arrangements and schedules for children's language development and schools should provide more chances of using L3 on the basis of the affordance of language environment and support to develop children's trilingual thinking and cognition. Some scholars, such as Lenenberg once mentioned the possible evidence of learning a foreign language in the famous Critical Period Hypotheses (CPH). They believed that there is a critical period for people to learn a language in which the learning is very easy, and later language learning will become very difficult with the lateralization of the brain. (Lenneberg, 1967)^[13]. With regard to trilingual education for ethnic children in China, it must make sure that they master their L1 and L2 in the first place, and based their bilingual ability, the third language (L3) teaching can be implemented in the primary schools. Teaching a foreign language for ethnic children involves language awareness of children, their willingness to communicate, their trilingual experience and cognitive burden, and so forth; this is quite different from learning a foreign language in none-ethnic areas. Therefore, trilingual teaching in ethnic regions must have all those ecological factors into serious consideration to set up the basic standing point and find suitable methodology of teaching English as a third language in the practice. In addition, studies of trilingual teaching and learning show that there could be complex transfer relations among L1, L2 and L3. The influence may be positive or negative, trilingual teaching, therefore, must find out the specific rules and be in accordance with such rules accordingly, making full use of the positive influence and its function of adjustment to serve learning an L3. (Payant, 2015)^[14].

4.3 Form a strategic ecological relation of children's trilingual education

Regarding trilingual education as a whole system ecologically, there should be a positive ecological environment of trilingual education through the establishment of a balanced relation among the government of various levels, the society and families. From such an understanding, in addition to governments' efforts, there should be a positive socio-ecological environment for children's trilingual learning and support. For example, whether the three languages can be applied with certain niches in the society will for sure affect

language learning. In the remote rural areas, if English as L3 can be recognized by more families, the learning ecology of course will be bettered significantly. Besides the financial, cultural and educational involvement of the government in the ethnic regions, there must also be joint efforts from all parties in the trilingual education system to provide more external support. Therefore, all is considered, the strategic requirement of children’s trilingual education can be depicted in the following figure:

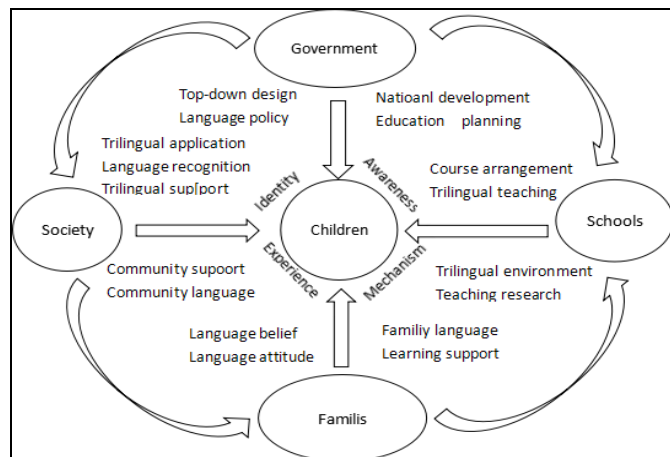


Fig 1: The ecological strategy of children’s trilingual education

As depicted in this figure, government, society, family, school and children together form the ecological system of children’s trilingual education which is dynamic, flexible and fluid in nature. All the factors in the system have a reciprocal influence between one another which can be either positive or negative without purposeful interference. That is, trilingual education of children would have many constraints from various aspects. The strategy of children’s trilingual education should therefore be built in line with the rules of the ecological system. As illustrated, it is clear that children’s trilingual ability must not be dependent merely on the school. Strategically, government plays a leading role that leads, governs other parties in the system. With governmental financial and administrative base, schools form the primary root for learning L2 and L3 and society must provide necessary support, like trilingual teaching and learning materials, teacher training platform and so on; families then affect children’s learning of the third language directly with the choice of family language and the attitudes towards learning L2 and L3. Finally, it is children themselves that determine learning L2 and L3 with their recognition of their social identity, awareness of trilingual advantages. Strategically, we must make sure that all the factors involved in trilingual education must be taken into full consideration to ensure all the elements can function effectively.

5. Possible ways to realize the strategy of children’s trilingual education ecologically

The whole strategy of children’s trilingual education must be implemented from an ecological perspective, emphasizing the education strategically. Then, there comes the requirement of reflecting and changing the traditional method and building a beneficiary ecological environment. Therefore, with the ecological quality of children’s learning of an L3 based on their L1 and L2 as stance, it requires that all the ecological factors

must be evaluated and integrated, from the government to schools, from the society to individual families, all having its ecological roles and forces.

5.1 Reform trilingual education planning based on the present condition

From a macro perspective of language ecology, the planning of children’s trilingual education must be in line with national security of language, the policy of language of the country, so it’s necessary to carry out reforms of the present policy of language education and make a top-down wholesome design of teaching L2 and L3 from a strategic stance. So far, there is not sufficient research on trilingual policy and language planning in China although there are papers focusing on teaching English as L3 in colleges. Therefore, the necessary policy, regulations and mechanism of trilingualism must be established as soon as possible to make a clear cut for L1, L2 and L3 in ethnic regions. There must be an easy access from L1 to L2, and from L2 to L3 accordingly which makes full use of the factors of government, society, schools and families based on the achievements already made. As the current policy demonstrates, we must first make sure that the ethnic language (L1) must be maintained, and based on that, promote the effective learning of Mandarin (L2), and on basis of that, cultivate children’s ability to use English (L3) so that children in ethnic areas can have the equal ability to get information from a wider range of the world.

For a more forward planning, there should be a medium-term or long-term planning and also a short-term planning. The medium-term or long-term planning aims at the future objectives and the short-term is mainly for the current changes. In the primary and middle schools, there must be the arrangement of the three languages at different stages and the content and time allotment should be varied accordingly. Considering language environment, national security of language and the rules of L3 acquisition, English as L3 should be arranged in formal teaching programs after Mandarin as L2 fully mastered. Before schooling and in primary school, L1, L2 should be regarded as the basic requirement. While at the advanced stages in primary school and middle schools, the weight of English as an L3 should be gradually increased. In the whole planning of trilingual education, in order to make teaching more effective, English teachers should notice the features of children’s language development in the specific regions. For example, in the first place, it’s help to understand what are the complex interaction among L1, L2 and L3 and how L1 and L2 influence learning L3. All in all, the government is expected to guide and lead the institutions of language and schools to form the strategic language policies for developing children’s trilingual ability based on national linguistic and cultural strategy so as to set a strong linguistic base for the future sustainable development of the region.

5.2 Promote formal trilingual teaching in schools

It’s obvious that learning a third language is mainly in the school in China and hence the core of ensuring children’s L3 ability lies in promoting learning and teaching in schools. With regard to the arrangement of learning the three languages, there are three points need to be noticed. First of all, there should be adaptable and effective trilingual courses in the school for learning L1, L2 and L3; second, there must be objective consideration of effective treatment of the relationship between the three languages; and third, adaptable environment for

learning and using the three languages in school must be constructed purposefully.

For formal teaching of the three languages, the weight of the courses of L1, L2 and L3 must be different in the kindergarten, the primary and middle schools, such as emphasizing phonetics, written form or communication of English at different stages in primary education. That is, the national language planning and course curriculums for L2 and L3 must be set with care respectively so that teaching and learning the three languages at school will be more suitable for the characteristics of children in the ethnic areas. In the primary and junior high school, L1, L2 and L3 can be arranged with a step-by-step strategy according to the language education planning and national curriculums for them, and a make-up strategy and evaluation mechanism must also be made for the future development. Because learning three languages would no doubt have more cognitive burden for students; trilingual teachers must probe into the nature of trilingual acquisition, arrange Mandarin and English language teaching appropriately, pay attention to linguistic transfer from L1, L2 to L3, so as to teach more effectively. In addition to the formal teaching consideration, schools should try to lower children's anxiety of learning and communicating in English as L3, build positive trilingual learning and communication environment based on the understanding of the reality of children's language affection, cognition. Besides, rich resources of learning English must also be provided to suit the regional characteristics. For instance, in the construction of campus culture, the three languages, especially English should be appealed to be applied more widely in the aspects like making the wall paper, board casting or trilingual knowledge competition, etc. so that students will have more chances to use the three languages, especially English and develop their trilingual ability in a natural route accordingly.

5.3 Reform the mechanism of trilingual teacher training

As Gibson Ferguson (2006)^[11] pointed out, one of the more reliable routes to improve trilingual teaching, then, may lie in revised and improved teacher education, retaining qualified trilingual English teacher is the biggest problems the ethnic regions are facing now. Different from other English teachers in mainland China, trilingual English teacher should not only have a good mastery of English, but also an overall understating of Mandarin and the ethnic language in order to teach English with a comparative effectiveness. In recent years, great achievements have been made in English teacher training in the west ethnic areas; however, compared with teachers in the developed areas at home and abroad, English teachers in the ethnic regions such as in Tibet, Xinjiang need improvement in teaching experiences, skills and knowledge. In the remote rural areas, quailed teachers of English as an L3 are especially far from sufficient. Researches show that there are many problems of the current English teachers in the west ethnic regions, for example, they are lack of mature experience, and the structure of their education background is not as expected. (Huang, 2013)^[12]. Therefore, from the reality of trilingual education in the west ethnic regions, local administrative departments and primary or middle schools should step up efforts of cultivating qualified trilingual teachers to form the base of trilingual education. While recruiting English teachers, it is necessary to employ those who know not only English, but also Mandarin and the ethnic language.

However, due to the remote geographical region and backward economy, these areas cannot attract qualified English teachers from other regions, so it's essential to recruit and develop teachers of the ethnic regions. In such a sense, it's better to form some special organization to carry out and promote trilingual teacher development. Currently, there are many training programs like "the national training programs for primary and middle school teachers" and "provincial training programs for primary and middle school teachers" which have played an important role in English teachers' professional development in the ethnic areas. For the strategic consideration of regional sustainable development, these programs should exert more influences on trilingual teacher development which especially emphasizes teaching English as a third language. Besides, the programs of "Classes preparing talents for Tibet" and "Classes preparing talents for Xinjiang" have contributed greatly to the storing of talents for those areas as mentioned; these programs can also have its unique roles in preparing teachers who know both Mandarin and English in addition to their mother tongue, the ethnic language. Meanwhile, local government of west ethnic regions should make beneficiary policies to attract more excellent trilingual teachers or volunteers who can work at least for several years in the ethnic regions.

5.4 Construct trilingual learning materials with the cooperation of the whole society

Compared with English learning and teaching in other areas in China, English teaching and learning in the west ethnic regions are especially lack of suitable materials as the unified course books are away from the actual life of people there. For example, the topic of one section in primary English is "discussing eating junk food like ham and fried chicken", but many of the students in the rural areas have never seen what ham or fried chicken is like; even for those who once have chance to taste it, it would be delicious. How could they carry out such a discussion? Hence, finding suitable teaching materials for students in the ethnic areas becomes an urgent task for English teachers and the authority. The government should invest in the formation of suitable course books and guide other social power such as the publishing house, research institute and universities to join in the construction of trilingual teaching and learning materials. At present, some learning and teaching materials have already been made, such as the publishing of "A small Mandarin-Tibetan-English dictionary, "Daily English (Uygur language)". These materials provide much help for teaching English for children and adults in those ethnic regions. The education department of the local government, therefore, should organize qualified teachers and researchers to compile more suitable course books of English, including not only the necessary English culture, but also the life of the ethnic areas, the typical culture of the nation, customs and scenery of the areas which can raise students' interest and national awareness. At present, in an "internet+" period, all the possible digital channels such as the internet, mobile phones can be utilized and designers and users work together to create the resources that are potentially available with multi modal means (Underwood, J. et. al, 2012)^[15]. For example, teachers of a school, all the parents, the related social institutions and so on can cooperate to provide more materials, design and data to build a school-based trilingual learning "bank" where children can get sufficient materials or information of learning English, Mandarin and their mother tongue.

5.5 Build a harmonious social language environment with positive guidance

Trilingualism and multilingualism present characteristics different from bilingualism at the individual, sociolinguistic, and educational levels. (Cenoz, J. & Gorter, D., 2005) [1]. Ecologically, children's learning of the three languages, the time and space of using the three languages form the basic ecological field. From the space factors, the language environment of learning English includes the school, society and family. In many stronghold areas of the ethnic people, children's mother tongue and languages of other nations such as Mandarin and Kazakh can co-exist and be used in the communication alternatively. And due to the different language habit, mode of communication, the society, families would have different attitude to the choice of daily communication language. This, of course, makes communication in the society to be multilingual oriented and will have direct influences on children's learning of L2 and L3. Given that English as a foreign language has not been emphasized so far, it would be especially crucial to construct a harmonious learning environment of learning and applying the three languages in the long run.

Starting from an ecological perspective, there are three dimensions to be considered to build a harmonious multilingual environment. In the first place, for the ecological balance of language use, with the prerequisite of maintaining the variety of languages in the ethnic regions, it is necessary to provide more chances of using L2 and L3 in the society. For example, the major professions in the society, like broad casting, TV, internet, business, tourism and AD, should persist in using three languages to create a multi-modal environment in which the graphs, sounds and pictures are combined for the promotion of trilingualism so that children will have more opportunities to contact the three languages and form the necessary language awareness. For example, a trilingual online platform of shopping (in Mandarin, Uygur language and English) was built in Xinjiang in 2014, making a modal environment of trilingualism. Second, attitudes towards L2 and L3 in the family and the community will also have great influence upon children's leaning of English. An obvious case is that learning English in the urban areas are more emphasized than in rural areas because Mandarin and English are more frequently used in the daily life and are welcomed by people in the city than in the country. Therefore, it is important to ensure that family members have a positive attitude toward children's learning of English as an L3 based on their mastery of Mandarin as L2 because trilingual ability will affect their future success to a large extent.

In addition, children were exposed in the community language environment just when they were born and this environment would soon substitute the family to become the most important ecological environment for them to contact and acquire languages. Consequently, the ethnic regions should emphasize and guide those cultural and linguistic activities in the communities for a better ecological environment of trilingual education, for example, sponsor some trilingual parties or related entertainment in the neighborhood, or send messages in the three languages publicly to individuals to pave the way for Mandarin and English learning and application in the communities and villages. As a result, a beneficiary ecological environment that tolerates, accepts and supports trilingualism can be formed gradually.

6. Conclusion

Multilingual education is an important channel to realize social fairness and national unity for one country; while children's trilingual ability will for sure be decisive for the development of the society and economy for the west ethnic regions of China from a sustainable perspective. To enhance the development of these regions, it is necessary to take good opportunities of this strategic stage of children's trilingual education, setting a sound base for their future development. From an ecological perspective, the development of the economy, cultural exchange, language planning, individual families and the social language environment will all have influence on the implementation of children's trilingual education from different aspects, and therefore, there must be joint efforts among the governments at all levels, the society and schools to form a sustainable ecological strategy for children's trilingual development. On the one hand, the government is responsible for the macro planning and administrative work, guiding the society and families to construct an ecological environment for trilingualism and its education to ensure a good commend of mandarin or bilingualism, and on the basis of which, develop children's English ability; On the other hand, as the main battlefield of formal trilingual teaching, local educational department, research institution and schools should cooperate purposefully and work out effective teaching modals and learning strategies based on the national curriculum and the rules of the acquisition of L3. Only in so doing, by combing both the micro and macro aspects of trilingual education can we make sure that children in the west ethnic regions will not lose opportunity at the starting line, and make a solid foundation of educational and social fairness for the present and the future.

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