

THE PLACE OF CHINESE LANGUAGE IN GLOBALIZATION ORDER

Dr. Ifeanyi Sunny Odinye

Department of Chinese Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: is.odinye@unizik.edu.ng

&

Dr. Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye

Department of Chinese Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: ie.odinye@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

The Chinese language belongs to a separate branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. It has many dialect groups which include Mandarin, Wu, Min, Cantonese, Hsiang, and Hakka. The standard variety of Chinese is Mandarin Chinese, popularly called 'Putonghua' literally meaning 'common speech'. 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. English language was promoted in 19th and 20th centuries by Britain and United States. In 21st century, China is seriously promoting Chinese language to contend with the English language. This study is aimed at the promotion of Chinese language in the present globalization order. This research adopts a qualitative research method and secondary source for data collection. This study concludes in agreement with Zheng (2019) that the promotion of Chinese language (and culture) learning by Confucius Institute has been successful in creating a positive image of China and attracting learners despite the challenges and criticisms. The researchers see Mandarin Chinese as the language of the 21st century and recommend it to all and sundry.

Keywords: China, Chinese language, Confucius Institute, globalization

Introduction

The word "China" is derived from *Cin*, a Persian name for China popularized in medieval Europe by the account of 13th century Venetian explorer Marco Polo. The Persian word, *Cin*, is derived from Sanskrit word *Cina*, which was used as a name for China as early as AD 150. The first recorded use in English dates back to 1555. China is called "中国 *Zhongguo*" in Chinese, literally meaning "middle kingdom". China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), is the world most populous country, with a population of over 1.3 billion. It is a single-party state governed by the Communist Party of China. China has 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 directly controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing), and 2 mostly self-governing special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau). There is still controversy over Taiwan, though China sees it as its 23rd province but it is governed by separate political entity, Republic of Taiwan. The current president of China, Xi Jinping, was elected on 14th March 2013.

Chinese people celebrate October 1 as a National Day in honour of the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. China has 56 recognized ethnic groups but 91.6% of Chinese people are from Han ethnic group. The non-Han population

includes 55 ethnic minorities, of which are listed according to the population (from largest to smallest) Zhuang, Hui, Manchu, Uygur, Miao, Yi, Tujia, Tibet, Mongol, Dong, Bouyei, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazakh, Dai, She, Lisu, Dongxiang, Gelao, Lahu, Va, Sui, Nakhi, Qiang, Tu, Mulao, Xibe, Kyrgyz, Jingpo, Daur, Salar, Blang, Maonan, Tajik, Pumi, Achang, Nu, Ewenki, Gin, Jino, De'ang, Bonan, Russian, Yugur, Uzbek, Monba, Oroqen, Derung, Hezhen, Gaoshan, Lhoba, Tatar. China has many languages but adopts only one language as standard language, Mandarin, which is also called “*Putonghua*” (Odinye, 2013).

China has a long recorded history which dates back to 1600BC. Among the elements that characterize Chinese history are the consistent rise and fall dynasties, intermittent aggression from northern aliens, varying degrees of openness to the outside world, Cultural Revolution, invasions from other countries, opium war and the rest. Chinese history can be summarized in four parts: pre-history, ancient era, imperial era, and modern era. What is now China was inhabited by *Homo erectus* more than a million years ago (Zhu et al, 2003).

The early history of China is obscured by the lack of written documents from this period, coupled with the existence of later accounts that attempted to describe events that had occurred several centuries previously. The Xia Dynasty of China (from c. 2100 to c. 1600 BC) is the first dynasty to be described in ancient historical records. Historians often refer to the period from Qin Dynasty to the end of Qing Dynasty as Imperial China. The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) was the last imperial dynasty in China. The early 1900s saw increasing civil disorder in China. The Xinhai Revolution in 1911 overthrew the Qing's imperial rule. A revolutionary military uprising, the Wuchang Uprising, began on October 1911, in Wuhan.

The Republic of China was formed in Nanjing on 12 March 1912. Sun Yat-sen was made the President of Republic of China. After Sun's death in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek, seized control of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party or KMT) and succeeded in bringing most of south and central China under its rule in a military campaign known as the Northern Expedition (1926-1927). The power tussle ended in a civil war known as Chinese Civil War in 1949 with Kuomintang (KMT) pulling out of the mainland, with the government relocating from Nanjing to Taipei and maintaining control only over a few islands. The Communist Party of China was left in control of mainland China. Mao Zedong, on 1 October 1949, proclaimed the People's Republic of China. Henceforth, China here stands for People's Republic of China.

Chinese Language

Chinese (simplified Chinese: 汉语; traditional Chinese: 漢語; pinyin: *Hànyǔ* or also 中文; *Zhōngwén*, especially for the written language) is a group of language varieties that form the Sinitic branch of the Sino-Tibetan languages, spoken by the ethnic Han Chinese majority and many minority ethnic groups in Greater China. About 1.3 billion people (or approximately 16% of the world's population) speak a variety of Chinese as their first language. The Chinese language belongs to a separate branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is a contour tone language. It has many dialect groups. They include Mandarin, Wu, Min, Cantonese, Hsiang, Hakka. Each of these

could be said to comprise many varieties. In their spoken forms almost all of the so-called dialects are mutually unintelligible. We have earlier said that Mandarin is the most widely spoken of all the other dialect groups. It is, in fact, “a large and very diverse group of Chinese dialects spoken across northern and southwestern China” (Wikipedia).

The standard variety of Chinese is Mandarin Chinese, popularly called ‘Putonghua’ literally meaning ‘common speech’. It was in 1955 that the Chinese government officially established Mandarin Chinese, based on the northern dialect, as the standard spoken form of modern Chinese. About 900 million people that constitute almost three quarters of Chinese speakers speak Mandarin. It is mostly based on the pronunciation of Chinese speakers of Beijing (Katzner, 2002).

Chinese is written with many characters numbering from between 5,000 to 50,000. These distinctive characters are called ideographs. To draw a character, one may need as few as 2 strokes or as many as 33 strokes. Although several attempts have been made to simplify the Chinese characters and possibly device a Chinese alphabet based on the Roman script. In order to provide phonetic notation for Chinese characters and to facilitate the consultation of dictionaries, phonologists drafted the ‘Scheme for the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet’, and in 1958 the Chinese government passed an act to promote the application of this scheme, commonly known as the pinyin (arranged sounds) system. Pinyin adopts the Latin alphabet... [and] is now widely used for the study of Chinese language, and has aided the popularization of standard Chinese (Schmidt, 2004).

Globalization

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).

The term ‘globalization’ has in recent times been described as both a misnomer and a euphemism. It is universally acknowledged that globalization requires as well as produces new channels, networks and practices of communication which are not dependent on geographical proximity (Toolan, 2000). By a strange paradox, these channels, networks and practices of communication depend heavily on language, yet language still remains a relatively neglected aspect of current scholarly and politically debate on globalization (Odinye & Odinye, 2010^a).

Scholars from various disciplines such as sociology, political science and history have perceived globalization differently and have tried to define it from various angles. Globalization increases cross border flow of goods, services, money, people, information and culture. We also find common concepts like mutual interdependence, exchange and sharing of the communication around the world in all aspects such as social, economic, cultural and even linguistic aspects. Our concern here is in relation to culture. Culturally speaking, globalization is the emergence of different cultural beliefs that are common cross-culturally and across national boundaries. The global communication leads to some extent functional homogenization of culture and language. These two aspects namely, homogenization of culture and homogenization of language, are particularly relevant for translating globalization as a reality (Odinye & Odinye, 2010^b).

Globalization no doubt is producing new ways of not only the role played in language. Linguists are expected to be concerned with not only the role played in globalization processes by language, but also the effects of globalization process on language. The growing awareness of the challenge that globalization poses to language has moved scholars around the world, from the socio-linguistic standpoint, ask many of the same questions that dominate discussion on globalization in other areas. Prominent among these questions is the issue of linguistic diversity. Scholars are beginning to wonder whether globalization means ‘Englishization’ for example or whether it is more likely to lead to an increase in individual and societal multilingualism, and the preservation or revival of currently ‘endangered’ languages (Crystal 1997, 2000 as cited in Odinye & Odinye, 2010^a).

Globalization has, however, acted solely to homogenize language and promote use of English. We also find example of heightened political activity to gain recognition of, and to generally promote regional languages like Scots, Gaelic, Welsh, Catalan and Kurdish. Most of these movements have not identified their adversary as globalization per se (or for that matter, English when used as an international lingua franca), but rather the dominant language of the dominant national culture, like for example, Turkish in Turkey (Odinye & Odinye, 2010^a).

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.

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 (Odinye, 2015).

The negative impact of globalization on multilingualism is a more visible phenomenon. According to Wurm (1995:67), it has been predicted that by the end of the 21st century, some 90% of languages spoken today may disappear. Montviloff (2002:87) warns that with the introduction of multimedia technologies of communication, this phenomenon is increasing exponentially. He describes each of the 6,700 languages spoken today as a reflection of traditions, thoughts and cultures all unique in their essence. Any loss of language is a disappearance of a pool of knowledge and an impoverishment of our cultural heritage and research capacities.

Chinese Language in Globalization Order

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 with a serious contender. In 21st century, China is seriously promoting Chinese language, and it is now contending with the English language. In agreement, 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.

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.

Promotion of Chinese Language: Confucius Institute

The rise of China has given birth to the promotion of Chinese language and culture abroad. Recently, culture has increasingly become a pillar in Chinese diplomacy. The main vehicle of promoting Chinese language and culture internationally is the Confucius Institute. Confucius Institutes are non-profit governmental educational cooperation between universities and colleges in China and universities and colleges in other countries whose aim is to promote Chinese language and culture. (Odinye, 2020).

In order to meet the demand of learning Chinese language around the world, Hanban is committed to providing Chinese language and culture teaching resources and services worldwide. It goes all out in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world. According to Hanban's website:

As China's economy and exchanges with the world have seen rapid growth, there has been a sharp increase in the world's demands for Chinese learning. Benefiting from the UK, France, Germany and Spain's experience in promoting their national languages, China began its own exploration through establishing nonprofit public institutions which aim to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries in 2004: these were given the name Confucius Institute.

Although Hanban claims to model Confucius Institute after Britain's British Council, France's Alliance Francaise, Germany's Goethe-Institut and Spain's Instituto Cervante but many scholars do not accept the claim. Mosher (2012) notes, "Unlike Alliance Francaise, the Confucius Institutes are not independent from their government; unlike the Goethe-institut establishments, they do not occupy their own premises. Instead, participating universities agree to provide office space in exchange for funding, and to cede academic control to the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party". According to Zheng (2019), "Confucius Institute is governmental and not independent from the Chinese government, yet Goethe Institute and British Council are in figure under Non/Quasi-governmental organizations. In this sense, Confucius Institute cannot be comparable to neither the Goethe Institute nor British Council, despite what Hanban has assured". According to Paradise (2009:648), "the Confucius Institute project can be seen at one level as an attempt to increase Chinese language learning and an appreciation of Chinese culture, but at another level it is part of a broader soft power projection in which China is attempting to win hearts and minds for political purposes". Pan (2013) argues that the Confucius Institute project can be understood as a form of cultural diplomacy that is state-sponsored and university-piloted, a joint effort to gain China a more sympathetic global reception. The Confucius Institution project involves a complex of soft power techniques. However, it is not entirely representative of soft power capability, because the problems embedded in the

project and in the wider society run counter to the Chinese government's efforts to increase the Confucius Institutions' attractiveness and popularity.

Conclusion

There will always be naysayers and critics. This study agrees with Zheng (2019) that the promotion of Chinese language (and culture) learning by Confucius Institute has been successful in creating a positive image of China and attracting learners despite the challenges and criticisms. The rise of China is good news to many people and equally bad news to others. The rise of China has brought progress and opportunities to many people and countries around the world. Because of the rise of China, Chinese language (Mandarin) will continue to spread around the world. 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 dependent on the Chinese government to promote the Mandarin Chinese language and the willingness of the foreigners to learn the language. It is important to say that Chinese government is not forcing her language on other people or nations rather other people or nations are willing to learn Chinese language in order to communicate with Chinese people freely.

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