

Study on Language Acquisition Strategies and Language Diversity Protection Approaches of Minority Students in Yunnan Minzu University

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Abstract: This paper takes the minority students of Yunnan Minzu University as the research object, and discusses the strategies they adopt in the process of acquiring their native language and their impact on the protection of language diversity. Through questionnaire survey and interview, the research finds that students mainly adopt cultural awareness cultivation, language learning environment, productive strategy, receptive strategy and so on in language acquisition. Based on the theory of linguistic ecology, this paper analyzes the application of these strategies in multilingual environment and their positive effects on the inheritance and development of minority languages. The findings highlight the importance of effective language policy formulation and implementation for the protection of linguistic diversity in the context of globalization, and provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for the harmonious development of multilingual societies.

Keywords: Language acquisition strategies; Language diversity; Inheritance of minority languages; The ecology of language

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1. Introduction

There are currently over 7,000 languages in the world. Some languages, such as English, are becoming increasingly important, while others are declining, and some are even on the brink of extinction, e.g. Atsugewi (an indigenous language of northern California, USA) (Grenier and Liu, 2018).^[1] Many countries generally recognize that linguistic diversity is an indisputable fact of life worldwide, and have therefore paid early attention to and implemented policies for the protection of minority languages. In the context of globalization, the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity is of paramount importance for the development of societies.

China is a multi-ethnic country with rich minority cultures, among which the diversity of ethnic minorities and their languages in Yunnan is particularly remarkable. This paper takes ethnic minority languages in China as an example, and students from different ethnic groups, majors, grades and regions in Yunnan Minzu University as research objects. Through questionnaire survey and interview, this paper discusses the acquisition strategies and use status of ethnic minority students' ethnic languages, so as to better preserve the crystallization of working people's wisdom and promote the diversity of Chinese ethnic languages.

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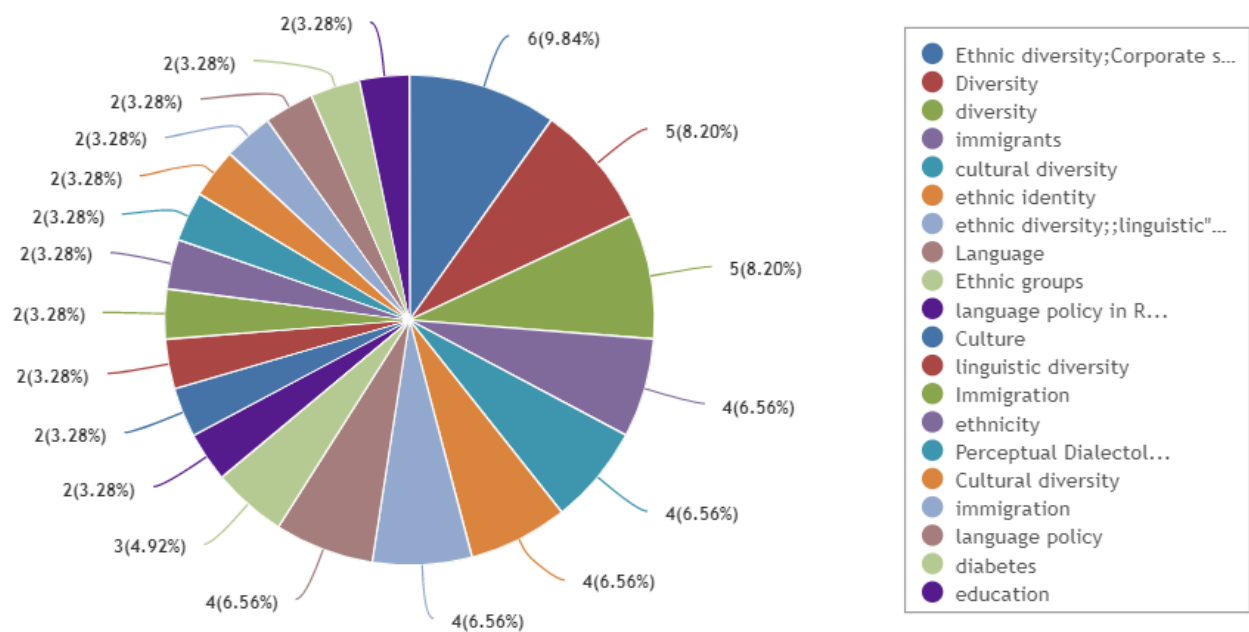
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2. Literature Review

Scholars like Luo and Tan(2024) have long been committed to studying certain aspects of diversity such as the diversity of birthplace, ethnic diversity, demographic diversity, and cultural diversity. As one of the dimensions of linguistic diversity, dialectal diversity is defined as a country or region having a variety of languages with regional characteristics.^[2] Of all the national characteristics, language is the most stable and the slowest to change. However, under the background of modernization, due to the influence of the gradual convergence of world economic life, the diversity of people’s linguistic life has been greatly challenged(Tan, 2005).^[3]

Compared to domestic China, research on minority languages and their diversity is relatively scarce abroad, especially about Yunnan’s ethnic group language diversity, which are mainly about language diversity relating to their own regions and country or applying linguistic diversity to medical research. As shown in the following picture.



While in China, research results on minority language diversity are also fewer, focusing on the protection of ethnic language, language policy, language using and so on.

There is an article focusing on minority communities in Yunnan Province that explores language ecology, including language use, language transfer and language preservation, to understand language change and maintenance in multilingual environments through the framework of language ecology theory, which emphasizes the importance of the environment in multilingual coexistence (Yu, 2024)^[4]. The article’s findings emphasize that the maintenance and transfer of minority languages in multilingual environments is a complex sociolinguistic process that is influenced by a variety of factors, including language attitudes, preferences, socioeconomic factors, and language policies (Yu, 2024)^[4]. There are also articles on minority language education (Xu and Wang, 2020)^[5].

All in all, the literature mentioned above provide an in-depth understanding of linguistic diversity in China and its impact on innovation, language ecology, and education, and highlights the importance of effective language policy formulation and implementation in a multilingual environment. These studies not only enhance the understanding of the complexity of linguistic diversity, but also provide a scientific basis for relevant policies

that can help promote the preservation and rational use of linguistic resources, as well as the harmonious development of multilingual societies.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper uses the ecology of language to investigate the use of language in ethnic minority families. The Ecology of Language, which originated in Haugen's (2001)^[6] *The Ecology of Language*, studies the interaction between language and the environment (both social and cognitive), with a particular focus on the status, diversity, survival and development of language, the ontology of language. Linguistic ecology has been applied to a variety of analyses, including discourse analysis, grammatical analysis, linguistic evolution, and linguistic diversity. Linguistic ecology refers to linguistic ecology as an ecosystem, emphasizing the importance of the environment in which multiple languages coexist.^[4] Languages are seen as dynamically coexisting in certain geographical or social locations, and linguistic ecology is conceptualized as a metaphor that can be applied to them.

This aids in our comprehension of language change and maintenance in a multilingual environment (Yu, Ng and Mamat, 2024).^[4] Apart from this, it will guide the readers to appreciate language diversity with the perspective of language ecology. Therefore, The relationship between linguistic ecology and linguistic diversity is interdependent and influential. The ecology of language provides a framework for understanding and preserving linguistic diversity while emphasizing the complex interactions between language and the environment. Through this perspective, we can better understand how language develops and changes on a social and ecological level.

4. Case Analysis

This research found 4 strategies among 27 ethnic groups to maintain their language. They are cultivation of cultural awareness, language learning environment, productive strategy including visual assisted language learning strategies and phonetic improvement strategy, as well as receptive strategy including maintaining the simple language use and narrative reading method.

(1) Cultivation of cultural awareness

Cultural awareness is the acceptability of culture reflected in the use of language in communication, including history, geography, local customs, lifestyle, literature, art, ideology and other categories. In the process of language learning, in order to master and speak a language effectively, learners need to understand and integrate into the culture behind the language. This process of integration and understanding is essentially a kind of strategic learning and adaptation. Therefore, the cultivation of cultural awareness, through increasing the understanding and respect of the target culture, enables learners to use the language in a wider context, thus improving the effect of language learning and practical application ability.

After sorting out the interview data, we found that only 2 out of 60 students argue that the cultivation of cultural awareness plays a very important role in their language learning process. For example, an interviewee maintained that her family members deepened her understanding of Jingpo culture, such as their festivals, history and son on, so as to better master the Jingpo dialect by teaching the cultural knowledge of Jingpo.

"In my family, there is a strong emphasis on preserving and passing down the rich heritage of the Jingpo culture. By sharing with me the intricacies of Jingpo cultural knowledge and traditions, they are not only educating me about my roots but also equipping me with the tools to communicate in the Jingpo dialect more effectively. This familial education is crucial for me to connect with my ancestry and to express myself in a way

that is authentic to my ethnic identity. It's more than just learning a language; it's about embracing a whole way of life and a worldview that has been shaped by generations of Jingpo people."

[Zhang Hua of Jingpo ethnicity, female]

This example shows the importance of cultural identity and the value of language as a key component of it. If a family and even a society can respect and protect one or more languages, it is easier to promote understanding and respect among people of different cultural backgrounds, thus enhancing social cohesion and harmony. Protecting linguistic diversity helps to preserve the unique cultures and knowledge that those languages carry, which is essential for the preservation of cultural diversity worldwide.

(2) Language learning environment

As a language learning strategy, language environment refers to a series of actions and skills that learners use the surrounding language use situation to promote language learning and mastery. This strategy recognizes that language is not just a set of abstract rules and words, but is used and understood in a specific social and cultural context. According to the interview, language environment can be roughly divided into three types, namely, **family environment, school environment or community environment.**

Firstly, family is the first environment for individual language learning. Parents' words, deeds and the influence of family atmosphere have a profound impact on individual language habits and expression ability. The quality of family life, the socioeconomic conditions of the family, such as the number and variety of books and toys, have a direct relationship to children's language development.

For example, 2 interviewees all maintained that family language environment plays a very irreplaceable role in language learning, which is immersive and natural for them, including daily communication with their own first language with imitation and repetition.

"Immersive learning environment: Try to create a full-language environment, such as frequent communication in the target language at home, and natural contact and acquisition of the language in daily life. Use my own language, Blng as an example, such as using some onomatopoeia words, so that I can imitate and learn."

[Yu Zhangkan of Blang nationality, female]

"In the process of my learning Chinese or Jingpo, my parents did not say that they taught me in any special way, because Jingpo is my first language, since I can remember, I have been listening to them speak Jingpo, and then I learned it myself under the influence of the environment, and in my family, my parents are two different branches of Jingpo nationality. Therefore, I can speak three branch languages, and the most important thing to learn these languages is to be affected by the environment, and people around me have been speaking and listening to themselves. When I learn Chinese, I am also influenced by the environment and some guidance from my parents. They will intersperse some simple Chinese communication with me in daily communication, such as hello, thank you and so on."

[Wang Li of Jingpo nationality, female]

These two examples highlight the importance of the home environment in language diversity learning and how individuals can acquire multiple languages through the immersive influence of the home language environment. They emphasize the importance of environment to language learning and how growing up in a multilingual home naturally promotes the acquisition of multiple languages, thereby enhancing an individual's linguistic diversity and intercultural communication skills.

Secondly, the school provides a systematic linguistic science program, including grammar, vocabulary, listening, writing and other aspects of training. Teachers are facilitators of language learning who help students master the language through professional teaching methods and techniques.

For example, one interviewee mentioned that her parents didn't specifically teach language. At that time, in rural schools, teachers often taught in dialects. For example, the interviewee's Taiping dialect was learned in the process of school. At that time, in rural schools, teachers often taught in dialects.

"When I was a little girl, when I first started learning languages, my mother tended to teach me to speak Mandarin, and then I went to junior high school, because I went to junior high school in the countryside, so the teachers there often taught me in dialects, so I learned a lot of dialects, and then I often used Taiping dialect when I communicated with them. Then my mother was not very important to communicate with me in Mandarin at the beginning, nor did she have to communicate with me in Mandarin, but she often used dialects."

[Wang Xueyou of Tujia nationality, female]

This example presents that the implementation of mother-tongue based language education can improve access to and inclusion in education, especially for people who speak non-dominant, minority and indigenous languages. Such educational policies help increase classroom participation and student retention, and encourage families and communities to participate in education together. It also shows the place of dialects in linguistic diversity, which is an important carrier of cultural diversity. By learning dialects in school, individuals are exposed to the diversity of languages and are able to use and pass on these linguistic resources in practical communication.

Thirdly, the linguistic landscape of a community is frequently characterized by a diversity of languages and dialects. This diversity requires the community to show inclusiveness in the use of language, respect and accept different language habits and cultural characteristics, and also provide a broader platform for people to learn language.

For example, one interviewee stated that because parents have no time to pay attention to their own learning, they are more influenced by the community in the process of learning the language.

"Although my parents were poorly educated and spent most of their time working for the family, they had little time to pay attention to my studies, but I still acquired the language through self-study in a community environment. People in my hometown speak the local dialect, so over time, I learned it myself."

[Zhang Xin of Man nationality, female]

This example highlights the important role of communities in the preservation and transmission of linguistic diversity, and the impact of community environments on individual language learning, especially dialect learning. Communities are not only provide a natural place for language learning, but also facilitate the connection and spread of language through social networks, so social networks in the community can help learners make connections of language.

(3) Productive strategy

From the perspective of language learning strategies, productive strategy refers to a series of actions and skills that learners take to improve their language output ability (C.T and Ilankumaran, 2022)^[7] Huang (2009) stated that these strategies focus on helping learners express their ideas, emotions, and information more effectively in spoken and written language.^[8] Productive strategies are an integral part of language learning because they involve the actual use of language and the development of communicative skills (Huang, 2009).^[8] The purpose of productive strategies is to help learners transition from understanding language (comprehension skills) to using language effectively (productive skills), which is a key step in achieving communicative competence in a second or foreign language. Here mainly includes **visual assisted language learning strategies including showing pictures and videos as well as phonetic improvement strategy.**

3 out of 60 students state that in the process of language learning, productive strategies are used more often.

Firstly, visual assisted language learning strategies are important, like show pictures and videos, which can provide an intuitive sense of emotional expression to facilitate smooth language acquisition (Carney and Levin, 2002).^[9] It usually refers to those that directly help learners construct and directly influence the development of the language systems they learn. It facilitates language learning by incorporating visual materials such as pictures and videos. Pictures and videos and language can complement each other.

For example, one interviewee mentioned that in the process of language learning, her family would show her things such as clothes and festivals, and watch related videos together. In this visual impact of interaction with her family, she eventually acquired language.

"My family would show me things with elements of Naxi culture, such as traditional costumes, traditional festivals, etc., and teach me the corresponding Naxi language. Or let me watch some Naxi videos, such as *Let's Learn Naxi and Dongba*."

[He Yan of Naxi nationality, female]

This example demonstrates the importance of visual assisted language learning. Language learning strategies are defined as "strategies that help learners construct themselves and directly influence the development of the language systems they learn", which is in line with the purpose and function of visual assistive language learning strategies. Visual assisted language learning strategies help preserve and preserve endangered languages and cultures. For example, Naxi language, as one of China's minority languages, can deepen the understanding of Naxi language and its culture by displaying Naxi cultural elements and watching related videos, thus promoting the protection of linguistic diversity.

Secondly, there is another strategy called phonetic improvement strategy. That is a language learning strategy to correct pronunciation. It focuses on improving learners' pronunciation accuracy, ensuring that they are able to pronounce the phonemes and words of the target language correctly.

For example, one interviewee mentioned due to the influence of dialects, sometimes the pronunciation of Mandarin may not be standard. Therefore, her family and teachers will correct her pronunciation and intonation in the process of language learning to promote her language learning.

"When I was young, I began to speak dialects, and later learned Mandarin. However, due to the influence of dialect pronunciation, my Mandarin is sometimes not standard, so at home my family will let me learn Mandarin well, at school, the teacher will also correct my pronunciation when I speak inaccurate, such as front and back nasal and so on, and then my Mandarin will become better."

[Ma Yurong of Hui nationality, female]

This example presents pronunciation correction is an important strategy in language learning, and it has many meanings for language learners, which relates to communication efficiency, language accuracy, language naturalness, language confidence and so on. Pronunciation correction strategies help to maintain the purity and vitality of language, avoid language homogenization, and maintain the health of language ecology. Through this strategy, we can better understand and respect the uniqueness of each language and together promote a diverse and inclusive linguistic world.

To sum up, the production-oriented strategy has significant advantages in language learning, which can improve the language ability, learning ability and comprehensive quality of beginners, and also provide new teaching strategies for parents or teachers. Both strategies emphasize the initiative and autonomy of learners in the language learning process, as well as the applicability and transferability of strategies in different learning situations.

(4) Receptive strategy

Receptive strategy, from the perspective of language learning, refers to the approaches and techniques that

learners use to comprehend or understand language input when they hear or read it (Huang, 2009).^[8] These strategies are essential for learners to process and interpret the meaning of spoken or written language forms. In essence, receptive strategies are the learner's active attempts to make sense of the language they are exposed to, rather than producing it themselves.^[8] It includes two sorts, one is **maintaining the simple language use**, the other is **narrative reading method**.

7 out of 60 students believe that maintaining the simple language use is useful for them to learn language. Using simple language and vocabulary helps learners understand and absorb information more quickly, especially for beginners, which reduces cognitive load and allows them to focus more on the basic structure and meaning of the language.

For example, one interviewee maintained that her parents would start by teaching her simple vocabulary, such as simple expressions about three meals a day in daily life, so that she can slowly acquire the first language and set up her own language system.

"My mother has consciously asked me to learn the first language in recent years, because they think the first language may be good for me in the future, that is, our national language. In daily life, my mother would ask me to use my native language to express some simple things in life, such as bowls, chopsticks, eating, these relatively basic words. In daily life, she would also use my native language to communicate with me, and then let me try to speak out in my native language to conduct a kind of answer test."

[Zhao Yilian of Achang nationality, female]

This example shows that for language learners, using simple language can boost their self-confidence. When they can communicate effectively with simple words and sentences, they are more likely to remember and recall and more quickly establish connections between vocabulary and grammatical structures, thus improving the efficiency of language memory.

In addition to this, 5 out of 60 students state that their parents will tell stories and read books for them to learn language, a method we call narrative reading here. Narrative reading is a language learning strategy that combines the interactivity and creativity of storytelling with the systematicness and knowledge of reading (Riessman, 2005).^[10] This approach encourages learners to read to obtain the content of the story and then practice and improve their language skills by retelling, adapting, or creating the story.

In terms of narrative reading method, it can stimulate the imagination and encourage the learners to use the language creatively, which is very beneficial to the flexible use of language and the cultivation of creative thinking (Riessman, 2005).^[10]

For example, one interviewee stated that her family uses a strategy of conscious language guidance: storytelling. And then guide her to read this storey and retell it, so as to improve her language organization and expression skills. She thinks it's an interesting and meaningful process.

"When I was young, my mother insisted on communicating with me in Kazakh, and often told me stories, asked me to read more books, and encouraged me to retell the stories, so as to improve my language expression ability and vocabulary. This conscious interactive strategy effectively promoted my mastery and use of Kazakh. Whenever I wanted to express my ideas, my dad would patiently listen to me in Kazakh, and even if I didn't make sense sometimes, he would encourage me to keep trying and correct my wording."

[Sen Bati of Kazakh nationality, female]

This example presents that storytelling requires learners to organize language and express thoughts and emotions, which is very helpful for improving oral and written communication skills. And the rich vocabulary and expressions used in the stories can help learners expand their vocabulary. By retelling or rewriting stories,

learners can practice different language structures and tenses. The combination is not only enhances learners' language skills, but also promotes their awareness and appreciation of linguistic diversity. In this way, learners are able to improve their language skills in a fun and productive environment.

To sum up, by applying these two strategies, learners can achieve balanced development in listening, speaking, reading and writing, so as to master and use the language more effectively.

5. Conclusion

This study explores in depth the strategies adopted by ethnic minority students in the language acquisition process of Yunnan Minzu University and their impact on the protection of language diversity. It is found that language acquisition strategies, such as cultural awareness cultivation, language learning environment, productive strategy and receptive strategy play a crucial role in the inheritance and development of minority languages.

In the context of the continuous impact of globalization on language ecology, these language acquisition strategies not only improve students' language ability, but also enhance their cultural identity and social cohesion. While mastering their own language, students are also able to better understand and respect other languages and cultures, which promotes the communication and integration between different ethnic groups and provides strong support for the construction of a harmonious multilingual society. Therefore, inheritance is the best protection. Through effective language acquisition strategies, we can better protect and inherit minority languages, make them shine in the long river of history, and make important contributions to the diversity and richness of human culture. This study provides a valuable reference for policy makers and educators, and also points out the direction for the inheritance and protection of ethnic minority languages. Let us work together to safeguard this precious linguistic and cultural heritage and make it shine more brightly in the new era.

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