

# Paths of Language Vitality Construction in College Public Foreign Language Teaching

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**Abstract :** Through the literature review, interviews, case studies, classroom observation and questionnaires, this paper focuses on the vitality of target language in public foreign language teaching, identifies the critical variables that are positive to the vitality of target language to design in-and-after-class learning activities with oriented goal to change the ecological index of language learning environment and eventually finds out the possible paths to enhance language vitality.

**Keywords :** Language Vitality; Language Learning; Oriented Activity

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## 1. Introduction

In Chinese colleges, public foreign language teaching and learning has an ultimate goal to serve course studying and professional training in majors. In order to strengthen the vitality of the target language in the non-native environment, some teaching activities with incentive mechanism are designed. And the information about language policies and tests as well as the real cases that practitioners benefit from language learning are provided while teaching. Such interventions are given deliberately to change the target language learning ecology and the changes have a positive impact on language attitude, the increasing opportunities of target language use and enhanced target language ability.

## 2. Literature review

The attention and research on language vitality are based on the perspectives of language ecology and language planning. Giles put forward the concept of “language vitality” first to describe the relationship between the speakers and the social environment where they live and reflect how the whole language ecology affects the language. Subsequently, several influential language vitality assessment models emerged, including national language vitality assessment framework (Giles, 1977), GIDS assessment framework (Fishman, 1991) and language vitality assessment guidelines (UNESCO special expert group on endangered languages, 2003, 2011).

These assessment models and frameworks are influenced by the perspective of ecological research, including many factors involved and concerned in the researches on language planning and ecological linguistics. Giles (1977) established the framework of language vitality evaluation with language status, demographic indicators and institutional support as structural variables; Fishman (1991) focused on the groups of language users, the social function of language and the status of language learning in public education system in his framework. Experts from UNESCO offered nine indicators to evaluate language vitality, like the number of users, linguistic development trend and language attitude.

Some other scholars contribute to the study of language vitality. Since 1972, Einar Haugen has provided an ecological perspective for the study of language planning, which focused on the motivation behind the limitation of language development or

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extinction. After him, Robert Cooper (1989) divides language planning into three dimensions: status, noumenon and acquisition, and explores how national language policy affects the language ecological environment. Harald Haarmann (1990) puts forward the prestige dimension, and studies the efficiency of different organizations' influence on the different prestige reflected by government activities, institutional activities, group activities and individual activities. Zhou Mingming (2009) defines the concept of language order, determines the communicative value and language status of language. Fang Xiaobing (2020) proposed language resilience to explore the persistence of language development from two aspects of mentality and ecology.

### **3. Research design**

Similarly, the vitality of the target language in language teaching can also describe the relationship between the language learners and the environment. Therefore, designed-interventions could be offered to change the language learning ecology of the target language and enhance the vitality and persistence of the language in the learning process. We draw on the factors and dimensions involved in the three existing language vitality assessment models, and retain some factors that fit well with language teaching as the reference indicators of curriculum design.

Through questionnaire survey, comparative experiment and interview, the following three problems are solved.

- (1) What elements motivate students to learn foreign languages in positive way?
- (2) What factors could be focused on while building simulated target language ecology?
- (3) In what paths, the language vitality of target language could be improved?

## **4. Data analysis and discussion**

### **4.1 Questionnaire survey and designated interventions**

A questionnaire survey was conducted in six classes of public elective courses of French, Spanish and Russian for the sophomores in non-English majors for two semesters. They have 90 minutes of in class study a week for 16 weeks. For non-English majors, in addition to English language, learning one more language is not a mandatory requirement. Questions focus on the proper interventions to the vitality of target languages, ranging from students' language learning experience and the reasons for language learning to their evaluation and expectations of the target language learning, from the learning activities in and after class, learning experiences, performance and responses to the language learning planning after class.

Media resources in target languages in the daily life sent pragmatic information and motivate the students to decide whether they need to learn one more language and which language to learn. We learned that they are not resistant to the learning of a second foreign language, which is due to their personal hobbies and leisure activities in daily life, like animation, games, music and film and television works. For most beginners, their subjective impressions on the language play a vital role on the final decision. The official policy and suggestions from the Schools of Economic Management, Petroleum Exploration and Telecommunications, that learning a second foreign language is beneficial to the future work planning, encourage their majors to have higher expectations for language learning. With regard to the learning of the target language, it is found that teachers' requirements and students' language attitude have become the guarantee of language vitality. Most students' experience in learning the first language is conducive to the learning of the second foreign language. More practice is recognized as the best way to improve language ability and increase the opportunities to use language by both side of teaching and learning. That is why dialogue practice and group discussion are voted as the most popular classroom activities. Students with higher goals for language learning pay more attention to reading and writing, and have clear goals for continuing self-study.

It is found that the objective variables in teaching and learning, such as different professional disciplines the schools run, the setting of curriculum types, individual language ability, class hour arrangement, assessment and evaluation methods, domestic and international language status, as well as the subjective factors like personal preference, teachers' requirements, teaching materials, policies and regulations, adaptation, language attitude and the need for language use have a positive impact on language vitality in learning.

### **4.2 Comparative experiment and interview**

There are comparative experiments in the same language course. The activities aimed to enhance the vitality of target language are offered in experimental class in the second semester. To enhance students' subjective feelings, the oriented media resources are shared regularly, including songs, animation, videos, film and television works, e-books, literary works of target language; To increase the sense of superiority in language use, the resources like star award-winning speeches, public speeches, graduation speeches of Chinese students are also shared with students in and after class. Besides, the real cases that practitioners benefit from

language learning are provided to show language contributes to value-added professional ability. The language learning groups are build on the line, the students punch in to share the results or development of daily practice. Miss Deng, the lecturer of Spanish class encouraged her students to talk about things around them in Spanish with the help of translation software and she was surprised that these beginners talked a lot after few weeks practice. Miss Zhang, the lecturer of French class received some videos made by students to tell the real story in the dormitory in French. Miss Tang, the lecturer of Russian class is proud that some students planed to pass Russian proficiency test for their career planning.

Comparing the language learning performance, participation and interviews of the two semesters, we find that in the experimental class, students are more engaged in class and even over half of students in French class share the target language media resources on the line, and over 75% of the daily practice punch in time is relatively concentrated in the media resources sharing while less than 50% of the weekly practice homework could be finished in time in the control class in the first semester. The quality of language output is improved with the more length of engaged time and more various and creative forms.

### **4.3 Paths to enhance the vitality of target language in teaching and learning**

The vitality of target language in teaching and learning depends on the oriented language learning ecology, positive language attitude, and engagement to language learning.

The sharing of target language carrier, media resources related to leisure time can create a language learning environment closer to life and enhance the emotional response of language use. The important indicators of language ecology also affect the language attitude of language users, which affects language ability and use. The greater the language ability, the more the language use. They in turn change people's language attitude, an important indicator of language vitality. From rational level, the rational evaluation of the practical value and social status of a specific language can enhance the identity of the value-added target language and their subjective motivation of language use. From the emotional level, the good language environment the teachers build in and after class and the existing resources on the line make it certain that the target language could be used in life and serve majors. To improve the engagement, it is very important to create communication groups for language learners of different languages, to provide online gathering points for learners, to complete language tasks, pragmatically oriented, to ensure the effective participation of a certain number of target language activities, to simulate the language ecology. For beginners, the language learning objectives are mainly verbal communication greetings, media entertainment, self-expression, study abroad plan, tourism, service department language and other pragmatic purposes; But to make the language vitality more lasting, the learners should be guided to read the target language in written form, use the second foreign language for professional and work fields.

## **5. Conclusion**

To meet the needs of the new global pattern and the new liberal arts, Chinese colleges and universities are eager to cultivate compound talents of "professional+multilingual" ability, with broad global vision and strong patriotic feeling as well as in China's position. To enhance the vitality and persistence of learning the target language, efforts can be made through building oriented language learning ecology, cultivating positive language attitude, and promoting engagement to language learning.

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