

Summary of the Identity of Heritage Language Learner

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Abstract: Heritage language is often regarded as one of the most important and powerful contributors to the construction of national identity. It is a symbol of national identity and cultural unity. By sorting out the identity research literature of different heritage language learners, this paper explores many aspects of the relationship affecting the identity of heritage language learners, so as to provide reference for future research.

Keywords: Heritage language; Heritage language learner; Identity

1. Related Notion

(1) The heritage language (HL), is a socio-politically minority language, acquired as a first language during the first years of life, as in sequential bilinguals, or simultaneously with the majority language since birth, as in simultaneous bilinguals (Montrul, 2008; Polinsky, 2006).

(2) The heritage language learner, during the past 20 years, various definitions have been proposed. It is mainly divided into two categories: broad sense and narrow sense (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). In a broad sense, HL learners may refer to all learners of the same ancestral language (Fishman, 2001). In a narrow sense, HL learners are those who “bring to the classroom some measure of competence in the language” (Carreira & Kagan, 2011) due to home exposure.

(3) Identity, is a key aspect of minority language acquisition and maintenance which relates to socialization (Schieffelin, 1986), The link between language and identity makes bilingualism ideological (Heller, 2007). Identity, “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz, 2005), that identity is dynamic and socially constructed (Achugar, 2006)

2. Research finding

2.1 The origin of the heritage language learner in different languages

The interdisciplinary study of the heritage language and identity began in the 1980s (Giles, 1987), and it is often regarded as one of the most important and powerful contributors to the construction of national identity. It is a symbol of national identity and cultural unity, reminding linguistic minorities of their cultural heritage and transmitting group feelings (Hurtado, 1995). The development of heritage language can be an important part of and contribute to the formation and maintenance of national identity (Cho 20).

They view the connection between identity and language as “an intimate and mutually constitutive relation” (Belz, 2002), especially since language has important symbolic value (Wei, 2000) and plays a crucial role in establishing one’s place and role in society (Djité, 2006).

2.2 Identity study of heritage language learner in different languages

(1) Take the study of Spanish **heritage** identity as an example. The long history of the study and teaching of Spanish **heritage** has been inseparable from the question of identity since the birth of the civil rights era, which predates the recent history of applied linguistics. Identity orientation has become a core problem in the process of learning **heritage** language.

(2) Taking the research on the identity of Chinese **heritage** language as an example, language courses in higher education institutions and the number of Chinese courses in middle and high schools in the United States are increasing rapidly. Therefore, the proliferation of learners also increases the research on Chinese studies, especially related research on Chinese **heritage** language (He, 2006).

(3) Taking the research on the identity of the Bengali **heritage** language, Blackledge (2008) believed that the relationship between “language” and “inheritance” was far from simple and clear, but was a complex relationship shown in classroom interaction.

The analysis found that multilingual young people use complex language resources and creative research methods to reposition their identity, so as to try to change the definition of “inherited” identity given to them by the school (Creese, A., A. Bhatt, N. Bhojani, and P. Martin. 2006).

(4) In addition, there are related studies on Korean successors, Japanese inheritors, aboriginal languages of Canada, Norwegian Kwen, and traditional languages of Argentina.

2.3 Influence factor

(1) Influence of Language ideology: Language ideology is a belief system about language, which is the basis of social practice surrounding language and social interpretation by users of specific language variants (van Dijk, 1998; Errington, 2000; Kroskrity, 2004). The link between language and identity makes bilingualism an ideology (Heller 2007). Konig, K., (2015) et al. studied German-Canadian and German-Vietnamese. By comparing interviews with both comprised of 1.5th or 2nd generation immigrants., it was found that respondents’ understanding of multiculturalism and multilingualism differed greatly in some respects. How different linguistic ideologies influence these different orientation behaviors.

(2) Environmental influence: The influence of one’s own living environment on identity, as in the multicultural United States, as in the case of Cuban-American families in Miami. The vast majority of minority-language parents in Miami (Haitian, Nicaraguan, and Cuban Amish) want their children to be as fluent as possible in English, but are equally keen to maintain traditional language and culture, especially within families and their own ethnic communities. However, in the public sphere of social interaction, most people believe that the American language and way of life still dominate (Taylor and Lambert, 1994).

(3) Parents’ influence: Parents’ language ability and attitude play an important role in children’s language learning. Lambert, W. E., & Taylor, D. M. (1996) were recruited from 108 Cuban American mothers with an average age of 37 who had lived in the United States for more than 17 years. Research suggests that parents may be more effective at transmitting traditional languages, and if they themselves are less fluent in English, then heritage will be more likely to remain a primary mode of communication in the family environment.

(4) Other relevant factors ① Critical period of development. Blackledge, A., (2008) found that learning “ heritage “ language plays a crucial role in the process of children’s identity formation, which is almost a self-evident fact (Nicholls, 2005). ② Economic value. Because language has become a commodifiable object in the global economy (Dousa,2013). Language becomes a sign of wealth, subject to the appreciation of market values (Bourdieu, 1991). ③Pragmatism. Richard Ruiz (1984) pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of the “language is the problem”, “language is the right” and “language is the resource” approaches in language planning. ④ Cultural identity. Valdés (2001) explained that the self-maintenance of the heritage language and the relationship with the heritage language and culture is by individuals and families, it is almost impossible to replicate the reality of the social culture and interpersonal relations of the spread of the range and access to the heritage language of the first language of the spread of the way.

3. Topics that need further attention

Globalization affects identity and culture, giving rise to new practices and ideas that must be understood in light of the relationships between identity, language and class in multiple markets. Transnational identity does not mean losing or cutting off contact with an individual’s country of origin or culture; as suggested by Green and Power (2005). It strengthens the connection to the “root”.

There are also some limitations that need to be further explored. Researchers can view the development of heritage language throughout the life cycle from a broader perspective. Future research could include other measures of language competence, including receptivity and productivity, and sociolinguistic knowledge. Language skills are also a topic that learners of heritage language need to pay attention to. There are also language learners’ anxiety, acculturation and so on.

The study samples come from different language backgrounds, different language learning histories, experiences and proficiency levels, and are developing new communication models in new communicative environments through active language learning practices. Inspired by a review of the literature above, the most important shift may be among the young. They have certain cultural traditions and experiences, which influence their beliefs and attitudes towards language and language practice. From adolescence, they want to integrate into the culture of their home country and the cultural identity of their community and their inherited language, which is a process of continuous change and mutual influence.

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