

Political Competition and Educational Equity: “Language Game” and TCSOL Medium Instruction

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Abstract: This paper discusses the medium of instruction in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL), analyzing its use in teaching Chinese as a foreign language alongside Wittgenstein's Theory of "Language Game". It explores the fairness of education from a linguistic perspective, arguing that the “forms of life” in various countries can impact educational fairness through processes of mutual integration and resistance. Moreover, factors affecting educational equity within the educational system can also influence fairness globally by affecting these “forms of life”. In other words, addressing educational equity in the context of global political competition necessitates an examination of political factors. In TCSOL, teachers predominantly use English as the medium of instruction. This can lead to issues of medium failure when interacting with learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Educational inequity arises for students lacking English proficiency, which serves as a mediating language. This work begins by introducing Confucius Institutes and discussing their role in promoting international education and cultural exchange within the context of economic globalization. It then provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between educational equity and language, explaining how language inequality contributes to educational inequity and affects global communication. It is often assumed that resolving global political, economic, and cultural imbalances is a prerequisite for addressing educational equity. However, education itself possesses a degree of self-regulation and can focus on the equity of its own processes. Equity in education reflects the balanced development of human politics, economics and culture.

Keywords: Confucius Institute, Educational Equity, TCSOL, Medium of Instruction.

1. Introduction

Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL) refers to the teaching of Chinese to foreigners. In fact, it also includes the teaching of Chinese to overseas Chinese whose first language is not Chinese. It appeared in the 1980s [1]. Compared with the long history of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), it is only a “newcomer” in the language education field. The emergence of the discipline was to serve the needs of national political construction at that time [2]. In the 21st century, as China's political and economic development grows, Chinese language and culture are also needed by the world. I would like to call this phenomenon of language development “language market demand”. Just as language is a tool for education, and education is a tool for the

world to communicate with civilizations, so language education is an essential tool for cross-cultural communication and international dialogue. The equity in education cannot be avoided talking about.

In 2016, I started to study my undergraduate major, which is the major mentioned in this article, TCSOL. At that time, this major was in the stage of discipline development and construction, and it was not a popular major. Due to the needs of my major, I had a lot of opportunities to have cultural exchanges with international students from different countries, and I often went into the Chinese classes of international students for classroom observation. 2021 I entered my master's degree in this major. During this period, I taught Chinese in a high school in Thailand for 4 months, which was more of a practical learning experience for me. 2022 I was offered the opportunity to work in London for a year. At that time, I was working as a Mandarin teacher at the Confucius Institute for Traditional Chinese Medicine in London. The Confucius Institutes serve a similar function to the Goethe-Institute in Germany and the British Council. From the perspective of language itself, they are bases for language teaching. The role of Confucius Institutes as a link confirms the unshakable position of language education in promoting political, economic and cultural exchanges around the world. 2023, when I was an intern at UNESCO, I participated in a conference discussing the issue of global equity in education, during which I saw the imbalance of education in different countries around the world and heard the views of different types of people working on the issue of equity in education. This experience also made me think about the relationship between equity in education and language teaching. 2024 I worked there for half a year as an external faculty Mandarin teacher at South China University of Technology. TCSOL is mainly divided into two major teaching areas, domestic and foreign, in which the situation of teaching Chinese to international students in China is more complicated compared to that of foreign students with the same first language and cultural background, who come from different countries with different languages, cultures and educational backgrounds. For example, I teach a beginner's class with students from nine countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Arabia, Russia, and Japan. During the teaching of Chinese in this class, my medium of instruction is my second foreign language, English. English, as a universal language, is the most used medium of instruction in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and it is also a second language that teachers of Chinese as a foreign language must master and be able to use proficiently.

According to the definition given by UNESCO, medium of instruction is “the language of instruction of the basic curriculum of an educational system” [3]. It is also the language used by teachers to teach in the classroom. In TCSOL, there are usually three kinds of languages, mother language, target language and medium of instruction. The mother language is the language that learners master initially, that is, the first language. The target language is a non-native language that the language learner is learning. The medium of instruction here is usually English as a lingua franca, which can also be understood as the second language mastered by the teacher [4]. In actual teaching, it can be found that even though English is the most widely used language in the world and is an international lingua franca, there are still students in many countries who have not learned English and have not mastered this universal mediator language. Based on this situation, there is an educational inequity when teach Mandarin. Native English-speaking students from Britain and the United States, as well as students from Arab and Japanese countries who have English language skills, can use English as a medium to complete their Mandarin learning, but those who do not have English as a language support cannot acquire the language smoothly. Therefore, I think there is also an educational inequity in language learning in TCSOL.

2. Confucius Institute

In the context of globalisation, national development and foreign economic and trade exchanges require a stable, peaceful and friendly international environment, and most countries are well aware

of this. As the waves of globalisation, industrialisation, informatisation and urbanisation advance one after another, China is deeply interacting with the outside world in the fields of economy, diplomacy and security during this period, demonstrating an increasingly close symbiotic relationship with the world. The occurrence and development of Confucius Institutes come from the international demand for China and the Chinese language, and the international demand for China and the Chinese language come from China's continuous and rapid development. The concept of the construction of Confucius Institutes is to focus on language teaching and to promote language and cultural exchanges among the world with the purpose of cultural exchanges. The existence of Confucius Institutes is mainly in the form of non-profit educational institutions supported by government funding and manifested in the form of cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities for the purpose of language teaching, while considering the function of cultural communication [5]. The first Confucius Institute in the world was opened in South Korea in 2004. Subsequently, China established partnerships with various countries to open Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms. Confucius Institutes have been opened in a very wide range of countries around the world, and nowadays there are Confucius Institutes all over the world on five continents, forming a very large network of language teaching and cultural dissemination. Specifically, Confucius Institutes are open to universities, schools, colleges and universities, as well as communities and enterprises: they carry out Chinese language teaching, as well as teach courses with a strong Chinese cultural flavour such as Peking Opera, Wushu, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Calligraphy, Tea Craft, Song and Dance, and Chinese Cuisine, etc., which satisfy the needs of multi-level and diversified learning to the maximum extent possible.

The geopolitical theories that emerged in the West during the 18th and 19th centuries, namely the influence of geography on the character, history, and structure of international politics, especially in relation to other states, and the study of this influence itself. The main schools of thought encompassed Mahan's theory of sea power, Mackinder's theory of land power, Duhey's theory of air power, and Spiekermann's theory of liminal zones [6]. But either strategic layout of rights is aimed at controlling and dominating the world. And then controlling and dominating the world requires both economic and military power as well as political strategy and cultural identity. That is to say, in the present trend of globalisation, cultural exchange and identity is an indispensable part. World is now in a period of multicultural coexistence after the end of the Cold War, and the world environment is most characterised by what has been described as a period of "great development, great change, and great adjustment" [7]. According to Thomas Friedman, cooperation and competition on a global scale have made the world increasingly flat, and the technological, political, economic and information revolutions are accelerating the elimination of all kinds of barriers and making the world even flatter [8]. Therefore, strengthening communication and cooperation has become a common choice for all countries. Against this background, the unique value and contemporary significance of language, as the first communication tool of human beings, has become more prominent. Liu Yandong pointed out that mutual learning and exchange of languages and cultures is an important way to promote communication and understanding among people of all countries and build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity [9]. The communication of the world's diverse civilisations requires linguistic diversity. In the Development Plan of Confucius Institutes (2012-2020), it is clearly stated that "Confucius Institutes should give full play to their role as comprehensive cultural exchange platforms" [10]. Geopolitics, as suggested by Tan Guizhao, also emphasises that geography is not constant, while language and culture are in a state of flux. Human factors are in many cases the main drivers of change in other geographic factors [11]. Professor Edward A-McCord points out that the United States has traditionally enhanced its soft power by promoting international exchanges (e.g., the Fulbright programme) [12]. Liu Yawei also suggests that China is not the only country that has disseminated its linguistic and cultural resources to overseas to deepen understanding of the home country and to promote cultural exchanges between the host country and the home country. In Japan,

there is the Japanese Cultural Foundation, and in Germany there is the German Academic Exchange Centre [13]. Transnational education in languages is an important means of promoting cultural exchange between the world.

At the same time, education as a social subsystem will inevitably be affected by political, economic and cultural factors under globalisation. First, from the political perspective, according to the actual Confucius Institutes and the practices of other countries, government involvement is the common practice of the world's major language and culture dissemination institutions. And in terms of institutional arrangements, governments without exception have included their language and culture dissemination institutions in the overall arrangements of national diplomacy and controlled their development strategies from a macro perspective. The British Council and the Instituto Cervantes in Spain are subordinate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Alliance Française has a close relationship with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Goethe-Institut signed cooperation and framework agreements with the German federal government in 1969 and 1976, and its activities are included in the scope of government diplomacy. In terms of funding, governments have provided substantial financial support for the establishment and development of language and cultural communication institutions in their countries. Secondly, from an economic point of view, business people at home and abroad generally welcome Confucius Institutes and expect them to play a greater role. Congressman Brett Guthrie (R-KY) believes that the establishment of the Confucius Institute will further strengthen U.S.-China cooperation in the areas of culture and business, and that the language education provided by the Confucius Institute will allow students without a basic knowledge of Chinese to play a role in the global economy of the future, benefiting students both locally and throughout Kentucky. Again, from a linguistic perspective, countries that speak different languages have different attitudes toward the Confucius Institute. For non-native English-speaking countries, the global development of Chinese is conducive to breaking the world language pattern of English dominance and enriching the diversity of world languages and cultures. Finally, from the cultural perspective, adhering to the concept of civilisation exchange and mutual understanding, Confucius Institutes have objectively increased the share of Chinese language and cultural resources in the world's cultural map, and influenced the reconstruction of the world's cultural map in the context of globalisation.

Because of the fundamental role and widespread impact of education on society, there is a segment of educational administrators in all countries who attach great importance to the right to control the educational space and who are particularly wary of the infiltration of external forces into the educational space. In the context of globalisation, however, this tendency in education is clearly anachronistic. The educational policies and philosophies of educational administrators in many countries around the world are also influencing education, especially international education, in an invisible way. Li Jianhui proposes that the core of international educational co-operation is "cross-border", that is, to explore educational co-operation among independent sovereign states based on the perspective of "international politics", and the premise of its internal logic is no longer "educational attributes" only. The premise of its internal logic is no longer only "educational attributes" but is dominated by "political attributes" [14]. Both education itself and international language education can hardly escape the influence of global factors such as politics and economy. From the macroscopic perspective of the world, it is the carrier of international education in the world and the form of material existence of these streams of consciousness of language education and national cultures in the real world. While exporting language education abroad, it also attracts students from various countries who are interested in Chinese language and culture. The linkage between Confucius Institutes confirms the unshakeable role of language education in the promotion of political, economic and cultural exchanges in the world. In addition to discussing the politics behind the Confucius Institutes, the function should be also paid more attention as a centre for teaching Chinese language,

engaging in educational activities and spreading culture, which promotes humanistic exchanges between China and the rest of the world.

3. Educational Equity and Language

The term equity first appeared in the social field, which refers to the reasonable and equal distribution of political, economic, and other benefits among all members of society. It implies equal rights, reasonable distribution, equal opportunities, and judicial fairness. Equity in education is the manifestation of equity in the field of education everyone has equal rights to education. Over the years, equity in education has been a good wish and ideal that people have been tirelessly pursuing. Hargreaves pointed out that in the 1950s, the Western educational community attributed the inequities that existed in education to the role of two aspects [15]. One is that educational inequity has external causes, such as economic, social, educational policy and school organization, on the one hand, the educated person's own ability, character and other factors. The above for educational equity belongs to the inequity of the starting point of education. However, Pu Caiyun believes that under the premise of emphasizing the fairness of the starting point of education, what needs to be emphasized and paid more attention to is the fairness of the educational process [16]. Xu Sheng'e shows that the world's efforts to promote equity in education are more often carried out at the macro level, such as policies, systems, laws and resource allocation. For example, regulating education policies between regions, learning from advanced and successful education systems, and so on [17]. However less research has been conducted to explore the micro level, such as classroom management, teacher-student interaction teaching language. As a result, most of the attention to educational equity is superficial, while ignoring the educational reality closely related to the growth of students, and the problem of actual equity in students' access to education has not been well solved. Micro-level equity is the materialization of macro-level educational equity, which is the internal substance of educational equity. The realization of macro-level educational equity needs to be implemented through micro-level equity. When the issue of equity in education is well resolved, it can transcend all social differences. The ongoing resolution of educational equity issues is a reflection of balanced global development. When focusing on equity in the educational process, it can be found that the language of instruction is often overlooked or considered an unimportant part of the process.

Bernstein B argues that the reasons for inequity in education are related to the language skills of the educated [18]. And there are two dimensions that produce this language inequity, one is explicit inequity, where students' poor language learning performance is due to teachers not practicing a great deal while students are learning the language. The other is implicit inequity, where students' inability to better master the language is due to the lack of effort on the part of the students, ignoring the fact that the students have language deficiencies. With the changing situation of globalization and historical development, it is not difficult to find that language and education are characterized by diversity. For example, the historical development of immigrant education, the language exchanges produced in the colonial and post-colonial eras have always influenced the choice and development of the language of instruction. In today's era, the world is like a big market with close political, economic and cultural exchanges, which also promotes the development and exchange of education. For example, study abroad activities, international education, etc. Bourdieu Pierre's linguistic-cultural mismatches further explain the importance of language in promoting equity in education nowadays [19]. Based on this, Zhao Li shows that due to teachers' own social and linguistic backgrounds, when they teach in a language different from that of the learners, the linguistic differences will create differences in cognitive abilities and linguistic communication [20]. How then can minorities with linguistic differences seek fair and equal communication, learning and knowledge consensus in the classroom? This is a question that cannot get around in addressing educational equity from a micro perspective.

In education and teaching, the educator speaks and the educated listens all the time. This is how they communicate with each other. When language enters the field of education, it need to think about that the relationship between educational equity and linguistic equity, and what language really means for educational equity. Educational research cannot be separated from language, educational research is always surrounded by language, educational activities cannot be carried out without language, language is the last home of educational activities. Language is the last home of educational activities. A linguistic scrutiny of teaching activities is an indispensable part of language in the face of educational problems. The introduction of language into educational research has caused an “earthquake” in traditional educational research, and language has brought educational research a picture of educational research full of the flavor of life. Language is to education what a snail shell is to a snail. Language is the abode of education. Education is a kind of linguistic existence, and education dwells poetically in language. Gadamer says that no social reality, with all its concrete forces, can fail to display itself within a consciousness expressed in language [21]. Reality does not take place behind language. Reality takes place entirely within language. Everything that is educational is necessarily embedded in language, everything that is educational is necessarily taking place entirely in language, education cannot be separated from language, they are inseparable. Language is not just an intermediary or a tool; it exists only as an object and is well known that language has a much richer connotation. In the case of education, language is more powerful than one can imagine. Education is always at the mercy of language. Dewey suggests that education does not treat language as a tool unless it treats itself as a tool” [22]. On the contrary, treating language as a tool in education makes education instrumentalized. Language has always been taken for granted and not noticed in education, however, once the “language turn” occurs in education and language is awakened in education, researchers who look at education through the lens of language will realize that the problems of equity in education often come from things that have almost ignored.

4. “Language Game” and Inequities in TCSOL Mediated Language of Instruction

U. Smit suggests that English, as a lingua franca, has been the medium language promoted and used in teaching Chinese as a foreign language [23]. Therefore, it is entirely possible to use English as the medium of instruction for the primary and intermediate levels of Chinese when dealing with students from English-speaking countries, that is to say, there is not much of a medium of instruction problem for instruction in English-speaking countries because students from English-speaking countries know English, and therefore teachers will not encounter a medium of instruction problem even when dealing with students at the primary level of Chinese. Zhang Zhiguo and Feng Yuan argue that due to the increasing influence of English on the language life and educational choices of countries in the era of globalization, the language education policies of many non-English-speaking countries in the world have had to consider the impact of English on their own countries [24]. Driven by such English language learning policies, students in these non-native speaking countries can also have English language skills. Despite the widespread use of English globally, there are still many countries or educationally disadvantaged regions where students do not have the ability to communicate in the English language. When all these types of students are present in the Chinese language classroom, English, the universal medium, also has the problem of not being able to communicate and deliver classroom information effectively. Zhang Zhiguo suggests that students will lose interest and self-confidence in Chinese language learning if they cannot understand the teacher's explanations and instructions for a long time [25]. If teachers and students have not been able to communicate well, the enthusiasm of both parties will decrease. This leads to the teacher's inability to seek a completely fair medium of instruction in the classroom.

According to Bonald Spolsky, the choice of medium of instruction or medium of instruction policy determines which language groups in a society enjoy greater political and economic development

opportunities and which language groups are “disenfranchised” from their basic rights [26]. This is a key form of redistribution and social reconstruction, and an important area of political conflict between national or ethnolinguistic, socio-political groups. It is also an important area of political conflict between national or ethnic languages and socio-political groups. In other words, when the medium of instruction produces an unattainable state of equity, it means that educational equity is also difficult to maintain.

J.A. Fishman, G.S. Fishman suggest that mediated language is a language issue because it affects the survival and development of language [27]. Medium of instruction is one of the most powerful means of both “maintaining language culture” and “revitalizing language culture”, and T. Skutnabb-Kangas suggests that it is also a means of developing “intergenerational language transmission”. It is also one of the most important forms of developing intergenerational transmission and one of the most direct ways of carrying out linguistic genocide [28]. At the same time, Bonald Spolsky argues that there is a very important form of linguistic genocide. It also need to be recognized that mediated language is an educational issue because it is a matter of pedagogical equity in the classroom. Shi Guangheng argues that the use of mediated language plays a role in grammar explanation, classroom language, exchange of ideas between teachers and students, and facilitating teaching abroad [29]. Lv Bisong reiterates, “We are not opposed in principle to the use of mediated language in second language teaching, but advocate that the use of mediated language be reduced to a minimum and used only as a last resort” [30]. On the issue of mediated language use it still be found that either reducing the use of mediated language or choosing the appropriate mediated language use according to the specific situation results in only hiding the problem of inequitable use of English mediated language.

According to Wittgenstein, “languages in reality are related to each other through family resemblance.” By family resemblance, it is meant that “two neighboring links may share common features and be like each other, whereas two links belonging to the same family that are far apart no longer have anything in common [31]. According to Gadmer (H-G.), in the hermeneutic circle, which is ontological in nature, language connects people to the world and at the same time interconnects them. The ontological role of language makes it necessary to base our understanding of the real world on the understanding of those who came before us, and the understanding of those who came after us is based on our understanding [32]. In this sense, language is a key to understanding people and their world. Ricoeur also believes that all understanding, whether historical or aesthetic, involves a certain linguistic. In this way, language is the thing through which man “owns the world”: a world that is not only an environment, but a world that he grasps at a distance and face to face [33]. What is clear is that when a language learner loses the equity of access to linguistic information through the mediated language, he is also stepping into the realm of educational inequity, and thus loses the right to grasp the world. Wittgenstein argues that the form of life embodies a close union between language, the world, and the human being. Although he does not define the concept, he states that “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” [34]. He calls language games “forms of life” only to emphasize that language games are activities, language practices. When talking about the equity in education in the world, papers usually focus on the ways in which “forms of life” in different countries of the world undermine equity in education through their integration and resistance to each other. Rarely do the works recognize how education itself, or the factors within education that affect equity in education, affect equity in education by affecting the world's “forms of life.”

5. Conclusion

The world is never isolated, and language and education are not separated. When problems in language teaching in educational practice are discovered, such as the use of media in Chinese language classrooms, that may be considered as issues that need to be addressed in language teaching. But if this phenomenon is placed in the macro world of humanity, it would be found that the

phenomenon of educational inequality has emerged. When you try to solve this unfair situation through language itself, that is difficult to solve the problem through language itself. Because behind this phenomenon are many issues related to cultural communication and understanding, social roles and functions, and political choices. In the era of globalization in education, it needs to be cleared that language teaching, language communication, and the culture behind them are all complex. It cannot be attributed that the issue of educational equity to a single subjective and objective reason when facing the globalization of education. What need to be done is not to draw on a successful case or a specific aspect to solve the problem of inequality in education. It should be treated and accepted that the unfair phenomena arised in the process of education with a more tolerant attitude and equality. If things are always in a state of balance, it will be difficult to progress and develop. Every aspect of the world has great complexity. Educational equity also has complexity. The development of the world requires the promotion of political, economic, and cultural exchange and development through imbalance. Education also needs to constantly face inequalities in the world.

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