

# Minorities' Heritage Language Planning and National Multilingual Capacity Building

Li Yan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> College of International Studies, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

Correspondence: Li Yan, College of International Studies, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: yanli2657899@126.com

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## Abstract

As an important part of a nation's soft power, national multilingual capacity refers to a nation's ability to use a variety of languages acquired in dealing with domestic and international affairs in the development of a nation. The nation-security-oriented language planning in the post-9/11 America is closely related with the teaching, using and developing of the minorities' heritage languages, which has to some extent facilitated the America's national multilingual capacity. Taking *National Security Language Initiative* proposed by the American federal government as an example, this paper suggests that minorities' heritage language planning be an endogenous shortcut to build the national multilingual capacity. Furthermore, the relationship between minorities' heritage language planning and national multilingual capacity building is established by matching the five key parameters in heritage language planning with the five components of national multilingual capacity respectively, i.e., exploring the correlations between languages planning, talent planning, education planning, industry planning, policy planning and national multilingual resources capacity, individual's multilingual capacity, national multilingual education capacity, national multilingual service capacity and national multilingual management capacity in detail by using an analytical method.

**Keywords:** minorities' heritage language planning, heritage language, national multilingual capacity

## 1. Introduction

Since the term "heritage language" was transferred from Canada to the field of language policy and planning in America in the late 1990s (see Krashen, 1998; Tse, 1997), studies focused on its protection, development and inheritance have attracted more and more scholars from various fields, including linguistics, pedagogy, policy science, sociology, etc. The American society, especially the US government, has shown concerns for heritage languages and made efforts for their teaching and using, which was ascribed by Stanford professor Valdés (2005) to the consequences of 9/11. To some extent, the minorities' heritage languages in America have also been taken as the acknowledged resources at present rather than the object of assimilation in the past. The nation-security-oriented language planning in the post-9/11 America is closely related with the maintenance and development of the minorities' heritage languages, which has in a way facilitated the America's national multilingual capacity. Nowadays there is no doubt that various languages have become national strategic resources in the world. A sustainable utilizing and developing of language resources require more attention to be paid to the values and social functions of minority languages from individuals, academia, nations and international organizations. Therefore, the relationship between heritage language planning and national multilingual capacity building is studied in this paper, which will provide some reference for the ecological development of minority languages and the enhancement of national language capacity in the multiethnic and multilingual nations.

## 2. Heritage Language and Related Language Planning in America

### 2.1 Definition of Heritage Language

Heritage language is a relatively new term, but it has a history as long as that of human languages. Scholars at home and abroad have interpreted the concept of heritage language from different perspectives, but no commonly accepted definition has been reached due to its national localization nowadays. Its definition varies with the periods when it is defined, the countries or regions where it was defined, as well as the ideologies and academic schools of those who

define it. For example, Fishman (1999, 2001) defines heritage language in America as any other languages that are used (or not) in a family or community except English, including indigenous languages, colonial languages, and immigrant languages. Later Cummins (2005) believes that American heritage languages include not only languages of immigrants and indigenous people, but also non-English languages of refugees living there. The National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) defines a heritage language speaker in America as an individual who is raised at home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands that language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and that language (Note 1). However, in Canada heritage language refers to any languages other than English or French, i.e., languages spoken by indigenous people or immigrants. Moreover, some scholars also believe that heritage language has almost the same connotation with ethnic language, ancestral language, home language, minority language, etc. (Baker & Jones, 1998; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003) from ethnolinguistics, education, anthropology, applied linguistics, etc. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers should put forward their own working definitions based on the background information and objectives of a specific study.

In this paper, firstly, it is assumed that the definition of heritage language is closely related with the conditions of the common language, the dominant language, and various other languages in a country; secondly, the definition of heritage language highlights the language users' ethnic and family attributes. The word "bilingual" in the above definition of heritage language speaker given by NHLRC reminds us that the differences and connections between heritage language and the notions of mother tongue, foreign language, etc., should be clarified in clarifying the connotation of heritage language. Therefore, heritage language is redefined in this paper as "a mother tongue and its dialectal varieties featured by the speaker's ethnic identity, which are first acquired and used in a family environment, and then degenerate or demise due to less or no use confined within a family or a community, or a social communication environment characterized by the common or dominant language". According to this working definition of heritage language in this paper, for example in America as for English, Chinese (including its dialectal varieties) spoken (or not) by those Chinese immigrants and their descendants could be regarded as heritage language; and in China as for Chinese, the minority languages spoken by ethnic minorities, such as Kazakh, Mongol, etc., all belong to heritage languages.

### *2.2 Language Planning and Language Policy*

"Language planning" was proposed by U. Weinreich in 1957. Then Haugen (1993) further developed this concept, pointing out that language planning is an activity of establishing goals, policies and activities for a speech community. According to Mühlhäusler (2000), language planning is an activity aimed at maintaining the maximum diversity of human communication systems and pursuing language diversity from the perspective of ecology. Its connotation includes not only language itself, but also economic and political factors related to language in social integration. Language planning is a young branch of sociolinguistics, emphasizing the close integration with social demand. It emerged in the 1950s, entered its low tide in the 1970s and 1980s, and revived in the 1990s. There is also a similar term called language policy which is often frequently used in the popular literature. As for the relationship between language planning and language policy, Kaplan & Baldauf (1997) think language planning is subordinate to language policy which "is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the society, group or system" (p. xi), while Schiffman (1996) thinks language policy is part of language planning. However, language policy and language planning have been integrated in terms of research intention and research objectives (Hornberger, 2006), which are closely related to each other and cannot be completely separated and distinguished. In this paper, language policy and language planning are not clearly differentiated due to their mutual inclusiveness.

### *2.3 Interpretation for Nation-Security-Oriented Language Planning (Note 2) in Post-9/11 America*

The 9/11 taught America a sobering lesson: "it is a nation's global language capacity and cultural capability rather than the advanced weapons and equipment that determine whether America can win the war against terrorism" (Zhou, 2009, p. 50). Four months later after 9/11, on January 16, 2002, a briefing of "Language and National Security" jointly attended by the National Security Education Board (NSEB), the National Intelligence Council (NIC), the US Department of State, and the US Department of Defense was held in Washington. The measures to cope with the nation's foreign language capacity constraints were discussed. As a result, some language policies oriented to national security were officially announced. In the following years from then on, with raising calls for non-English language education and policies from the US government departments, colleges, universities, academic institutions, experts and researchers, etc., a series of acts and proposals concerning American heritage language education were successively promulgated. The most important American language policy related with heritage language education is *National Security Language Initiative* issued on 5 January 2006. The plan is under the direct command of US president (George W. Bush at that time), and the US Department of Education, the US Department of State, the US Department of Defense, and Office of the Director

of National Intelligence (ODNI), etc., are jointly responsible for its implementation. It consists of several programs, such as K-12 and K-16 language studies, “Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program”, “National Flagship Program” and “STARTALK” programs. And languages involved include Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Farsi and others (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Which are all heritage languages of quite a number of American immigrants. The initiative mainly has three purposes: to expand the number of Americans mastering critical need languages and start at a younger age; to increase the number of advanced-level speakers of foreign languages, with an emphasis on critical needs language; to increase the number of foreign language teachers and the resources for them (U.S. Department of State et al., 2006). Byrnes (2005, p. 582) pointed out that “From a government perspective, these speakers have become “persons of interest,” a designation that, historically, is by no means unprecedented inasmuch as language has frequently been taken to indicate allegiance to US national values, both in the negative and in the positive sense”. Taking national security and interest into account, the US government has changed its view of language by treating languages other than English as resources instead of problems to be dealt with, although the premise is that heritage languages and their speakers should serve the national interests. According to the viewpoint of the language ecology (Haugen, 1972), the development and change of languages are closely related with their social and political ecology. The American government’s view on language issues as part of the political and national contest has explicitly demonstrated the profound influence of social and political ecology on languages. Though the purpose of heritage language-related policies promulgated by American government is not meant to maintain the balance of language ecology, the top-down language management and language policies do bring some opportunities for the maintenance and protection of the heritage languages in America, create space for the coexistence and development of different languages, and most importantly contribute to the strategic goal of enhancing America’s language capacity.

### **3. Heritage Language Planning and National Multilingual Capacity Building**

#### *3.1 Definition of National Multilingual Capacity*

In the post-9/11 era, facing the complex and changeable domestic and international environments, developed countries have put forward national language planning to maintain global advantages. Developing countries have also incorporated languages into national development plans, facilitating multilateral diplomacy in pursuit of enhancing national strength. The relationship between language and nation has undergone unprecedented profound changes. It has become a consensus that diversified languages are national strategic resources, and the concept of national language capacity (Note 3) has also emerged. Facing the idea and demand of multi-language strategy of the countries all over the world, the concept of national multilingual capacity in language policy and planning is proposed in this paper. As an important part of a nation’s soft power, national multilingual capacity has a connotation which is more specific than national language capacity. Under the global background of post-9/11 national strategies, the national multilingual capacity refers to a nation’s ability to use a variety of languages acquired in dealing with domestic and international affairs in the development of a nation. It is mainly shown in the following five components: national multilingual resources capacity, individual’s multilingual capacity, national multilingual education capacity, national multilingual service capacity and national multilingual management capacity. These five sub-capacities are mutually promoting and complementing and have a relationship of positive correlation.

#### *3.2 Relationship between Heritage Language Planning and National Multilingual Capacity*

Heritage languages are common in multiethnic and multilingual countries. According to the viewpoint of language ecology, the coexistence of diversified languages is the foundation of a harmonious language ecosystem. It is the demand of the time and the common vision of mankind to minimize the negative impact of globalization on heritage languages, to build a multilingual society, and to maintain the national linguistic ecological balance. Therefore, the resource attribute of heritage languages calls for heritage language planning. The harmonious coexistence of various languages and the maintenance of national linguistic ecological balance also need heritage language planning. Enlightened by the nation-security-oriented language planning related to the using of heritage language, it is suggested that heritage language planning could be taken as a unique way to improve national multilingual capacity in global competition. The relationship between heritage language planning and national multilingual capacity building is illustrated by establishing the correlations of the key parameters (Note 4) in heritage language planning and the main components of national multilingual capacity respectively in the Figure 1.

### 3.2.1 Parameters in Heritage Language Planning and Components of National Multilingual Capacity

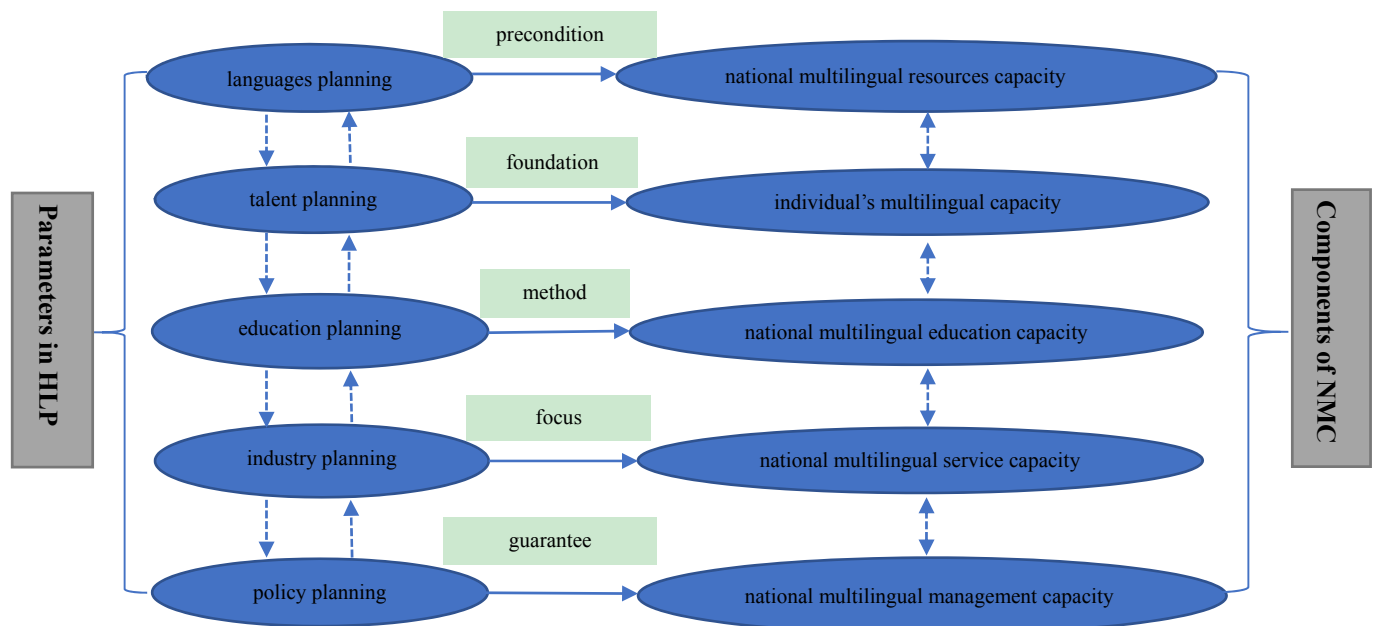


Figure 1. Relationship Building of Heritage Language Planning (HLP) and National Multilingual Capacity (NMC)

In this figure, solid lines with one-way arrows indicate the explicit relationship between parameters of heritage language planning and components comprising national multilingual capacity. The five parameters of heritage language planning show a progressive relationship, but in actual planning process the success of the later parameter will promote the former. Therefore, the five parameters influence each other, promote each other, and their relationships which are implicit in this study are indicated by double dotted lines with one-way arrows in the figure. The five components of national multilingual capability show a positive correlation of mutually promoting and complementing, which is indicated by single dotted lines with two-way arrows. Their relationships are also implicit in this study. Because the social ecological environment is dynamic, the parameters and the components are not in a successive and synchronous development order.

#### 3.2.2 Heritage Languages Planning as the Precondition for Building National Multilingual Resources Capacity

Heritage languages planning as the first parameter of heritage language planning is to investigate the comprehensive condition of diversified language resources, to pursue the survival information of each individual language and to exert the management. National multilingual resources capacity is the total information of various languages that can be deployed to serve national strategic needs, including number of languages, number of language speakers, languages function, language distribution, etc. Heritage languages planning is a prerequisite for the building of national multilingual resources capacity. It should be an important part in heritage languages planning to set up a nation-level heritage language database for languages collection, monitoring and rescue. For example, the MLA Language Map in America based on census data is a good example. What should be mentioned is that, immigrants' heritage languages and aborigines' heritage languages show clear difference in the above aspects. Therefore, each heritage language has different vitality in building national multilingual resources capacity. In general, the vitality of languages and the attention paid in the planning are inversely related. With the guidance of ethnolinguistic vitality theory proposed by Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977), Heritage languages with low vitality such as declining languages and endangered languages require more attention in the language planning. According to the law of language niche (Li, 1991), each heritage language occupies a niche in the language ecosystem. Successful language planning could make them play their respective advantages and function, so as to boost national multilingual resources capacity.

#### 3.2.3 Heritage Language Talent Planning as the Foundation for Building Individual's Multilingual Capacity

Heritage language talent planning as the second parameter of heritage language planning aims to cultivate citizens with language competence of national common language and at least one heritage language (the learner's mother tongue). The multilingual capacity of a citizen refers to an individual owns two or more than

two types of language knowledge and skills. If a country has only static language resources and lacks a number of talents mastering and using these languages, these languages are dead actually. The lack of heritage language talents is directly reflected by individual citizen's lack of competence for this particular language, which will result in the failure of national multilingual capacity building in a way. The multilingual capacity of an individual citizen is closely related to heritage language talent planning. For example, immigrants from all over the world constitute a large part of American population, but only 10% of American citizens are bilingual, and top bilingual talents are few, while 56% of people from EU countries are fluent in speaking two languages. Some scholars believe that heritage language users are resources to be developed to relieve the American foreign language talent crisis (Wiley, 2007). The individual's multilingual capacity directly affects the quality of the nation's human resources, which will then affect the national multilingual capacity. Therefore, the cultivation and buildup of heritage language talent team should start with improving individual's multilingual capacity, which is the foundation of national multilingual capacity building.

#### 3.2.4 Heritage Language Education Planning as the Method for Building National Multilingual Education Capacity

Heritage language education planning as the third parameter of heritage language planning is a process of dividing, analyzing, and implementing the elements of heritage language education under the guidance of general objectives of language education for the nation's strategic demand. National multilingual education capacity is the ability to accomplish the task of multiple languages teaching activities to meet the whole country's needs. Based on the time span and environmental difference of learners' using heritage language, heritage language learning can generally be classified into the innate acquisition and the acquired learning. The former makes heritage language acquirers different from traditional foreign language learners and gives them advantages to become high-level bilingual talents needed by a nation in the progressing of heritage language education. Therefore, some specific measures should be made to meet the demands of the heritage language acquirers who are totally different from that of the second language learners. In 2007 Olga Kagan who is the first director of NHLRC confirmed the above statement: after four years of professional training in the university, heritage language acquirers can become high-level language talents, reaching a level that is inaccessible for foreign language learners. Consequently, heritage language education planning could be regarded as a means to build national multilingual education capability, which is worthy of key support and input from governments. The study of heritage language also shows that heritage language learning is different from traditional native language education if the dominant language environment changes in the process of heritage language acquisition. If the language input has been reduced sharply, the direct consequence will be an incomplete language acquisition, and the language learnt is an interlanguage between native language and foreign language (Montrul, 2010).

Moreover, heritage language talent planning also needs to be guaranteed by scientific education planning and its effective implementation. So, what should be done are to reinforce heritage language identity, to increase junior students' heritage language input, and to compensate for the lack of cohesion of heritage language education in the primary, secondary schools and universities. Moreover, it is extremely important to separate heritage language education from the traditional foreign language education and then to make reasonable language planning based on the rules of language acquisition. It is the families and the communities that should play a more leading role to ensure a full language acquisition. A successful education plan will greatly reduce the proportion of heritage language loss and become an effective means to build national multilingual education capability.

#### 3.2.5 Heritage Language Industry Planning as Focus for Building National Multilingual Service Capacity

Heritage language industry planning as the fourth parameter of heritage language planning is the general design of heritage language services to meet the requirements of national strategy, including language training, language translation, language publication, language testing, etc. National multilingual service capacity is the nation's ability to provide multilingual services in accordance with its strategic requirements. With the human society entering the 21st century, emerging languages industry featured by language information and language technology springs up, such as machine translation industry, search engine industry, and artificial intelligence industry, etc.; the development of "Internet Plus" also relies on the language technology and big data mining. The emergence of new language service industries, such as language "therapy" and language rehabilitation, has created a new economic form of "language economy". What is not to be ignored is that the heritage language industry planning relies on education planning to cultivate multilingual talents and make them a major force in the development and cultivation of the language industry. Globalization and informatization create a good environment for the development of language industry, so heritage language industry planning needs to seize the

opportunity to get full industrialization for some heritage languages and make it a focus for multilingual service capacity building.

### 3.2.6 Heritage Language Policy Planning as the Guarantee for Building National Multilingual Management Capacity

Heritage language policy planning as the fifth parameter of heritage language planning is a specific embodiment of the nation-level selection of the heritage language practice, language ideology, and language management. The national multilingual management capacity is the ability to manage multi-language life according to the strategic needs of the country. Heritage language policy-making concerns the nation's strategic development and is a strong guarantee for building national multilingual management capacity. Heritage language policy includes laws, regulations, rules, measures, etc., formulated by the nation and administrative institutions at different levels towards heritage language, which manifests the language ideology of a nation to the diversified languages. A country's language policy, explicit or implicit, written or unwritten, should serve the national interests. In the era of globalization, a harmonious and balanced language ecosystem in a multilingual and multiethnic nation will play a positive role in shaping national image and implementing national governance. In the field of American heritage language research, Wiley (2005) has proposed for several times that the study on heritage language policy is one of the important trends for American heritage language research. Therefore, it is important to make nation-level heritage language policy, including to change conventional perception about the status and function of heritage languages, to take measures to protect heritage language resources, to cultivate heritage language talents, to incorporate heritage language education as an important part of national strategy, to develop heritage industries, etc. so as to improve the national multilingual capacity from the macro management level.

## 4. Conclusion

Minorities' heritage language planning provides a unique view for the building of multilingual capacity which could be achieved in some specific ways as above for the multiethnic and multilingual nations worldwide. The framework constructed in the paper tries to help to establish the inner relations between heritage language planning and national multilingual capacity. With the development of the studies on heritage language planning, the framework suggested in the paper may be improved and filled in more information. However, it is undoubted that heritage language planning is a unique research field emerged in the process of modern country's development, which is worthy of further exploring.

In 2012, *The Outline of Medium and Long-term Reform and Development Plan for National Language Enterprise (2012-2020)* was promulgated in China setting the language planning's objective of the significantly enhancement of individual's language competence, the obvious improvement of national language capacity, and the harmonious development of social language life. There are also heritage languages especially in the ethnic minority areas, Hong Kong and Macau in China. Since the thematic research on heritage languages is still in its infancy and achievements are relatively a few, more attention for heritage language studies should be paid in China. Since the multilingual lives in different countries are complex and vary, localized study of heritage languages based on the reality of different nations has both academic and practical significance. In the future, there are more issues in this field needed to be studied worldwide.

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## Notes

Note 1. <http://www.nhlrc.ucla.edu/nhlrc>

Note 2. In some of the nation-security-oriented language policies, there are the wards of “foreign languages” rather than “heritage languages” in the text, such as A Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities. In America, “foreign languages” is all the other languages other than English just as what has mentioned above. Although heritage languages not the same with foreign languages, but heritage languages are included in the category of “foreign languages” in this part.

Note 3. Some Chinese scholars have warmly discussed the concept of national language capacity (see Li, 2011; Wei, 2015; Zhao, 2015; Wen, 2016). Wen (2016, p. 26) talked about national language capacity under the background of national strategy, and in her paper, it is defined as “the language ability that government need to deal with the affairs at home and abroad concerned with national strategy and national interests”.

Note 4. According to the main focuses in the previous studies of heritage language, e.g., languages, talent,

education, etc. and its predicted trend of future studies, e.g., industry, policy, etc., five key parameters of languages planning, talent planning, education planning, industry planning and policy planning are suggested in the paper.

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