

## Language Education Policy Research in the United States: Review and Inspiration

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### Abstract

Language education policy is a branch of language policy. The research on language education policy in academic circles has not been developed for a long time, but the research methods and research scope have undergone significant changes. The ethnic and cultural diversity of The United States is highly similar to the coexistence of multi-ethnic languages in China, especially the bilingual teaching research. Scholars began to study the language education policy in the United States in the 1960s. Up to now, it has experienced nearly 60 years of development, producing many valuable research methods and ideal research results. This paper summarizes and analyzes the studies on language education policy in the United States in the recent 60 years, so as to draw lessons from the methods and measures that can be referenced and absorbed in the formulation of language education policy research in China.

**Key words:** The United States; Research on language education policy; Bilingual education

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### INTRODUCTION

Language policy is essentially a research argument in the field of sociolinguistics. From a macro point of view, language policy is related to national strategy and

the influence of a country in the international arena. From the micro point of view, it has a great impact on language acquisition, especially on second foreign language acquisition. In recent years, the topic research and discussion on language policy show a rising trend. The United States is a multiracial and multilingual country, and its educational policies have been developed with many cultural and social background motivations, mainly through the stage of language education without policies, monolingual language education and bilingual language education policy. The language education policy of the United States mainly revolves around the English-only movement and bilingual education, which is in essence English-centered monolingualism, and is mostly formulated at the national strategic level to serve the national interests. Throughout the history of China, there are many similarities between China and the United States. At present, there are not many studies on language policy in education in China. Therefore, combing and analyzing the studies on language education policy in the United States is conducive to concluding and summarizing the practicality and effectiveness of language education policy in the United States, so as to provide some reference and inspiration for the study of language education policy in China.

## 1. RESEARCH TRENDS AND TRENDS OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES FROM 1960S TO 2019

### 1.1 Research on the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

In the early 1960s, Freeman (1998) first proposed the study of language education policy as an independent subject. Parker (1961) is the earlier of the formal education in foreign language teaching to carry on the detailed and comprehensive discussion of scholars, but

Parker after put forward the study of English in education didn't study for deep step, he didn't involve in the later published articles to English as a foreign language as the research direction and content, but scholars think, Parker is still can be regarded as the first to use a foreign language as a teaching research is the beginning of the study of the language education policy (Fishman 1981).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the number of studies on foreign language teaching increased. Grittner (1971), as the first scholar to study the reasons for the existence of various forms of foreign language teaching and how to choose foreign language courses, examined the policies and existing problems in foreign language teaching in the United States vertically from the time dimension (Brod, 1979). The Council on Foreign Languages and International Studies, established by the President in 1978, received official attention for promoting academic research on language education policies in the United States and for convening academic conferences. For example, the relevant conferences organized by the American Educational Association and the Language Roundtable in modern English Society and Life. New collections and papers began to appear in large Numbers during this period (for example, Allen 1973-1976, etc.). In these studies include two aspects of various federal and state environment to explore the legal status of English and other languages, and provides the suggestion for the national language policy, but the work does not involve will be teaching English as an independent discipline, circle of English, especially in the outer ring of the variant without further discussion and research.

## **1.2 Research on Bilingual Education**

The development of language education policy in the United States can be divided into three stages: language education without policy, language education policy of monolingual language education and language education policy of bilingual language education.

### **1.2.1 A Brief Introduction to the Development History of Language Education Policy in the United States**

#### **1.2.1.1 The Stage of Language Policy Without Policy**

Language policy in the United States in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the early stages of the nineteenth century was an unregulated natural form of society in which the Federal and local governments of the United States permitted the existence of multiple languages. The US Congress and the federal government decided to adopt the "language policy without policy", that is, no explicit official language policy was made. At that time, English had not been established as the official language at that time. The diversity of the languages of the colonists and the early immigrants reflected the characteristics of the tolerant language education policy in this period.

#### **1.2.1.2 Monolingual Education Policy**

Monolingual education refers to the period when English is the only language education. The background of this period is diversity and multi-nationality. During this period from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, with the continuous development of industrialization, more and more immigrants flowed to the United States. Compared with the early immigrants from Europe, immigrants in this period were more diverse and their national characteristics were also quite different. The policy of English-only monolingual education embodies the essence of English-only monolingual education policy in the Americanization movement, that is, the policy of language education must serve the needs of national interests. It is precisely out of national interest that other foreign languages are pushed out. Ultimately, the purpose is to force immigrants to give up the culture of the original country or region and integrate into American society by assimilating the language.

#### **1.2.1.3 Bilingual Education Policy Stage**

In the late 1960s the Bilingual Education Act was introduced in the United States. Considering the internal conditions of the society and the overall influence of the whole country, the United States government began to change its single-language education policy and gradually accepted and promoted the coexistence of English-centered and multilingual education. In the decades since, due to the complexity of the social situation and the diversity of racial characteristics, the BILINGUAL Education Act has been revised many times. The 1994 Amendment is considered to be the most powerful version of the Bilingual Education Act, which emphasizes that the purpose of bilingual education is to improve students' ability in both mother tongue and English. Despite many revisions, the Bilingual Education Act has never escaped from the theme and purpose of "assimilation". In the late 1980s, driven by conservative forces in the United States, the "English as an Official language movement" and the "English only Movement" in support of monolinguals were launched throughout society. The California and Arizona legislatures passed laws in 1998 and 2000 to abolish bilingual education.

### **1.2.2 Research Overview of Bilingual Education Stage**

#### **1.2.2.1 Critical Research on Bilingual Education**

In the 1970s, after the early stage of language *laissez-faire* and assimilation, i.e., the social stage of no language policy, and the assimilation period when the national language was unified into English, the United States was now in the stage of bilingual language education.

During this period, the study of bilingualism in foreign academic circles presented a flourishing state, involving not only interdisciplinary academic categories, such as psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. And the content is rich, the research result is rich. For example, research on the process of second language acquisition, the factors

of language acquisition, and the influence of language context.

At this stage, the research methods of the Language education policy in the United States tend to be more empirical research, from the macro qualitative research to more detailed micro quantitative research. The results of this study also have more validity and reliability, which prove that bilingual education is a successful way of language education in more aspects.

Cummins (1980) proposed the bilingual “common potential model”, in which language learners use the more proficient first language as the main axis and their cognitive ability can be transferred from one language to another. It will only help the child learn a second language, and will never hinder the child. Krashen (1996) constructed the theory of “language transfer” of mother tongue. Positive transfer usually occurs when certain characteristics of the mother tongue (or learned language) are similar or exactly the same as those of the target language. When some features of the target language are different or inconsistent, negative transfer will occur if the learner relies on some rules as a tool. Positive transfer contributes to foreign language learning while negative transfer hinders foreign language learning. Baker (2001) to build a kind of innovation “into the scene - process - output” bilingual education model, the model shows that the teachers of bilingual quality and students’ own language potential, language motivation, attitude towards language learning, and students to its own cultural background, and other factors on the important impact of the bilingual education can, bilingual education research are pointed out the existence of a certain degree of limitation.

In the 1980 s, more and more voice against bilingual education form, the voice of the monolingual socialist supporters also prompted the “movement” in the English language only, its supporters argue that immigrants in the United States need to give up their original national culture and national characteristics, and they want success to learn English, thus with a native fusion and to work together for the prosperity of America.

The substantive research results of bilingual education are not particularly persuasive, so some scholars have raised doubts about this, especially those scholars who take monolingual education as the school of thought, and criticized the shortcomings of research design and analysis methods that support bilingual education researchers. However, the controversial issue of bilingual education or monolingual education promotes the development and prosperity of language education policy research to a certain extent in academic circles. Because the United States is a multi-ethnic country, and it accommodates a large number of RACES, the American society is characterized by diversity and complexity.

In the early 1990s, the issue of bilingual education has obviously become the focus of the debate on language

education methods that support different viewpoints, and the academia has also derived new research methods and perspectives. Ramirez (1985) points out that intercultural education for linguistic minorities and English-speaking students contributes to the realization of bilingualism, and bilingualism as an individual and social phenomenon can be studied from the perspectives of linguistics, psychology and social culture. Bilingual education challenges the national character from the perspective of language and the class character from the perspective of education. There are also higher requirements for the design of courses in various forms. American language and culture professor Schiffman (1998, p.351) argues that language policy in the very great degree by the low status of recessive class people’s language, the influence of American language policy can be divided into two kinds of explicitly and implicitly, dominant language policy generally refers to the state constitution or the law, usually refers to the official policy on language, official is embodied in the applicable to the national level of language, national language, foreign language level of policy; Implicit language policies mainly refer to the non-official formulation of language practices, relevant strategies and measures, such as the adoption of certain language as the working language of the government, the language of law, the language of religion and the language of media, or the introduction of language requirements in terms of enrollment and employment (Hu & Lei, 2006).

Language is the carrier of culture. Different RACES have their own cultural attributes, which are often reflected in language. Every race should be treated equally. They have the right to protect their own culture and the right to choose their own language. It is the unique cultures of each nation that together constitute the present colorful and rich world culture.

Ehlich (1991) once expressed his own views on the formulation and implementation of language policy, that is, if the language rights given to the people are not acceptable and satisfactory, the language policy should not be continued. The existence of multiple languages in the society should be regarded as a language resource conducive to the development of the society, and the language policy made by the government should develop towards the direction of “complex multilingualism”. Galindo’s (1997) research shows that the main reason for the change of bilingual education policy in the United States is the struggle between the connotation and characteristics of the three languages, “language is a problem, a right or a resource” advocated by Ruiz.

During the period of bilingual education in the United States, the language education policy of bilingual education comes from both the research results of scholars’ recognition of the policy of bilingual education and the voices of the opposition. During this period, the main research developments and changes were reflected in the research methods and contents, which obviously

changed from the logical qualitative analysis to the empirical quantitative research, and the research contents were mainly reflected in the two opposite viewpoints of agreeing with the research on bilingual education and opposing the research on bilingual education.

### 1.2.2.2 Strategic Study and Feasibility Study of Bilingual Education

Colman (1983) from the point of view of policy system analysis the American bilingual education from 1953 to 1983 about 50 years of development, mainly from the federal, state, between school bilingual education system is analyzed, mainly puts forward the implementation of bilingual education in the language policy is able to American language education targeted to improve the strategic problems.

In 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act. After a year of discussion and revision, the bill was finally passed and published. The background of this act is based on education reform and the transformation of educational management mode. The purpose of the “No Child Left Behind Act” proposed by US President George W. Bush is not to let any child lose the opportunity to receive education, but also to set higher standards and institutions to make the education system more standardized. The deeper purpose of this act was to reduce to a large extent the educational gap between the RACES in American society at that time, and all the American students who received education at that time had the opportunity to achieve academic achievement. This act was later called by many American scholars as the most valuable and effective education reform since 1960s, which has a great significance in the history of American education. Taking Pennsylvania schools as an example, Dietrich (2002) analyzed the problems faced by the practical application of No Child Left Behind Law, discussed the relationship between school differences and students’ academic performance and other aspects, analyzed the relationship between these factors, and also discussed whether bilingual education is feasible. “No child left behind law” after the release, in the process of implementation of a growing number of the defects of the legislation was found, the main point is that the law is not clear how to truly achieve under the application of class, a method is too rough and not meet the high standard requirements of legislation, and then more and more people begin to oppose the legislation. (Gong, 2019) In his research paper on The No Child Left Behind Act, he pointed out and analyzed the deficiencies of the Act and predicted that the future education reform in the United States may also formulate and implement relevant policies and laws based on the goal of providing a high-level and high-quality education for every student.

More than a decade into the 21st century, the United States has not yet established a unified national official language policy, and each state has its own language policy and official language, both states pursuing

a single English language and local governments implementing “English +”. (Hu, 2018). The formulation and implementation of language policies in the United States still face complex situations and social phenomena, and future studies on the development and planning of language policies in the United States are still a promising direction.

Through the above analysis, the research trend of language education policy in the United States has gradually evolved from the macro social and ethnic level to the practical application level of language education and the trend of research methods has also changed from logical analysis to quantitative empirical analysis. Because of the large amount of America is a immigration country, its internal contradictions, and culture also complicated, for the social factors of language education policy is more of a service for the interests of the state, at present the education level of the study of language policy also began to increase, the education in the future of our country, the relationship between the survival and development of national culture, the future of the developing mode of language education policy is expected to pay more attention to the language learning and using and guided by the national security policy studies.

## 2. REFLECTIONS ON THE POLICY OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Through the sorting and analysis of the research on the Language education policy of the United States, it is found that after decades of development and changes, foreign research on the language education policy has also made great progress, with more diversified research perspectives, more comprehensive research system and scope, and more comprehensive analysis framework (Zou & Feng, 2015). Domestic research on American language policy has a single perspective, mainly from the perspective of policy analysis and case analysis. The research content is also relatively limited, mainly involving bilingual language education, immigrant language education, language education for ethnic minorities, and language education research under the “No Child Left Behind Act”. The deficiency is reflected in the lack of detailed comments on the historical development of language policy in the United States and the lack of comprehensive analysis and discussion on the content of the study. Language education policy is actually a relatively large area, it involves the subject range is wide, including sociology, linguistics, pedagogy, etc., but not a single to to analyze it in some discipline direction, thus the study of language education policy is analyzed from the need to adopt more interdisciplinary, this feature is also for the future of research in language education policy offers a variety of perspectives, the development



of language education provides the possibility of a great development.

### 3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States is a multi-cultural country, and its ethnic and cultural diversity is to a great extent similar to the coexistence of multiple ethnic languages in China. The formulation, revision and implementation of the language education policy in the United States are all social problems that deserve our reference and consideration. Nearly 60 years, with the continuous development of research on language education policy change, foreign scholars focus from more in the perspective of the sociology, language policy development for the language from the education level for research, education aspects involved in language acquisition is how to better the second language acquisition, bilingual education and bilingual language advantage in theory and study of the cognitive aspects of bilingual. These studies have achieved good results, which not only provide theoretical basis and support for the government to formulate language policies, but also provide effective guidance for schools to provide bilingual education teaching. The current research situation in China is mostly the way of review and introduction to analyze the literature, which to a certain extent neglects the language practice, leading to the simple description and theoretical reference of the language education phenomenon (Lin, 2017). Study of related language policy in China at present, although there is a good research trends, not enough and comprehensive, especially in the field of empirical research on the use of domestic haven't been able to mature, therefore, we in the study of language education policy, from the way and the study of American education policy research perspective in enlighten, and in the future study expand the system and the scope, especially when more diversified in the perspective of cross-disciplinary research and analysis. At the same time, by drawing lessons from and thinking about the research results of American language education policy, it has some practical reference value for the development of Chinese language education and policy making in the future.

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