A Study on Language Standardization and Variation From the Perspective of Language Ecology

LI Xiao-yun

Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China

FENG Guang-yi

South-Central University for Nationalities, Wuhan, China

This thesis examines the dialectical relationship between language standardization and variation from the perspective of language ecology. Language standardization is a task of calibrating language ecological niche. No matter what kind of language in the world, it would experience language standardization issues during its development process. Language standardization and variation is the unity of contradiction. To handle their relationship properly is the basis of maintaining the harmonious language ecology, and also a prerequisite of forming a good language environment. It is pragmatic subject's bounden duty to observe and perform language standardization. Dynamic trend is determined by linguistic ecological environment. Pragmatic energy is determined by the competition among different languages. Linguistic ecological variation determines pragmatic change of pragmatic subject.

Keywords: language ecology, ecological niche, language standardization, variation, pragmatic subject

Introduction

Language ecology regards language standardization as a task of calibrating language ecological niche. Language ecological niche emphasizes that language should occupy a proper position in the language ecosystem. This position requires language to be standard and the language internal structural elements (i.e., pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) must play their roles on the premise of standardization and normalization. No matter what kind of language in the world, it would experience language standardization issues during its development process. In other words, any language must deal with language standardization during its development process. If this issue is well dealt with, the language would then develop on track, otherwise it would go astray. Therefore, we hold the view that setting up the ecological perspective of language standardization is the basis of dealing with language standardization work properly.

Language Standardization and Variation in the View of Language Ecology

In the past, in the working of language standardization, we especially emphasized on the work which centrals on the language internal structural elements (i.e., pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar). As for the language internal structural elements, we respectively provide specific and different standard requirement and give up something which is not standard. Meanwhile, we provide a benchmark as a standard and embark on standardizing for every element about how to deal with. Since the founding of new China, the standardization

of contemporary Chinese is conducted with this approach. For example, the phonetic standard of contemporary Chinese puts forward a propose that “taking northern dialect as the standard pronunciation and lexically the northern dialects as standard dialects (the basic glossary of northern dialects is the foundation of modern Chinese vocabulary)”, while grammatically, “the canonical modern vernacular as grammatical rules” and so on. The reference system we introduced here is clear which is worth further elaboration and weighing words regardless of voice glossary or grammar that all need to further explain. For example, being regarded as standard voice, many phonetic elements in Beijing dialect is not included. Because of large dilatation of glossary, the northern dialects distributes too wide in China in terms of geography—including four main parts (the dialects of the north, northeast, southwest dialect, the dialect of Jianghuai dialect). The four dialects have their internal differences reflecting on glossary, thus we need to make a further consideration. “Taking canonical modern vernacular as grammatical rules”, and what is “the canonical modern vernacular”, whose articles use “modern vernacular, canonical”, how to regulate “canonical modern vernacular”, and so on are all need to be further identified. While the time is moving forward, the language is developing. The normative standard provided in the 1950s also needs to keep pace with times and take in new content and connotation after several decades.

The ecology perspective on linguistic standardization we provided mainly emphasizes on paying more attention on linguistic niche. The linguistic standardization is a measure taken according to the variation on linguistic niche. In linguistic standardization, we consider how to practice the issue in terms of linguistic standardization and normalization. In the ecology, niche generally refers to,

The position that the biology occupy in the physical space of the ecosystem. The position in the tropic relationship between all creatures in community (tropic niche), and in the physical environment, such as the position placed in the variation gradient of the temperature, humidity, Ph factor determine the biotic environment, lifestyle, and limitation made by chemical and biology. (XIA, 1999, p. 4902)

We borrow the term of “multidimensional niche” to refer to the position in the linguistic ecosystem occupied by language (including dialect and so on). Being influenced by varied factors in linguistic ecosystem, we must understand this position from the view of “multi-dimension”. In real society, the different positions in the linguistic ecosystem placed by various languages (including dialect and so on) are connected with different social environments and linguistic ecological environments. The linguistic structural elements (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) also encounter this case. From the view of norm and the standard of linguistic structural elements, we have a clear realization that what benchmark would be taken as standard involving in multi-dimension. For example, when we regulate the contemporary Chinese with the Beijing dialect as standard, we should consider the various components of “Beijing pronunciation”. It is because the position of Beijing pronunciation in contemporary Chinese standard depends on what the connotation is and what are the factors of forming “Beijing pronunciation”. During the last millennium, especially since Ming and Qing Dynasties, Beijing dialect has been influenced by the external speech—the influence of the Han dialect (the phonetic influence of North and Northeast China), and also the phonetic influence of minority language (such as Manchu language). The connotation of the Beijing pronunciation is actually very complex. Since the local dialect is mingled with external phonetic form, when comes to the Beijing pronunciation as standard, it is regulated by local language (Beijing dialect), or external pronunciation (dialect). It is clear that the Beijing local dialect has been eliminated in the standard of modern Chinese pronunciation, which integrates the pronunciation of the external language (dialect) and minority language (Manchu).

We should treat the Mandarin and its connotation from the perspective of linguistic niche. The ecological niche of Mandarin has determined that it is a standard language which is formed on the basis of extensive absorption of dialects and even the language of minority nationalities. It is also a normative language recognized by government and relevant academic institution, and an authoritative general national language regulated by constitution.

The linguistic ecology holds that the standard and the variation of the language is conducting under the restriction of dynamic equilibrium regulation. The dynamic equilibrium rule of the linguistic ecology plays a role of balance in the process of interaction between standard and variation. Certainly, the relation between linguistic standard and verbal variation should be recognized clearly by us when we discuss. Linguistic standard is characterized by stability, conventionality, and nationhood, while verbal variation has flexibility, creativity, and distinctiveness. In the book *Variation of Rhetoric Study*, we point out that linguistic standard is a kind of criterion regulated by law or society, which plays an important role in linguistic activity. However, the dialectical materialism believes that everything is not absolute, they are only relative, the same case as the linguistic standard. The linguistic standard is not compact hoop headed on Sun Wukong which is restricted by linguistic standard in linguistic communication, yet it is also flexible in most cases so that they can take some effective expressions varying from standard, briefly, variation, becoming standard's twin brothers in linguistic communication. That is, when linguistic standard comes into communicative field, the linguistic variation has sprung up (FENG, 2004, p. 6).

The Language Ecology Connotation of Language Standardization and Variation

As the premise of forming good linguistic environment, linguistic standard requires all languages in the world to be healthy, positive. Nowadays, human being has entered a new era of ecological civilization construction requiring innocence, health, and harmony in linguistic communication. In order to reach this purpose, different languages should at least construct their work on linguistic standard. If a kind of language does not have a unified normative standard, such as unified standard pronunciation, basic vocabulary recognized by the whole nation, fundamental rules on grammar, unified shape on Chinese words. Moreover, when we communicate with people from other countries, everywhere has its own standard and everyone also has its own standard, or in other word, there is not any standard. The language itself is in a state of confusion and anomie, as a result it cannot reach the goal of communication. From the perspective of linguistic ecology, this case certainly affects the world's linguistic ecological environment and causes abnormal and inharmonious communication.

No matter what kind of language, it occupies a certain "niche" in linguistic ecosystem so long as it is in world linguistic ecosystem. It must work for linguistic standard, or it will lose its own "niche". In general, a standard language has a healthy and harmonious linguistic life so as to make itself more dynamic. If the standard language does not do a good work, or even not standardize the work at all, its own survival and development are surrounded by crisis. A kind of linguistic standard requires clear, reasonable, and unified standards in aspect of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, letter, and pragmatics. These standards have gained widely recognition and people who use the kind of language will obey and perform these standards with consciousness and pleasure. Working as the standard, this kind of linguistic ecological environment is good. Meanwhile, the "niche" in world linguistic ecosystem will also be great. In this respect, the case of contemporary Chinese is preferable. Since 1950s, contemporary Chinese has conducted an amount of

standardized work to form Beijing dialect as standard speech, and northern dialect as basic dialect, while the canonical modern vernacular as grammatical rules. At the same time, we do much work to standardize letters, including simplifying Chinese characters, reorganizing special-shaped characters, and unifying pronunciation so as to make contemporary Chinese develop in a more harmonious and standard way. By doing these, a good internal linguistic ecological environment is formed.

It is our inescapable responsibility to observe and perform linguistic standard and our bounden duty to maintain a good linguistic ecological environment. The linguistic standard of a language is performed by the people who use it. In other words, people are the implementer and protector of the language standardization. The important position in the construction of good linguistic ecology that people hold requires that that people should think the specific connotation carefully. Moreover, people should also master the basic rules of linguistic standard and observe the creative dialectical relation between linguistic variation and linguistic standard, thus to reach the purpose that not only observe and perform linguist standard, but also keep language alive and innovative. The Canadian social linguist Ronald Woodward once said:

Everyone's language has a large variation, but it has a clear boundary. In the case of language, you can't follow your own bent and do what you want. Also you can't read the vocabulary according to your own way, or deform the noun, verb in an arbitrary way, or change the word order in accordance with your preferable way. If you do so, your performances can't be accepted by people or even regarded as nonsense. The variation what you can do have a boundary that can be accurately described. The realization of these different boundaries (standard) is not only accuracy but also nearly unconsciousness. It's hard to explain how the spoken man grasp the normative knowledge of linguistic action, because these standards seemly more subtle than the applicable norms of social behavior, dress and table manners. Our mission is try to describe the linguistic behavior standard in special group carefully, and then to explain individual action by using this standard. (Woodward, 2009, pp. 6-7)

The linguistic ecological environment's sustainable development depends on the basic status of language, the degree of the linguistic standard, the internal condition in language structure system, the coordination and cooperation of linguistic standard between different languages, and so on. Since language standardization is a long-term constructive project, and as the social development and changes in linguistic life, it must have a dynamic and regulating resistance, which is also connected with the sustainable development of good linguistic ecological environment. That is to say, the dynamic and regulating resistance must base on better linguistic ecological environment. The definition of modern Chinese common language actually is the basic normative standard from 1950s (including three aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar). With the passing time and language development, these concrete connotations of basic standard will change, such as "canonical modern vernacular article as grammatical rules" which not only points out the object definite in 1950s, but also should enrich and include "canonical modern vernacular article". For example, some grammatical forms should make some adjustments on normative requirements according to the development of modern Chinese common language. Written by LV Shu-xiang and ZHU De-xi in the 1950s, the book *Grammar and Rhetoric in Speech* had proposed some opinions for grammatical phenomenon in accordance with specific requirement in that times, such as "恢复疲劳" (recovery from fatigue), "打扫卫生" (do the cleaning), and so on (LV & ZHU, 1979, pp. 43-49). It now appears that these expressions have been accepted by masses and are applied in language practice. Therefore, the linguistic standard should bond tightly with linguistic development and linguistic application and keep the pace with the times as well as make continual adjustments without regarding it as unalterable dogma. In our view, linguistic standardization is a long-term constructive project, thus we

cannot take a wrong path, and take the road back or even become panic (making arbitrary standardization or abusing it). In the past, we had a lesson on standardizing Chinese characters (e.g., simplified Chinese characters), for example, “二简字” (double-simplified characters) disturbed the normal order of language use and made a bad influence on good linguistic ecological environment which was worth learning from it.

Pragmatic Subject in Language Standardization and Variation

Pragmatic subject refers to the person who uses language in a certain linguistic ecological environment. Pragmatic subject is a constitution, observer, and executor of language standardization. To observe and initiate linguistic standard and avoid non-standard linguistic behavior will be tough for pragmatic subject. Since a pragmatic subject is thousands of different people and there are various differences between them, the process of implementation of the linguistic standard will vary, such as different comprehension, degree, implementation strength, and strategy of linguistic standardization. Pragmatic subject is the user of language, and in the process of using language, we often encounter with some problems, such as how to deal with the new relation between linguistic standard and linguistic innovation, how to practice linguistic standard according to different styles and so on.

The plasticity of pragmatic subject refers to pragmatic energy influenced by a certain social environment. From the perspective of language ecology, the plasticity of pragmatic subject is under the control of a certain social environment. The same pragmatic subject manifests different pragmatic energies because of different linguistic ecological environments, therefore, pragmatic subject has to take various adaptive strategies, as the creature can adapt to survival condition through changing variation in different natural ecological environments. The plasticity of pragmatic subject possesses several features: Firstly, dynamic trend is determined by linguistic ecological environment. Secondly, pragmatic energy is determined by the competition between languages. Thirdly, survival awareness is determined by linguistic ecological variation.

Dynamic trend is determined by linguistic ecological environment. A good linguistic ecological environment may attract pragmatic subject and makes the subject to conduct pragmatic practice with its mind at ease. On the contrary, poor linguistic ecological environment is avoided by pragmatic subject; it will directly affect the normal conducting of pragmatic practice by the subject. In the linguistic ecological environment, if various languages have the same position and equality regardless of powerful or weakness, the dynamic trend of pragmatic subject will not be apparent. If various languages have different position and equality, the powerful language and weak language will be apparent so that pragmatic subject may occur in different dynamic trends: attaching itself to powerful language, or generating jealous and antagonistic psychology, or having sympathy or supporting weak language. Linguistic ecological environment determines the basic trend of pragmatic means used by pragmatic subject. This is because that the application of pragmatic means is closely connected with linguistic ecological environment, people will take different adaptive pragmatic means according to different linguistic ecological environments.

Pragmatic energy is determined by the competition among different languages. Just like there is fierce competition between all creatures in natural ecological environment, in linguistic ecological environment, fierce competition also exists in various languages. Competition in various languages includes the competition of linguistic position, use range, rights, survival condition, and so on. Since the linguistic competition is involved in immediate interests, it deeply affects or stipulates the pragmatic energy of pragmatic subject. In general, pragmatic subject has a profound emotion on the language that has been used. In linguistic competition,

pragmatic subject may play an important role in making its using language to become a winner, which will send out vigor to maintain and expand using range, possess and continue linguistic right and improve linguistic survival condition for a long time. We once pointed out that the competition between languages is human's competition that is the competition of pragmatic subject. The pragmatic energy that pragmatic subject sends out for its own using language is an important factor of affecting linguistic competition.

Linguistic ecological variation determines pragmatic change of pragmatic subject. The linguistic ecology is dynamic in continuous variation. Whether linguistic ecology is in a good or bad direction of variation and development, it has a great impact on pragmatic subject. Pragmatic subject uses language in good linguistic ecological environment, and it is normal to use language according to express requirements regardless of pragmatic psychology or pragmatic behavior. While in poor linguistic ecological environment, pragmatic subject cannot use language normally, because pragmatic subject's pragmatic psychology and pragmatic behavior will change or even become abnormal. Therefore, it is necessary for us to pay more attention to ecological variation and understand the impact of ecological environment on the pragmatic subject.

Conclusion

From the perspective of language ecology, language standardization and variation are the normal characteristics of language ecology. The former is the basis of forming harmonious linguistic ecological environment while the latter is the form of language development. Therefore, they make up the relationship of dialectical unity. In the eddy currents of language standardization and variation, pragmatic subjects are expected not only to develop a right attitude towards language ecology, but also to deal with the relationship between these two terms felicitously, so as to form a harmonious linguistic ecological environment.

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