REVISITING THEORIES OF LANGUAGE AND POVERTY: EVIDENCES FROM CHINA

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The concept of poverty involves a complex issue embedded in multi-factorial, multi-dimensional and multi-layered aspects. Therefore, the theoretical and empirical studies on the relationship between language and poverty constitute a dynamic and flexible system. Poverty affects both children's language development and adults' use of language. It affects the former by social conditions and neural mechanism, and the impacts of the latter can be interpreted by the concepts of social network and scarcity. Language competence shapes social and economic conditions based on longitudinal and synchronic studies. Language constitutes a probabilistic factor shaping the socioeconomic conditions of individuals, families, regions and countries. Given that the research on alleviating poverty through language has been exerting a greater influence in China's anti-poverty course, the concept of "target-oriented poverty alleviation through language" has been rephrased and clarified by referencing the scarcity theory. The current studies on language and poverty have been driven by China's poverty alleviation policies and practices. I believe that the relevant theoretical and empirical studies conducted in China have some broader implications for the international community.

Keywords: Language competence; poverty; poverty alleviation through language; scarcity theory

К ВОПРОСУ ТЕОРИИ ЯЗЫКА И БЕДНОСТИ: ОПЫТ КИТАЯ

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Концепция бедности может рассматриваться в комплексе аспектов, включая многофакторный, многомерный и многоуровневый. Таким образом, теоретические и эмпирические исследования взаимосвязей между языком и бедностью представляют собой динамичную и гибкую систему. Бедность негативно сказывается как на языковом развитии детей, так и на использовании языка взрослыми. Социальные условия и нейронные механизмы влияют на языковое развитие детей, а использование языка взрослыми можно интерпретировать с помощью концепций социальной сети и дефицита. Языковая компетенция формирует социальные и экономические условия на основе лонгитюдных и синхронных исследований. Язык представляет собой вероятностный фактор, определяющий социально-экономические условия отдельных лиц, семей, регионов и стран. Учитывая, что исследования по борьбе с бедностью посредством языка оказали значительное влияние и внесли вклад в курс Китая по борьбе с бедностью, концепция «целенаправленного сокращения бедности с помощью языка» была перефразирована

и уточнена со ссылкой на теорию дефицита. Текущие исследования языка и бедности основаны на политике и практике Китая по борьбе с бедностью. Автор полагает, что соответствующие теоретические и эмпирические исследования, проведенные в Китае, имеют важное значение для международного сообщества.

Ключевые слова: *языковая компетенция; бедность; сокращение бедности с помощью языка; теория дефицита*

1. Introduction

The study on the relationship between language and poverty contains two inter-related aspects (1) impacts of poverty on language and language-related practices; (2) impacts of language on poverty and poverty-related issues. The first aspect focuses on the impacts of language competence on the economic status or income of individuals, family, region and country [Nettle, 2000; Tang et al., 2016; Yingji 2018]. The second aspect includes but is not limited to the studies of the impacts of poverty on the development / use of language (children/ adults), and the relationship between poverty and language diversity [Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Wang, 2017]. In addition, there are also studies on the interplay of the underlying factors and mechanisms between language and poverty [Li, 2018a, 2018b; Wang, 2018c].

Empirical studies on poverty alleviation through language cover but are not limited to: language poverty alleviation policies; language poverty alleviation measures and mechanisms; language poverty alleviation outcomes, etc. [Shi, 2018; Wang, 2018c].

It is clear that poverty involves a complex system embedded in multi-factorial, multi-dimensional and multi-layered aspects. The theoretical and empirical research on the relationship between language and poverty is therefore a dynamic and flexible system. The oversimplification and one-sided analysis should be avoided.

The second and third parts will briefly discuss the interplay between poverty and language competence; the fourth part focuses on China-related practices of language poverty alleviation and the fifth part is the conclusion.

2. The impacts of poverty on language competence

Previous studies have focused on the impacts of poverty on children's language competence with insufficient attention on the adults' language competence in poverty stricken areas. This section will include the discussion on both groups.

2.1. Impacts of poverty on children's language competence

Socioeconomic status (SES) has been widely documented to correlate with children's physical, cognitive, and psychological development. The impacts of home conditions on children's language development are particularly significant. A great number of studies indicate that children's early exposure shapes a great impact on their language development and nonverbal-related brain functions and structures at a later stage. Considering the existent literature available on this topic, this section will map out the patterns by adding a few supplementary findings.

2.1.1. Performance

Based on a study with 185 kindergarten children aged 43–77 months, Li et al. (2012) show that family income is a strong independent predictor for children's early language capacity in that high-SES families score higher than low-SES families regarding the children's language development and family learning environment. In a similar way, children of high SES can hear 30 million more words (so called "30 million words difference") than children of low SES [Hart & Risley, 1995; Fernald, Marchman & Weisleder, 2013]. Apart from quantity differences in words and speech input, the quality of children's language input also shows great SES-related disparity in lexical complexity, response, parents-child interaction [Hoff 2006; Leffel and Suskind 2013; Hirsh-Pasek *et al.* 2015)].

In recent years, the studies on children's language development have moved from the traditional approach of phonetic, lexical, grammatical aspects to the capacity of language input and output. For instance, Romeo *et al.* (2018) indicate that a higher frequency of conversational turns between parents and children in their early family environment is more conducive to children's verbal development; and high SES parents (or grandparents/caretakers) tend to have more conversational turns, thus giving their children a better foundation for language development.

Li and Liu (2018) have conducted the interviews with 405 children aged 3–12-year-old from four geographical locations of the Baoding city in China including downtown, county, village and remote areas. Their study reveals that there is a significant urban-rural disparity in terms of children's communication intent, language performance and overall expressiveness. The study also demonstrates a spatial pattern showing a gradual decrease of children's speech performance from central to peripheral regions. In other words, the farther away from the city center, the less ideal is the children's language development. It should be noted that except the county-rural difference, the differences between other localities are all significant.

These studies mentioned above echo with the interplay of the complex and restricted codes and SES proposed by Bernstein (1964) and Cohen (1969), which is children of high SES, tend to use complex codes whereas children of low SES are inclined to restricted codes. Just as Bernstein (1985 [1964]) claimed that forms of spoken language in the process of their learning initiate, generalize and reinforce special types of relationship with the environment and thus create for the individual particular forms of significance.

2.1.2. Factors

Poverty affects children's cognitive and language development for the following main reasons: (1) the close association with hunger and malnutrition caused by poverty; (2) the compounding disadvantages of illnesses and their chain effects triggered by poverty; (3) shortage of educational resources such as books, computers, other supplementary materials, training opportunities; (4) lack of parents' attention to and time on family conversations due to parents' busy schedule; (5) great stress in poor families and neighborhoods, which in turn negatively detains children's learning competence; other problems such as higher rate of crime, violence and dropout in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The present studies on how poverty impacts language development can be summarized into two models: family stress model and parental investment model [Perkins et al 2013]. Family stress model believes that the economic stress causes an increase in parental emotional distress and results in harsher, more authoritarian parenting practices and fewer opportunities

for affection and nurturing whereas the parental investment model states that poverty-stricken family intends to satisfy the basic needs rather than obtaining other profits.

Other than the studies on social factors, more recent studies have begun to interpret poverty's influence on cognition and language from neural mechanism. For the decade since the publication of Noble *et al.* (2005), many studies have shown that family SES is related with childhood hippocampus capacity. It is also argued that poverty also causes differences in brain structures and developmental trajectory.

Although the studies above cannot directly prove that poverty is the cause of brain development, they have revealed the underlying factors that shape the low-SES children's brain development. These factors include: more stressful experiences, polluted living environment, fewer cognitive stimuli in daily life, lack of communication and mother's malnutrition during pregnancy. These studies have shed lights on how children's brain development is affected by family income. It is clear that the only way for improving children's family conditions is through poverty alleviation. It may seem challenging to achieve in a short time, but if targeted interventions could be implemented to narrow the gap, it would improve children's language development in poor families.

2.2. Impacts of poverty on adults' language competence

The aforementioned interpretation and mechanism are based on the studies with children and are inapplicable to adults. This section centers on two adult-related issues: the constraints of geography and social network on language abilities and the corresponding consequences resulting from the scarcity.

2.2.1. Impacts of geography and social networks

In discussing why some countries are rich while others are poor, Diamond [Diamond 2017: 15–75] proposes two factors: geography and institution. His analysis may also apply to understanding the poverty/wealth gap within the country. For example, the 14 contiguous poverty-stricken regions in China are ethnic minority areas, old revolutionary base areas, border areas and destitute areas, where the harsh natural environment causes a series of poverty-related chain problems such as poor traffic, blocked information, long-term isolation from the outside world, and backward development of infrastructure and social underdevelopment.

The more geographically closed and inaccessible areas are, the less impetus and opportunities for population mobility, the stronger the consanguinity/homogeneity of their internal social relations, and the closer the internal social network. This may lead to some negative consequences. For example, whiling making the local resettlement, more stable social and cultural networks are formed, which in turn internalizes the "poverty mindset" and constructs a much high degree of language loyalty [Wang, 2018b]. These fixed thoughts may be conscious but more likely unconscious. On the other hand, their life habits (including language use) tend to be more fixed and thus block the outside factors and inhibit innovations and changes. Even if a new way of life or language paradigm is introduced, the power of the established social network will pull it back to its original model. After all, for homogeneous speech community with closed social network, the possibility and degree of language variation and language change appears to be very low [Wang, 2014].

2.2.2. Linguistic consequences of scarcity

Sendhil Mullainathan, Professor of Computation and Behavioral Science at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, has worked with another expert studying poverty, Abhijit Banerjee, and co-founded the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) in 2003 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology[1]. J-PAL conducts randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in poverty intervention, offer scientific evidence, and scale up effectiveness to make more evidence-based policies.

One of Professor Mullainathan's most famous studies is to investigate and interpret the social problems such as poverty and busyness from the perspective of "scarcity". In his series of studies, he points out that poverty is not only a problem of lack of funds but also a long-term and day-to-day difficult choice related to poverty, such as whether to let children go to school or continue to go to school, whether to continue to invest in crop production, who is responsible for children, house repair and other material or social infrastructure vacancy, etc., Such mental juggling depletes the amount of cognitive and psychological attritions [Banerjee & Mullainathan 2008]. These attributions often lead the poor to internalize the economic decisions to make poverty permanent. For example, (1) Poverty creates over-attention on the present but neglects the future. When poor people spend their psychological resources on current daily poverty problems (such as loan repayment or agricultural harvest or family disease treatment), they will have less energy to spend on other long-term tasks requiring more cognitive and psychological abilities (such as improving agricultural production efficiency or investing in education) [Mullanathan & Shafir, 2013]. As for the long-term or marginal issues such as the improvement of language competence, they have no extra cognitive power, and even take no consideration at all; (2) poverty may cause a failure of capacity to aspire, weakening or even forfeiting the poor's ability to seize the opportunity available. Poverty in previous literature has been largely attributed to external constraints beyond an individual's control [Misturelli & Heffernan, 2011], either the environmental factors of poverty (such as the unreliability of lending institutions, transportation, etc.) or the deficiency features on the poor (such as lack of education and lack of parents' attention). Such explanations are not sufficient and complete. The "scarcity theory" reminds us that in poverty alleviation work, we should reduce the cognitive burden of the poor residents, e.g., the burden of interpreting new policies, responding to complex incentives, filling in long forms, or preparing for long interviews.

The concept of scarcity in the book *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much* [Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013] can shed many lights on this paper in many ways. First, scarcity reduces cognitive capacity, thereby weakening their ability to analyze, judge and reason; it also lowers the executive functioning, thereby impairing the ability control behaviours and impulses; second, incompetence can lead to poverty, and poverty can also result in incompetence. The scarcity mindset of the poor is the main reason for their incompetence. It shows that poor people have weaker cognitive and executive control. Scarcity-relevant concerns diminish their cognitive resources. The poor are not only short of money but also lack bandwidth. In turn, this bandwidth burden causes them to perform poorly in intelligence tests (p. 162); third, from the perspective of this scarcity psychology, it is not difficult to understand the many mistakes that happen to the poor. Their failures are inevitable not because of their lack of motivation, but because of their lack of bandwidth (p. 183).

These perspectives offer the following inspirations for the current paper: (1) Language

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[1]   Homepage:…http://economics.mit.edu/centers.

competence is outside the "tunnel vision" and thus it is often suppressed; (2) Language competence is on the edge of the cognitive and psychological concerns of the poor. Struggling for survival, the poor form a continuum of psychological concerns from strong to weak and language is basically at the far end of the continuum. (3) Despite that language might be a dispensable aspect on poor people's mind, language-related issues will gradually move to the near end of the continuum once they start to get rid of poverty under the influence of internal and external forces. The role of language competence is more prominent when population flow or tourism serves as the major means of poverty reduction and demand more communication with the outside.

3. The impacts of language competence on poverty

This section focuses on two topics: how language competence influences the economic and social conditions diachronically and synchronically; why the improvement of economic and social conditions via language competence constitutes a probability rather than a sufficient-necessary condition.

3.1. Diachronic and synchronic influence

In December 2017, *Nature* published a large-scale archaeological study conducted by 18 professors led by Timothy Kohler. They tried to investigate how disparities in wealth mount in the process of evolution from primitive society to semi-agricultural, then to agricultural and other types of society. One of the main findings is that with the advancement of technology and the evolution of the economy and society, the role and proportion of human capital in earnings become more prominent. Due to the individual differences in physical strength, intelligence and emotional talent, each technological innovation further widens the income gap. People with more human capital will see their wealth opportunities increase, while ordinary people might benefit from the new technology but with limited effect.

This echoes with Theodore Schultz's study. In 1960s, he (1961) put forward the view that the income from the improvement of human capital in knowledge, skills and health is higher than that from the increase of material capital and labour force. This theory proposes that (1) the investment in human capital contributes more to economic growth than that in material capital; (2) the social and economic benefits of education investment in low-income countries/regions are higher than those in high-income countries/regions, and the social and personal benefits of investment in primary education are higher than higher education; (3) there is a positive correlation between personal earnings and education level.

Language is a typical human capital [Wang, H., 2018a; Wang, C., 2018c]. In a diachronic perspective, language competence plays an increasingly important role in polarizing between the rich and the poor and in worsening poverty; in a synchronic perspective, language competence also plays a crucial role in the economic situation of a country and region as well as families and individuals.

A large number of previous studies have proved the negative impacts on economic income as monolingual (monolingual speakers of minority language in particular) / mono (only competent in local dialect), and the positive effects on earnings in speaking a lingua franca and becoming bilingual bilinguals [Wang.C, 2018c; Wang. H, 2019]. Different languages have functional differences [Li & Wang, 2019]. The dominant languages of a country (also the national or official languages) have functional advantages. Therefore, strengthening the dominant language competence and developing bilingual competence in the poor areas will provide the residents

with more opportunities access to more public resources and various advantages in language functions.

As a whole, there is a positive correlation between language competence, social class and socioeconomic status. For the residents in poverty-stricken areas, improving their language competence constitutes one of the important conditions to improve their economic status and social class.

3.2. Probability condition

Language competence plays an important role in the improvement of economic and social conditions, but it is not a sufficient-necessary condition, but a probabilistic condition. In other words, some areas and residents may get rid of poverty and become rich even if their language competence does not change while others may still be in poverty after improving their language competence. However, improving language ability will undoubtedly enhance the possibility of getting rid of poverty and becoming rich.

At present, many residents in Hong Kong, Guangdong, Fujian and other regions still maintain the monolingual state of Guangdong dialect or Hokkien dialect. However, given the rapid regional development, they have already moved from the poverty state to a well-off life.

For some poor areas, especially the so-called "slums" in the suburbs of American cities or Chinese cities, many residents can speak a good lingua franca, but due to the influence of other factors (unemployment, disease, ageing, disability, self-indulgence, etc.), they still live in poverty.

However, the improvement of language competence can undoubtedly improve the chance of poverty alleviation. In the early 1950s, the Chinese government formulated three major tasks for language development: simplifying Chinese characters, promoting Putonghua and formulating and implementing Pinyin schemes. Over the past 70 years, these three tasks have laid a foundation for and made great contributions to China's illiteracy eradication, education improvement, social progress and economic development. The standardization of language is an important influencing factor for a country to move from backwardness to progress and modernity. The improvement of language competence is an important link for families or individuals to move from poverty to wealth.

In this sense, it is argued that "the relationship between language competence and economic development is not a simple and linear relationship, but a probability relationship" [Wang. C, 2018c: 96]. Language competence is a probability condition for upgrading the economic and social status.

4. Practical explorations of language poverty alleviation in contemporary China

In order to improve the language competence of physiological/social problems of children, especially those from poverty-stricken families, governments and non-governmental organizations all over the world have done or are doing some practical explorations on language poverty alleviation. For example, the United States has launched the "Thirty Million Words Initiative" and the "Providence Talks program"[23]. This section tries to focus on the current practice and experience of China to discuss several aspects of language poverty alleviation practices.

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2   Homepage of the "Thirty Million Words Initiative"：http://tmwcenter.uchicago.edu/

3   Homepage of the "Providence Talks program"：http://www.providencetalks.org/

4.1. Prominence of language poverty alleviation

Since the reform and opening up, China's anti-poverty course has gone through five stages: the systemic poverty reduction stage from 1978 to 1985, the large-scale-development-model poverty alleviation stage from 1986 to 1993, the key poverty alleviation stage from 1994 to 2000, the new poverty alleviation and development stage from 2001 to 2010, and the targeted poverty alleviation and the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects from 2011 to 2020 [Li & Wei 2016]. Based on a review of the policy files promulgated by the Chinese government at the five stages, language-related policies only emerged at the fifth stage. Specifically, the fifth item "poverty-alleviation in industrial sectors (23)" in *China's Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development Program* (2011-2020) requires "the promotion of the national common script in ethnic minority regions." From then on, the language-related policies have been increasingly added in subsequent documents [Wang, C, 2018c].

The increasing statement on language-related policies indicates that China transformed from solving the problem of food and clothing to speeding up the process of poverty alleviation and prosperity in fighting against poverty across the country. Such transition shows that: (1) the role of the language in poverty alleviation and development is becoming more and more prominent; (2) language is a hidden factor. In other words, at the initial stage of solving the problem of food and clothing, language is not an urgent concern or it's so common that it is taken for granted. However, the demand of language competence gradually appears in the growing prosperity phase; (3) in different regions, there may be differences in the urgency of language factors and the attainment of the goal of language competence improvement.

4.2. Conceptualisaiton of "targeted poverty alleviation through language"

Targeted poverty alleviation and poverty eradication are the strategic guidance and key tasks for China's current poverty alleviation and development work, and the core and highlights of the party's and the country's poverty alleviation work in the new era. The *Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Winning the Battle against Poverty* clearly states:

"China needs to keep on practising the targeted poverty alleviation measures and improving their effectiveness. The target-oriented is the key to poverty alleviation and development. It is necessary to address the issues of helping whom, who helps, and how to help. Those who are in need should be assisted. Keep the sustainability of alleviating poverty and developing the sense of accomplishment for poverty-stricken population."

The concept of "target-oriented poverty alleviation through language" covers at least some of the following aspects: (1) the approaches adopted in poverty alleviation should be targeted-oriented, which means that the language-mediated poverty alleviation strategy should be treated differently in different regions (2) with regard to the targets of poverty alleviation, language-mediated poverty alleviation measures should reach to specific poor villages, families, and individuals; (3) with regard to the content of poverty alleviation resources need to gradually evolve from material capital to human capital. After a certain degree of capital accumulation, what promotes productivity and economic growth is no longer the increase of the three traditional factors, such as land, population or physical capital, but the improvement of human capital level, such as people's knowledge, ability and health. Therefore, it is of strategic significance for the government to transform its investment from the material capital-dominated mode to the human capital-dominated mode so as to erase poverty. (4) Different poverty alleviation strategies should be accurately implemented to assist targeted groups. Several government documents have relevant

statements. Firstly, *Guiding Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on the Three-Year Action on a Successful Poverty Alleviation Endeavor* requires to consolidate the achievement of poverty-eradication, implement suitable measures based on local conditions and ensure to eradicate absolute poverty by means of production development, resettlement, ecological compensation, educational development, and social security by 2020. Among these groups, language should exert greater importance in poverty alleviation through relocation and education than other aspects. Secondly, *the Decision of the State Council on Winning the Fight against Poverty* issued by the central committee of CCP includes many strategies for targeted poverty alleviation. It is encouraged to "develop the localized industry for poverty-eradication", "offer guidance for exporting migrants to eradicate poverty", "implement the resettlement to eradicate poverty" and "strengthen the education to eradicate poverty". These policies and measures are closely associated with language competence. Therefore, it is necessary to make the target-oriented strategies match the improvement of language competence. Thirdly, *the Decision* also mentioned the need to "improve the poverty alleviation coordination mechanism between the east and the west". Later, the general office of the CPC central committee and the general office of the state council also issued the *Guiding Opinions on Gurther Strengthening the Poverty Alleviation Coordination between China's Dast and West''*. The east-west poverty alleviation cooperation will inevitably involve the improvement of personnel's communication and language ability. In addition, the national tourism administration, the State Council and other departments issued police documents such as *Opinions on the Action Plan on Poverty Alleviation through Tourism in Poverty-stricken Areas* and *the Eight Action Plans for Poverty Alleviation through Rural Tourism,* The improvement of language competence is required in poverty alleviation through tourism: on the one hand, local residents need to enhance national lingua franca(s) to facilitate communication with tourists; on the other hand, local language and culture can also be used as tourist commodities/by-products to attract tourists.

4.3. Implications of the scarcity theory

Under the theoretical framework of "scarcity", the practice of language-medicated poverty alleviation can be strengthened from the following aspects:

Firstly, language in poverty alleviation and poverty reduction is a "non-urgent factor", compared with the other urgent necessities such as water, food, health, sugar, tobacco, production materials and the entertainment facilities such as TV. Given that language and education are considered as non-urgent elements, the poverty-stricken populations tend to overlook the language-related issues. This can be confirmed by Banerjee and Duflo's study (2013). In India and other Southeast Asian countries, the positive chain effect occurs after the use of mosquito nets: "the use of mosquito nets – reduced infection and other diseases – physical wellbeing – increased income –enhanced investment – being lifted out of poverty." In a similar way, the improvement of language competence with the support of governments and social forces when the basic living conditions are available will have a positive chain: "improved language competence – increased job opportunities/upward mobility – increased income –added investment –being lifted out of poverty."

Secondly, construct language as profit so that the value of language competence might be manifested, the knowledge of language "bonus" might be recognized, and the correlation between "language capital-information-job-income" might be revealed to create the effects of demonstration and projection (Wang, C, 2018b). It is worthwhile for the mass to realize the value of improving their own or their children's language competence. Under certain conditions,

"conditional cash transfer" [Banerjee & Duflo 2013: 71–72] can be used. In other words, with the improvement of language competence, the whole poverty alleviation fund will be paid step by step. Those who fail to do so will be rejected for funding.

Thirdly, training for the poverty-stricken needs to be simple and practical – bandwidth-saving education is an effective way. Therefore, in order to improve the language competence of poverty-stricken population, it is necessary to design special teaching plans, programs, teaching materials and teaching methods. In addition, sufficient funds should be provided for teachers, teaching and teaching materials. It is also necessary to implement the target-oriented training in terms of language training content, training methods and training periods with the consideration of people and location [Wang, H., 2018b]. In this regard, Yunnan province has adopted many innovative training models for language poverty alleviation, which is worth for other regions to learn from [Yuan Wei, 2018].

Fourthly, language-mediated poverty alleviation should be implemented in the right/proper place so that people are aware of these measures and know how to enhance their language competence through these measures. Importance shall be given to those people in poverty who are not aware of language-related impacts.

Fifthly, the role of language policy and planning in language-mediated poverty alleviation shall be given full attention. Basic strategies and specific language plans are needed to improve the language competence of poor areas [Li, Y., 2018a: 5]. Poverty alleviation and reduction need to be supported by various public policies. As a part of public policies, language policies should take an active role in the formulation and implementation of the entire social security network. In addition to other public policies, language learning and formal education should be more accessible to the poor as social and public welfare. Effective and positive language policies need, on the one hand, to maximize the public's ability to acquire knowledge so as to effectively improve education and productivity; on the other hand, to maximize the public's cohesion and enhance their capacity for cooperation so as to promote national development.

Sixthly, improving language competence and education level constitutes an important investment or consumption for the poverty-stricken population. The state and local governments should take more responsibility for this basic kind of consumption. The education promotion based on language competence is the key bridging the gap of "modern ethics" and blocking the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Optimizing the consumption structure and exploring opportunities that generate strong income growth is the best way to avoid falling into "the economic poverty trap" [Li, X, 2017]. After all, consumption gap is a critical factor affecting social stability than wealth gap and income gap [Meyer & Sullivan, 2013].

Seventhly, there is a need to distinguish intellectually between personal development and national development. From the perspective of national strategies, poverty alleviation has macro-objectives in corresponding to spreading of national lingua franca and the harmonious development of local languages/dialects in poverty-stricken areas; from the perspective of individuals, they need to take into consideration their conditions and decide whether they need to improve their Putonghua proficiency, maintain their mother tongue or dialect or to become bilinguals.

Last but not least, it is necessary to point out that poverty alleviation in rural areas and some poverty-stricken counties does not mean the disappearance of poverty in rural areas and the end of poverty alleviation work. Poverty is a relative concept. Poverty in countryside will continue to exist in the form of relative poverty and multi-dimensional poverty after the year of 2020, and poverty alleviation endeavor will continue in the future. Education poverty alleviation,

especially the development of preschool education and the improvement of the quality of compulsory education in poverty-stricken areas, should be not only an effective mechanism to prevent new poverty but also an important institutional assurance to prevent the return to poverty [Li, X., 2018]. Language poverty alleviation is an important part of education poverty alleviation as well as an important part of assurance to prevent poverty return. In this sense, language poverty alleviation will continue to be explored. Understanding the role language has in poverty alleviation, building a language path for poverty alleviation for the poverty-stricken population and regions, contributing "language power" [Li, Y., 2018a: 5] to changing their economy and development disadvantage and promoting the civilization and progress of the local society, will eventually contribute "language power" to the realization of permanent poverty alleviation [He, L., 2018].

5. Conclusion

Poverty is a product of human development stage. It is one of the global *three Ps* (Pollution, Population and Poverty) problems and a major problem that mankind has been confronting and must be solved. Therefore, poverty eradication was written into the UN Charter at the very beginning of its establishment. Poverty is one of the manifestations of inequality, and with the progress of human technology and the precision of the organizational system, inequality continues to penetrate. History has proved that inequality is the root of human disasters (like war, civil strife). Therefore, it is of far-reaching historical significance to put forward ideas and make efforts to solve a series of inequality problems in human society. In this sense, the historical significance of China's poverty alleviation practices is far from overestimation. Besides, it is of historical significance to conduct inter-disciplinary studies from different perspectives and approaches to achieve a better understanding of poverty-related issues.

The practice of poverty alleviation in contemporary China (including the practice of language poverty alleviation) is constructing a new chapter and making a profound contribution to the development of human history. China's poverty alleviation practice also provides an unprecedented opportunity for the study of human language and poverty. Although a bulk of the studies on language and poverty have been conducted abroad, China-based studies including observation, description, thoughts and interpretation can bring new perspectives to and even challenge the existing theories, paradigms and methods and perhaps a new theoretical paradigm is likely to emerge [Li, Y., 2018b]. For example, large-scale and government-led collective poverty alleviation rarely happens in history, the contexts of China-related studies and different social factors may contribute a new understanding of language-related issues and practices. China-related studies have covered many topical issues that have not been conducted or lack of sufficient exploration abroad. These topics are like the language adaption of relocated populations in the poverty reduction of resettlement, the requirements and challenges confronting language issues in other systematic and large-scale poverty alleviation measures/paths, the functions of promoting language competence by means of training programs such as "evening schools for villagers" and "workshops" and the role of promoting language competence in blocking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Language and poverty are bi-directional. The studies on language and poverty have formed many concepts and theoretical discussion. The studies of language alleviation have provided poverty issues with language-related strategies and approaches. As a whole, the studies on language and poverty in China include both the theoretical and practical concerns.

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